

TO THE POINT OF PRODUCTION—

An Interview with John Watson of the
League of Revolutionary Black Workers



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John Watson, editor of *Sauti—The Inner City Voice*, and director of the West Central Organization in Detroit, has been involved in Detroit revolutionary politics for a number of years. One of the original founders of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, he is currently serving as a member of the Central Committee of the League.

FIFTH ESTATE: What is the history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers? Why was it formed?

JOHN WATSON: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers is a federation of several revolutionary union movements that exist in Detroit. It was originally formed to provide a broader base for the organization of black workers into revolutionary organizations than was previously provided for when we were organizing on a plant to plant basis.

The beginning of the League goes back to the beginning of DRUM which was its first organization. The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement was formed at the Hamtramck Assembly Plant of the Chrysler Corporation in the fall of 1967. It developed out of the caucuses of black workers which had formed in the automobile plants to fight increases in productivity and racism in the plant.

All the caucuses which had developed previous to DRUM had been co-opted, either by the company or by the union. In other words the company had either fired the leadership of these caucuses or bought them off by giving them jobs as foremen or supervisors, or the union had managed to buy off the leadership one way or another.

The organization of DRUM was in direct response to numerous attempts by black workers over the last several years in the Hamtramck Assembly Plant to organize a movement which could resist racism and oppression both on the part of the union and the company. We wanted to be a revolutionary organization which would not be co-opted by the moneyed forces.

Briefly, the history of DRUM began with a series of wild-cat strikes which we held around the issues of productivity, production standards and overt racism. The first strike was held when Chrysler Corporation speeded up the production line six cars an hour, during the UAW Convention last May.

After this strike in which both black and white workers participated, the company imposed disciplinary action on those who they considered to be leaders of the strike action. This disciplinary action was taken primarily upon black workers. A number of black workers were fired, and quite a

few received suspensions from anywhere from three to thirty days. In response to the racist attack which the company laid upon black workers after the first strike, DRUM organized a number of other strikes at that particular plant.

With the development of DRUM and the successes which we had in terms of organizing and mobilizing the workers at the Hamtramck Assembly Plant, many other black workers throughout the city began to come to us and ask for aid in organizing some sort of group in their plants. As a result shortly after the formation of DRUM, the Eldon Ave. Revolutionary Union Movement (ELDRUM) was born at Eldon Ave. Gear and Axle Plant of the Chrysler Corporation. Also, the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM) was formed at the Ford Rouge Complex, and we now have two plants organized within that complex.

Since that time the organizational activities have been expanding. We've moved into hospital industries with the HOWRUM, NEWRUM for the newspapers in Detroit, an UPRUM which stands for United Parcel Revolutionary Union Movement for black Teamsters who work at United Parcel. There's a JARUM which is Jefferson Assembly Revolutionary Union Movement and there's the development of a CRUM, which is Chevrolet Revolutionary Union Movement. Other automobile plants and other industries are in the process of being organized now.

PLANT CONDITIONS

FIFTH ESTATE: What types of conditions exist in the plants that are being organized by the League?

JOHN WATSON: Working conditions are deplorable. What's been happening over the last fifteen or twenty years in industry in general, but especially in the auto industry, is the increase in productivity. A lot of people describe the increase in productivity as meaning that there's automation or something like this going on. But in most of the automobile plants, what's been going on is "nigger-mation."

"Nigger-mation" is simply when you hire one black man to do the job which is previously done by two or three or four white men. There's a constant struggle which is going on

inside the automobile plants in which the foreman and the general foreman and the supervisor are constantly attempting to work the men harder. They are constantly attempting to speed up the production line. They are constantly attempting to cut down the number of people who work on the lines.

In their insatiable drive to make greater profits for the company, they have negated all considerations of the welfare and safety of the workers in the plant, especially the black workers. As a result, in the foundries for instance, almost 95 percent of the workers in those plants have some sort of industrial illness, usually silicosis or some sort of other lung disease. In the stamping plants all kinds of guys are walking around with two or three fingers missing from one of their hands because of the unsafe machinery.

People are regularly killed in the automobile plants in a wide variety of different kinds of industrial accidents which take place there. The air is foul, it's hot, the noise level is extremely high, the environment is almost intolerable and it gets worse every day because of the constantly increasing production standards of the company.

Besides the problems that black workers have with productivity and safety standards, they have the added problem of overt racism, which exists under these monopoly capitalist corporations. In the first place most of the supervisory personnel, white-collar personnel, and skilled trades are all white. It's almost impossible for the average brother who gets a job in an automobile factory to be able to move into one of these positions.

Besides that, those white foremen generally have very degrading attitudes towards black people. Every day there are instances in which there are clashes between black workers and white foremen because of racist remarks or racist actions on the part of company representatives.

The racism of the company presents itself not only in the form of verbal abuse and in the form of various kinds of disciplinary action which are laid on the heads of black workers, but also on the very basic level of the allocation of jobs. In almost all plants you find the black workers on the hardest jobs in which you have the heaviest work and in which you have to work the fastest and in which the

conditions are most unsafe, whereas you find white people with less seniority are generally employed at lighter jobs which don't have the same sort of safety hazards which the black worker must face. Moreover, white workers are not subjected to the kind of racist insults and harassment that black workers constantly find themselves subjected to.

FIFTH ESTATE: How do you organize the plants you are working in? What kinds of things do you find necessary for organizing a plant?

JOHN WATSON: Black revolutionaries in Detroit have a Marxist-Leninist position and have recognized the necessity of organizing in the working class for a number of years now. We had made attempts a number of times to begin to move in the direction of mobilizing the black working class; but up until this point those attempts had been pretty futile, although they had given us a lot of experience into the things that are necessary to successfully organize.

OUTSIDE SUPPORT

One of the things that we find is that it is absolutely essential that the workers have some sort of support from outside of the factory. When we carry out strikes at any of the plants, we usually have a large number of people come down from the community to man the picket lines. They often bring drums, huge congo drums. This helps to raise the morale of the workers in those actions.

Anyone who works in a plant who participates in a wild-cat strike can be fired, if the company can prove that he actually participated in it. So by having people from the community man the picket lines we can begin to avoid the problem of having large numbers of members losing their jobs and livelihood.

We find that the basic things that are necessary in terms of organizing a plant are, first of all, a clear understanding of the needs of the workers and the kinds of problems which they are facing in the plant; second, an ability to articulate those needs and to set forth demands which can begin to solve those problems and third, the establishing of a

mechanism, an organizational structure which can effectively mobilize the workers to resist the pressures of the company and the union. This organizational mechanism generally requires that we produce a publication for the plant.

This publication is an organizing tool in and of itself in that workers themselves begin to write for the publication and distribute it in the plant. Through recruiting reporters and through distribution of the publication, we develop a network of communication throughout the plant, throughout the department.

The production of the publication is fundamentally different from producing a single leaflet which you pass out once or twice at a factory. It takes eight, ten, or twelve weeks, for instance, of consistently producing a newsletter and having it passed out within the factory before the workers can really understand that the people who are behind this organization are dead serious about it. The workers have had a lot of experience with people who come into a plant for one-shot deals, people who come in and run down a whole lot of radical business. But they are really concerned with people who are going to be consistent and who are going to be persistent, who they can depend on. When they see that the DRUM publication is at the gates being passed out every Tuesday on the nose without deviation they begin to recognize that this is a very serious organization which they're dealing with.

The production of the publications, the publication of the various documents which are needed, for instance, the constitution for the group, demand organizational skills which don't exist among the workers. A wide variety of tasks which have to be done are generally done by people who are outside the factory.

It is also essential to understand that the cats working in an automobile plant killing themselves for ten hours a day, working six and sometimes seven days a week, are generally too tired to do all the work which is necessary to tie together membership meetings, produce publications, get in contact with community groups for support, raise funds and so on and so forth. Therefore, it is necessary to have some group of supporters outside the factory who can carry out all these

services to the workers.

In terms of providing its support, providing the print shops, printing facilities, community support, raising money, the League is very important because through the League, workers in a number of plants throughout the city can combine their resources together so that they can be serviced by the same administrative staff. This prevents duplication of a lot of activities which would be necessary if we didn't have this kind of broad federation.

FACTORY ORIENTED ORGANIZING

FIFTH ESTATE: What are the differences between a community-oriented and a factory-oriented type of organizing?

JOHN WATSON: We have a certain program, a certain understanding of the dynamics of American capitalist society and we're acting on the results of our analysis. This doesn't mean that we're against those people who are involved in community organization. Our analysis tells us that the basic power of black people lies at the point of production, that the basic power we have is the power as workers.

As workers, as black workers, we have historically been and are now an essential element in the American economic scene. Without black slaves to pick the cotton on the Southern plantations, the primitive accumulation of capital which was necessary to develop industry in both Europe and America would never have been accomplished. Without black workers slaving on the assembly lines in automobile plants in the city of Detroit, the automobile companies would not be able to produce cars in the first place, and therefore, wouldn't be able to make the tremendous profits which they have been making.

Therefore, we feel that the best way to organize black people into a powerful unit is to organize them in the factories in which they are working. We feel that black workers, especially, have the power to completely close down the American economic system. In order to implement that power, we have to become organized.

In one factory you have 10,000 people who are faced with the same brutal conditions under the same system from

the same bastards every day, eight hours a day, ten hours a day, six or seven days a week. When you go out into the community, the interests of the people, let's say in a particular neighborhood, more than likely are going to be much more greatly dispersed than the interests of the workers are. That is, people have different landlords, they are exploited by a number of different shopkeepers, they are faced with a number of different kinds of problems throughout the community, and they don't represent the same sort of homologous mass as 10,000 people in a factory do. Therefore, just in terms of expediency there are greater possibilities in the organization of the plant.

And when you consider even farther than that, when you do organize significant sectors of the community, the kinds of actions which can be taken are not as effectively damaging to the ruling class as the kinds of actions which can be taken in the plant. For instance, when you close down Hamtramck Assembly Plant, you do a number of things automatically. If you close it down for a day you cost Chrysler Corporation 1,000 cars. That, considered in relationship to their investment, means the loss of a sizeable sum of money.

Also when you close down a large automobile plant, you automatically can mobilize the people in the streets, 5,000 or 10,000 people in a single blow. Whereas when you go from house to house or block to block, it is much more difficult to gather together that many people at the same time.

Finally, we feel that in conjunction with the organization of workers in plants you automatically have the development of community organization and community support. After all, workers are not people who live in factories 24 hours a day. They all go home and live somewhere in the community. We have found that it's almost an inevitable and simultaneous development that as factory workers begin to get organized, support elements within the community are also organized. We feel that it is necessary to have broad community support in order to be able to effectively organize within the plant and effectively close down significant sectors of the economy.

Therefore, we have an overall analysis which sees the point of production as the major and primary sector of the

society which has to be organized and that the community should be organized in conjunction with that development. This is probably different from these kinds of analysis which say where it's at is to go out and organize the community and to organize the so-called "brother on the street." It's not that we're opposed to this type of organization; but without a more solid base such as the working class represents, this type of organization, that is, community-based organization, is generally a pretty long and stretched out and futile development.

BLACK MOVEMENT AND WHITE WORKERS

FIFTH ESTATE: What generally has been the relationship between the black union movement and white workers? For example, recently out at the Chrysler Sterling Stamping Plant there was a wild-cat strike, led mainly by white workers, who called on the League of Revolutionary Black Workers to come out and help them with their organizing. Is this kind of thing happening more frequently?

JOHN WATSON: This kind of support between black and white workers in militant actions is in its beginning stages of development now. Our position vis a vis white workers has been distorted by the ruling class, the UAW and by various white radical organizations which are opposed to us for some reason or other.

Basically, we have organized an all black revolutionary union movement, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, because of the fact of racism existing in American society, because of the fact that the working class is already divided between the races, and because it is necessary for black workers to be able to act independently of white workers. We have learned historically that in too many instances white workers have been willing to sell us out because of their own racist misunderstandings of the dynamics of struggle.

Since the beginning we've had relationships with white workers at the plants that we've organized. For instance, at the Hamtramck Assembly Plant there has been the formation of an organization among white workers which hopes to

begin to organize them to struggle against the company and against the union in regards to their own interests, and to support the development of organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

We have found that among older white radicals and older union activists, even though we're carrying on positive struggle against capitalism, these people tend to be opposed to us because of purely academic arguments. They got all kinds of theoretical ideas about how we're splitting up the working class between black and white, when actually they know damn well that the working class has been split between black and white a hell of a long time because of conditions which I alluded to before. They have been doing very little to eliminate any of these conditions. Part of the problem is that white radicals tend to think that they have the sole solution to the problems involving all humanity. As a result of this, they become extremely dogmatic and incapable of working out any kind of alliance or coalition with other organizations.

In recent history, however, there have been some positive developments along the lines of the League being able to move into coalitions with groups of white workers. For instance, at the *Detroit News* there has been the development of an organization known as the News Revolutionary Union Movement (NEWRUM) among black workers. And this organization has attempted since its very inception to encourage the development of militant revolutionary organizations among the white workers at the plant.

Unfortunately, we ran into some problems there in that we found that although a number of the white guys who were down there had risen above the levels of racism and understood the exploitative nature of the company and the exploitative nature of the system, they had very little experience in organizing to fight oppression and exploitation. As a result of their lack of experience, the white workers' organization has been moving at a very slow pace. It seems to be necessary that the leadership of the League begin to provide some sort of theoretical or practical guidance to those whites who are attempting to move to organize in this particular situation.

In other plants such as the Sterling Plant, for the first time militant whites have called for us to support their action. Our position on this is that we, of course, support any progressive action on the part of any workers, white or black, who are moving to resolutely confront this racist capitalist system.

I think that there's going to have to be an awful lot of discussion over the next few months over the relationship between the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the various white organizations which are beginning to organize among white workers. The National Organizing Committee (NOC) has begun to implement a very positive program in this city among the white working class, and all indications are that it is going to be a fairly successful effort. Our relationship with that organization at this time, although unofficial, is very good in that both of us understand the positions which we're coming from and we both understand who the enemy is and what the nature of the enemy is. Therefore, we're not attempting to dominate one another; we're attempting to begin to coordinate our activity for a more solid attack.

I think the black people who are involved in the organization of the black working class should recognize that the theoretical conception of black people being the vanguard of revolutionary struggle is not just a conception which is meant to be laid in the clouds somewhere above everyone's head. It can be applied in a very practical and programmatic fashion. What it simply means is that as political beings we have to understand that the development of the white movement has been retarded, that it doesn't have the kind of experience of struggle that we have had.

Therefore, even though many of these white radical organizations have resources in terms of money and manpower which far exceed ours, because of their lack of experience most of them are unable to put these resources to work in a positive fashion at this particular time. As political animals, we have to realize that it is necessary for us to provide them with the kind of leadership which they lack at this moment and to begin to do all that we can to help them to develop that leadership to the point where it can be self sufficient.

OUR THING IS DRUM

Deep in the gloom
of the firefilled pit
Where the Dodge rolls down the line,
We challenge the doom
of dying in shit
While strangled by a swine. . .
. . .For hours and years
we've sweated tears
Trying to break our chain- -
But we broke our backs
and died in packs
To find our manhood slain. . . .
But now we stand--
For DRUM's at hand
To lead our Freedom fight,
and from now til then
we'll unite like men- -
For now we know our might--
and damn the plantation
and the whole Dodge nation
For DRUM has dried our tears. .
and now as we die
we've a different cry--
For now we hold our spears!
U.A.W. is scum-----
OUR THING IS DRUM!!!!!!

FIFTH ESTATE: Speaking about the white radical organizations, recently there has been criticism from the Progressive Labor Party on the basis that there should not be separate unions for black and white workers, as this splits the working class. The accusation is that separate black unions are a form of nationalism which has to be considered reactionary in all its forms. What is the League's outlook on the question of nationalism? Does it recognize a distinction between revolutionary and reactionary nationalism, and if so, what is that distinction?

JOHN WATSON: On this question of the Progressive Labor Party, and the criticism which it has leveled at us, in the first place our activities are based upon reality. They are based on an analysis of the real world, not some sort of subjective wishes about how we would like the world to be.

The real facts of the matter are that this is a racist society, it is a monopoly capitalist society, the entire society is divided up according to class and according to caste. This is a fact. Black people don't unite with the white working class simply because Progressive Labor says that that might be a good thing. White workers don't eliminate their racism simply because Progressive Labor says that this might be a good thing.

If you look at the history of the black liberation movement over the last 200 years, you'll find that there have been numerous coalitions, alliances, mergers, between black and white workers. Almost every time that this type of organization has developed and moved to the point where it was actually threatening the system, the system resorted by attacking the movement through racist campaigns.

I think the Populist Movement is one of the clearest examples of this where you had millions of black and white farmers united in a movement against the monopolies and trusts which were oppressing them in this country. In the 1880's and 90's and the early 1900's all the segregation codes were passed, the mass media in this country invented most of the Amos 'n' Andy and Sambo-type stereotypes which you have towards black people.

This type of massive propaganda campaign had a telling effect upon the mentality of the white farmers who were aligned with the black workers. Essentially what happened was that the whites who were originally directing their hostility towards the ruling class were convinced that the ruling class wasn't really their enemy, that black people were really their enemy. And you had the formation out of movements like the Populist Movement or organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan which instead of moving towards the liberation of all people directed its efforts toward the further subjugation of black people.

Therefore, we have learned time and time again that when we are involved organizationally with white people who are susceptible to racist overtures from the ruling class, we can get messed with. What this lesson tells us is that we have to have independent organizations which can act on the behalf of black people and in the interests of black people regardless of the kinds of positions which white organizations or white people are going to take.

If white people decide they are going to take a counter-revolutionary position because of the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* and TV-2 and WWJ and NBC, and the mass media goes onto a racist harangue, then it is still going to be necessary for us to fight for our freedom. If we are involved in an organization which is composed of a majority of white people, a majority of whom are white racists, it will just be a simple vote for the white racists in the movement to say, we no longer need to struggle for black liberation. What we're going to do is fight against crime in the streets or something like this. We will not allow ourselves to be put in a position where our future depends upon the good faith of the white community.

The Progressive Labor Party, which hasn't organized a worker, has no right at all to attack the League of Revolutionary Black Workers or DRUM or any other component part of the League. They are another one of these little groups which have a conception of themselves, a very egotistical and ethnocentric conception of themselves, as the vanguard party.

If you're in the vanguard party, it means that if anybody

else is moving in a revolutionary direction and mobilizing masses of people into revolutionary organizations, there must be something wrong with the program they're following because the only correct program is the program of that particular party. As a result of this particular kind of outlook they find it necessary to attack anybody who is trying to do anything for whatever dogmatic reasons they can find. Either you're a nationalist which is counter-revolutionary or you're backwards or you're just developing or something else.

From their point of view, you reach the pinnacle of revolutionary development when you decide to become a member of Progressive Labor. We're not members of the Progressive Labor Party and we're not about to become members of the Progressive Labor Party or any other existing white organization because none of them are doing anything which shows us that they're capable of organizing a mass revolutionary struggle in this country, among blacks or whites.

As far as the question of black nationalism is concerned, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers recognizes that black nationalism in and of itself represents a broad political spectrum from left to right. There are black nationalists who are essentially black fascists, and you have other black nationalists who are essentially black Marxist-Leninist Communist revolutionaries.

We understand that there are black nationalists who simply feel that they as individuals have not been getting a big enough piece of the pie of black exploitation and who are not moving in the interests of black people. We oppose the idea that the solution to our problem is the establishment of a new economy in which you have black capitalists, black factory owners, exploiting black workers the way the white people have. We see the solution to the problem not simply as one of establishing a nationalist organization or a nationalist community, but one in which all forms of exploitation and oppression are eliminated within that community.

ROLE OF WHITE RADICALS

FIFTH ESTATE: How do you feel that the white radicals should relate to revolutionary black union movements and also how do you feel they should relate to white workers?

JOHN WATSON: As far as relating to our movement there are a number of things which are needed to continue to carry out a program of organizing the entire black working class. There are all sorts of inputs into the movement, of which of course the first and primary one is money. We are constantly in need of funds to fight the legal struggles which we have, to put out the publications, to hire organizers, to run our offices, etc.

Second, there are a number of specific types of projects which white radicals can work on which so far most of them have been quite hesitant to do. There's a great need for an expansion of—and this is just one particular project—printing facilities within the black community.

We've heard that over 50 SDS kids will be coming to Detroit this summer who want to become involved in the organization and the development of a revolutionary union movement. It seems to me that these students could put their time to better use by attempting to set up print shops which had multilith and mimeograph machines, letter-set presses and other types of equipment throughout the city, than if all of them simply went into the automobile factories and worked next to the workers for a few months.

There are other kinds of inputs which the movement needs. For instance, we need some permanent fund-raising apparatuses around here. Some of the more progressive white radicals in the city have already moved in this direction of setting up legal self-defense, which provides a regular fund for people who are in need of legal assistance and bail money.

We are in bad need of photographic equipment. The League would like to begin to move into the production of films so we can have more vehicles for the re-education of black people to the true nature of the system. However, at the moment we don't have the resources, and the administrative staff doesn't have the time to put into that kind of project. White radicals who are really interested in doing

something could get together and figure out how to beg, borrow or steal these kinds of photographic equipment.

We could go on and on and on and talk about all the kinds of inputs which we need on that level.

Second, of course, I think that white radicals who want to support DRUM and the League should politically support us every chance they get. For instance, they should not tolerate organizations like the Progressive Labor Party or anybody else denigrating the kinds of political positions we take. There has been an awful lot of talk not only among PL but within organizations like SDS which have distorted both the history and the positions of DRUM. I think that some of the things which SDS said were said in a paternal light.

They misconstrued the political sophistication of our movement, in terms of us having a clear understanding of racism, monopoly capitalism and imperialism and also having an understanding of how to move to attack these evils. I think that white radicals who want to do something for us should do all they can, for instance, to let people who they have connections with know about the existence of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, what our program is, what we're doing in practice and the kinds of needs we have.

Of course, the major role of white radicals should be to organize the white workers. A lot of the same sorts of inputs which are needed in terms of organizing black workers are needed in terms of organizing white workers, i.e., print shops, photographic equipment, other types of communication networks, funds, etc.

There is a developing need for organizers to actually go into the plants to mobilize people. The reason that I sort of shy away from emphasizing that particular point, however, is that no workers need simply missionary people to come into the plants who think they got to do missionary work. If you've got five students who want to work in the plant it would probably be best if two of them went inside and three of them stayed outside to support those two who are in there.

If students consider themselves sufficiently sophisticated and aware of the problems and conditions in the plants and

decide to move into the factory, they should push to educate the white workers along a certain political line. That line, and this is very important, is the position that black workers are the vanguard of the revolutionary movement.

Now I know that many white radicals have espoused this position as a slogan, but it is more than a slogan—it's true. Therefore, white workers should prepare to accept leadership from the most advanced section of the proletariat.

White students who intend to enter organizing work in the plants should think that position through very rationally and carefully. If they expect to do any serious political work in the plants they must explain the concept of the black vanguard. We believe that it is extremely important that they push that position when they begin to organize white workers.

I think that once these kinds of conceptions are understood that we'll begin to make progress both in the further organization of black workers and stimulating the organization of white workers.

UAW RESPONSE

FIFTH ESTATE: How have the UAW and other unions generally reacted to the formation of black revolutionary union movements in places under their jurisdiction?

JOHN WATSON: They have reacted with total hostility, and vicious attacks upon our movement. The UAW, for instance, is going around selling an awful lot of wolf tickets about what they are going to do to black militants within a plant. For instance, there has been a lot of talk within circles of the UAW that they are going to form goon squads which are going to physically expel us from the various automobile plants. Emil Mazey, the Secretary-Treasurer of the UAW, called us a greater threat to unionism than the Communists were in the 30's and 40's. I guess this means that he wants all the right-wing liberals in the UAW to mobilize themselves to go for a concerted attack against us, perhaps even on a physical level.

The UAW sent out 350,000 letters to their membership in the Detroit area branding us as segregationist people who are

trying to divide the working class and are working against the interests of the workers as a whole. They have also publicly stated that they will refuse to support any black workers who are fired when we are carrying out DRUM activities, which is, of course, a violation of their own constitution. They have a responsibility to their membership, to anybody who is fired or disciplined by the company, but they have stated publicly that they won't do this any longer.

On a local level within the unions there are a lot of contradictions between the kinds of positions union leadership takes toward us because of the fact that we have such a mass base of support in the plants which we have organized. Many of the union leaders find it impossible to openly oppose us because their membership would go against them. Most of these union leaders are just existing by a thin thread anyway since they don't represent the interests of the workers, but generally they represent the interests of the company. They are very afraid of further development of a revolutionary organization among black workers.

I think that it can be reasonably assumed that there will be a great struggle over the next six months to a year between the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the union bureaucracy that exists within the UAW, the AFL-CIO, and the Teamsters, especially the UAW and the AFL-CIO. Exactly how these struggles will come out is difficult to say right now since in a legalistic sense the UAW always has the upper hand.

You'll notice that even though the overwhelming majority of the rank and file at the Sterling Plant went on strike against the conditions that existed out there, the UAW was able to meet this particular rebellion by simply placing the union under trusteeship and sending down an administrator from the Solidarity House to run the union. Therefore, even if you take over the union on the local level, the International has such power according to the ruling class's law that they can move to administratively stop the workers from exerting their own power.

But the thing that we have which the UAW doesn't have is the support of the workers on the primary level, that is, the support of the workers at the point of production. The most

important power that you have is the power to be able to close down the plant. The union can run down all the rules and regulations and laws, articles in the constitution and contracts that it wants to. But if you can pull a large enough number of workers out of the plant, that plant isn't going to run until we decide that we're going to run it again.

The AFL-CIO has also been selling us some tremendous wolf tickets in regards to the attempts of blacks to organize, especially among the skilled trades and construction workers. As you know, it's been a historical fact that the construction and building trade unions have been some of the most segregated and racist unions in the country. We're beginning to move to organize black workers into unions which can begin to take some of these high-paying jobs which we've been continually denied.

The AFL-CIO in this area has also stated that they will attempt to crush us. In the long run it will be impossible for the union bureaucracies to crush our movement. But we recognize that there's a long and bitter struggle ahead of us in dealing with these enemies of the revolution.

LONG-RANGE PERSPECTIVE

FIFTH ESTATE: In terms of a long-range perspective, has your experience with League organizing given you some insight or ideas into where the general revolutionary process is moving in this country and the kinds of things that it will ultimately culminate in?

JOHN WATSON: We have some definite conceptions of how the revolution is going to be accomplished in this country. In the first place we're organizing in automobile plants on the basis of the local struggles which black workers are faced with in the industries in which they are working. But we find that any time we carry out a strike at a particular plant the company doesn't simply rely on the resources which it has at that particular plant to suppress our strike but moves to bring in outside police, moves to bring in the courts, moves to use the mass media, moves to use a number of resources which are available to the ruling class to suppress the struggle.

Therefore, at a particular plant sometimes we find that in the struggle against the company the workers are overwhelmed by the amount of strength which the company can bring to bear against us.

If you consider this in a theoretical sense it's no different from the kinds of struggles which are taking place on an international level where American imperialism is allowed to concentrate superior forces in a small area of the world in order to suppress a liberation movement. For instance, look at the struggle which went on down in Santo Domingo. Che Guevara has told us that the response to this kind of tactic of the ruling class is to spread their forces thin throughout the world by the opening up of "two, three, many Vietnams," so that each local guerilla movement can deal more effectively with their local situation.

You can relate this to the situation as it exists in this country. We have found that in the future when a particular plant goes down and the ruling class brings in the police and courts and all the rest of that stuff, we're going to have to respond in some sort of fashion in which we can bring equal force against them. By and large this is one of the reasons for the organization of the League, so that workers in different industries and different plants could support one another in these struggles.

Given a protracted and intensive struggle, this kind of development would inevitably lead to a general strike in which it would be necessary for all the workers in a particular city or a particular geographic area to close down the industries in support of any particular struggle. A general strike on a local level, of course, can be met by the ruling class on a national level, that is, they can bring in the national guard, the state police, the FBI, the army and whatever else might be necessary to suppress this particular kind of struggle.

However, I think the development of a general strike here in a city like Detroit over the next two or three years would be a very positive development in terms of concretely demonstrating to masses of people their ability to mobilize themselves and bring immense power and pressure against the system.

In the long run because of the contradictions in capitalist society, capitalism can't make any kinds of really significant reforms with American industry or within the society at large. The process of increasing productivity standards within the plant isn't just a simple accident. It has to do with the necessity of the expansion of capitalism in an attempt to constantly increase profit in relation to overall capital investment. This simply goes to say that given the context of any kind of general strike or struggle on that level, the ruling class will be forced into a position of suppressing or attempting to suppress that type of activity.

Our response to such a repression on a local level will obviously have to be to escalate our attack on the national level. I think that we have to think in terms of being able to have a national general strike.

If a national general strike reaches the point of absolute confrontation between us and the system, and if the ruling class refuses to capitulate to the demands which we lay on it, it would probably resort to the type of tactics which were used to suppress the unorganized general strike which was held in July of 1967 in Detroit. That is, it would probably try to garrison off the community and starve us out.

A revolutionary organization and revolutionary leaders simply cannot tolerate the starvation of our community, and facing that kind of position we would have no choice but to call for the workers to go back into the factories and assume control of the means of production and distribution in order to feed ourselves and feed the community.

Assuming control of the means of production essentially means that you are at the first stage of assuming state power. It is from the escalation of this type of struggle and from the reaction of the ruling class to it that we see the development of an overall revolutionary movement which will forever overthrow capitalism and imperialism and racism.

FIFTH ESTATE: In the context of this long-range perspective where is the League generally going in the short-run? Is it going to be confined to a local level or are plans now being made for national expansion?

JOHN WATSON: At the moment we are tightening up the

organization on the local level and expanding to new plants and new memberships on a local level. Our interim medium-range plans are, of course, to begin to expand outside of this immediate geographic area to organize black workers wherever they might exist.

Our ultimate intention is to organize black workers as a whole, as a class throughout the country, and proceeding from that basic mass organization to extend to a revolutionary black organization throughout the black community.

