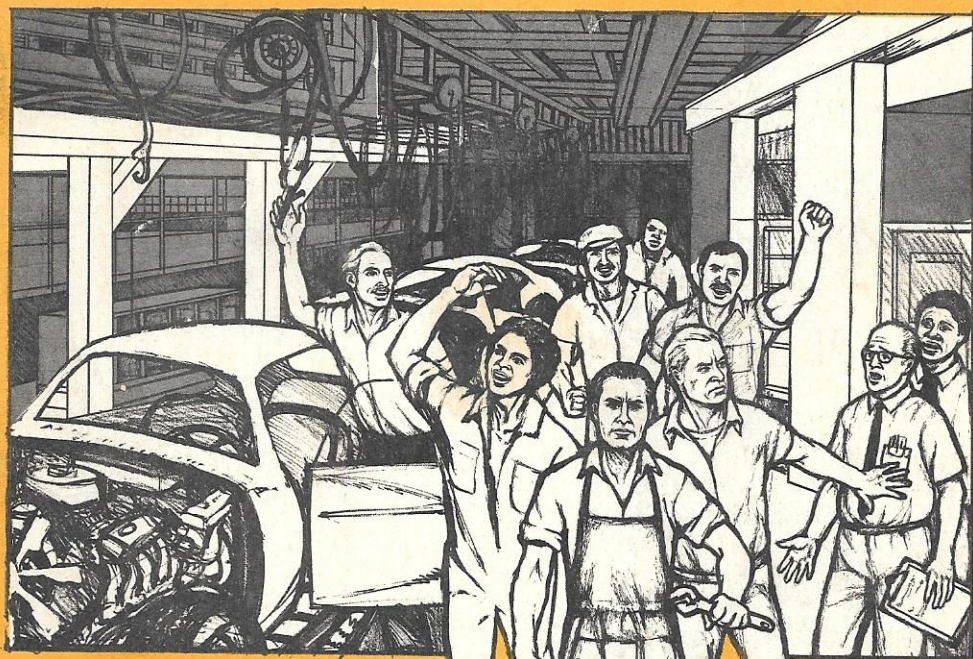


# AUTO and the WORKERS MOVEMENT

*Learning from the Proud Past  
To Fight for a Brighter Future*



*by the  
Revolutionary  
Communist  
Party USA*

75¢

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## Introduction

On February 11, 1937 the gates of three Chevrolet and Fisher Body plants in Flint, Michigan swung open and several thousand auto workers marched out to the wild cheers of tens of thousands of supporters. The workers had held two of the plants for 44 days after seizing them, kicking out all management and welding the doors closed.

General Motors, the largest corporation in the world, and the whole capitalist class had thrown police attacks, court injunctions, media slanders, and National Guard mobilizations against the workers. But when the smoke cleared, the strikers had won.

In a face-to-face showdown they had demonstrated their tremendous power and unity and raised the struggle of the working class to a new level. In the course of it they had won not only recognition of the union, the United Auto Workers (UAW), they had smashed years of efforts by the capitalists to keep unions out of basic industry.

The Great Flint Sit-down Strike marked one of the proudest moments in the history of the UAW and the entire working class. So powerful was the effect of this struggle that even today Woodcock and the other UAW officials must occasionally tip their hats in a gesture to those courageous fighters who built the union. But things are different now, they say. The companies and the union have reached a mutual understanding. Organized labor is now accepted as a responsible voice in the functioning of society, we are told.

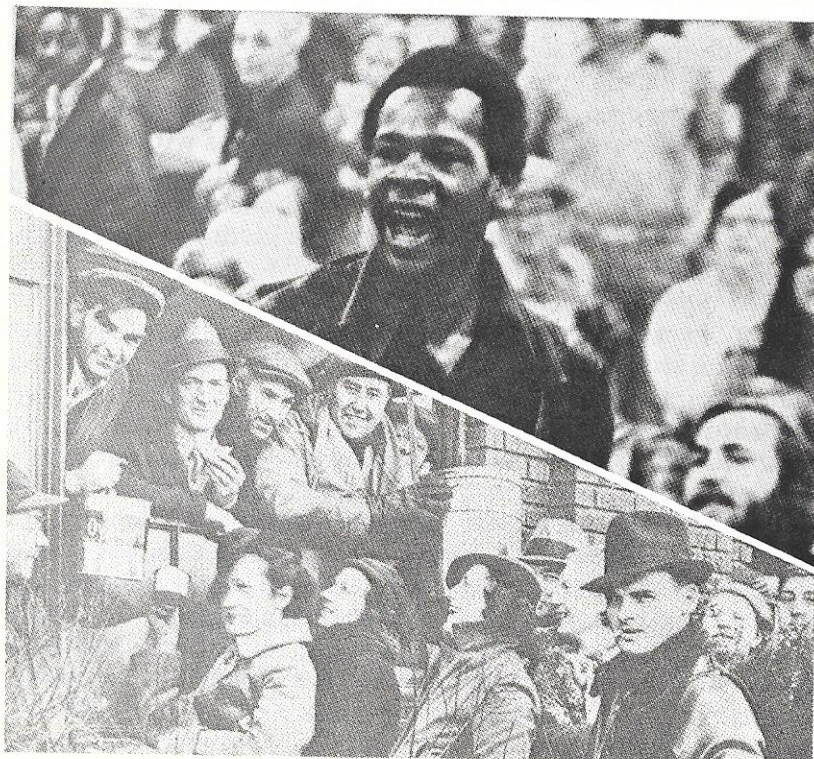
But how different are things today than when the union was built? Just like then the great majority of people feel like things are going to hell. The limited advances made in people's living conditions over the last 20 years are being undermined and things are going downhill fast. Speedup and job combinations are on the increase. There is no job security and unemployment is massive. Social services are going to pot. With defeat in Vietnam barely behind them, the capitalists are making preparations for yet another war.

Things are better? Not by a long shot. People are fed up. Thousands are starting to see that the only thing to do today is to get united and fight like hell. More and more struggles are

jumping off against the billionaire bankers and business bigshots, just as people had to fight back in the 1930s — in fact, throughout the whole history of the working class.

In those struggles it has become clear to many workers that the unions today have been taken over at the top by outright flunkies of the companies who feel only contempt and fear for the rank and file. The unions which workers built to advance their struggle have been undermined and the top leadership is a real obstacle to further progress.

All this raises sharp questions: Why is it that so many victories workers have fought and sacrificed for have been turned around by the rich buzzards who rule this country and forged into new links of chain, binding the next generation to the same rotten system their parents faced? How can the working class break this treadmill and build a bright future for itself and its children to come?



*From the sit-downs to the seventies, auto workers have fought against the bosses' attacks and for a better life.*

## What Auto Workers Face

The top union officials say that the future for auto workers lies in labor-management peace and cooperation. Sure, some of the companies are greedy, they say. But it isn't anything like the old days. Today the companies have grown more mature and labor has taken a responsible place in society. Today workers have to work out their differences with the companies through mutual understanding. For those problems which can't be resolved in this way there are the grievance procedures and other legal channels, including lobbyists for labor in Congress and "labor's friends" in the Democratic Party. Sure, auto workers, for example, may have some problems, they say, but it's nothing their "leaders" can't take care of sooner or later.

But let's check this out against the facts. Has the position of labor changed in society? Has the nature of the companies changed? This is pure, unadulterated hogwash.

Look at the conditions auto workers face every day. They might have worked years for these companies with whom the union leaders have reached an "understanding," only to be thrown out in the street like some broken-down machine. Maybe these "leaders" are cooperating with the auto giants but it hasn't stopped line speedup, job combinations, violations in skilled trades and every other attempt by them to get more work out of fewer and fewer workers. To top it off, auto workers are made to swallow the outrage of forced overtime while their fellow workers, even in the same local, remain without work.

This is just what's happening *in* the plants. No sooner do auto workers get paid than their families are set upon by other sections of the rich parasites. The food chains demand higher and higher prices for the basic necessities of life. Big landlords, finance companies and banks which really own even most people's house and car, claw each other to get as much as they can. The cops, workers are told, are supposed to protect their families from robberies. But they end up harassing — even murdering — the working class and minorities, or riding shotgun to get scabs through the picket line during a strike. At the same time houses and apartments get ripped-off anyway. And all this is not just happening to auto workers. It's happening to the great majority of people throughout society.



*Not content with collaborating on sellout contracts, UAW president Leonard Woodcock joined with Henry Ford II in backing Jimmy Carter for President, pushing the system's political process as the answer to workers' problems.*

### Drive for Profit

The nature of auto companies and the whole of capitalist society hasn't changed. Their system is based on one thing — profit. It is their lifeblood. As former GM president Alfred Sloane bluntly put it, "The primary object of the company was to make money, not just to make motor cars."

This profit comes from only one source — the labor of workers. Without workers their factories are only ghost towns, their precious machinery just so much scrap metal. The owners of the Big 3 and AMC do no work. Yet for every car and truck the workers produce the auto giants rake in \$1500 — part of which is their own profit, another part payments like interests and rents to other capitalists (their piece of the take) and the remainder goes to finance their government. Every penny of this wealth is created by the labor of the workers, but the cars and trucks belong to the capitalists and for every dollar they are forced to give back to the workers in wages, \$2 stays in the hands of their class.

And beyond this rip-off, their system leads to the chaos of fierce competition between individual capitalists for bigger shares of this plunder. Each owner of capital, each firm, is

governed by one iron law — maximize profits, expand or die. They must either beat out the competition or be beaten out by them. Look at the auto industry. GM, which controls about 50% of the market, publicly proclaims that it doesn't have a big enough share — it's going for 60%. Chrysler, on the other hand, despite the 2.5 million cars and trucks it sells worldwide every year, went further into the red in 1975 than any corporation had been since the now defunct Penn Central Railroad, all because it can't keep up with its competitors.

Plant closings, layoffs, runaways — all this and more grows inevitably out of the anarchy of individual capitalists competing in the wild chase for private profit.

And fundamentally this competition comes down to competition in exploitation. To maximize their profit these parasites are driven constantly to get more labor out of "their" workers. When they can, they buy expensive new equipment — itself made by the workers — to increase production. But the result is even more speedup and suffering for the workers, not less. And even if their *total* profits go up, as the capitalists tie up more money in equipment, their *rate* of profit — how much return they make on each dollar of their investment — tends to fall. The only way they can try to stall this tendency is to squeeze more out of the workers — here and in other countries. As other capitalists get the same equipment, the competition gets sharper and the workers are driven harder still.

And what does the worker get in return for his labor? Just enough to make it from week to week and raise a new generation of wage slaves, just enough to force him back to work to slave for the rich — wages barely enough to keep a family going and which continually lose ground to the rising cost of living; the "security" of fearing he may wind up in the street at any time, not knowing where the next paycheck will come from; the bitter knowledge that every year breaking his back on the line puts him one step closer to the grave.

And what do the capitalists reap from these generations of labor? A case in point is Ford. In 1903 Ford Motor Company was founded with a \$28,000 investment. This, of course, was soon gone, replaced and multiplied by the products of the auto workers' labor — wrung from them in the form of company profits. By the end of the 1920s Ford Motor Co. was worth a billion dollars. No capital had been put in in the meantime — no stock issues, no loans — none other than that reinvested from the profits created by the labor of Ford workers.

In their desperate scramble for higher profits, the capitalists cannot restrict themselves to the U.S. They scour the world for new, more profitable investments and new markets. They hold whole countries in a state of enforced backwardness and force workers there to work for lower wages. Ford, for instance, has built plants throughout Europe, in South Africa, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Canada.

It is to protect this international plunder that the capitalists' state maintains troops and bases around the world. They are constantly gearing up for war, against small nations struggling for independence like Vietnam, or big capitalist rivals, especially today the USSR which is once more a capitalist country and has become the main rival to the U.S. rulers for world control and the profit it means.

The whole capitalist system, based as it is on profit for a few not the needs of the many, is racked by periodic crises, each one tending to be deeper than the one before. Their attempts to stall off these crises by things like wage-price freezes, tinkering with the money supply, raising and lowering taxes just means that there is going to be more water behind the dam when it finally gives way. Already the economy is sinking toward a new depression and all that their much-heralded "recoveries" amount to is a slight upturn before a new plunge.

In the future auto workers, along with the entire working class, can only expect a deepening of the current crisis, resulting in even more vicious attacks by the Big 3 and AMC, as the capitalists try to make the working class bear the burden of their crisis.

### Forced to Fight

But where there is oppression there is resistance. The working class and the capitalists have nothing in common. Our interests are directly opposed. They want more profits. To get more profits they must push us down. We want a decent and better life for ourselves and our kids. They stand between us and the future. To survive and advance society forward, we are forced to fight them.

That is exactly what is happening. From Fremont, California, through the plants in Detroit, to Mahwah, New Jersey, auto workers are steaming mad. This anger has been building up slowly over the last few years and at times it is boiling over into open struggle.

The main form this takes at present is small-scale slow-downs, filing mass grievances, resistance to particularly rotten foremen, small groups organizing, and so on. And things are escalating.

For instance, we have seen the workers at Ford Mahwah, NJ, where the Granada is made, vote overwhelmingly for a strike at the end of 1975 and beat back a vicious company campaign of speedup, harassment, and job eliminations. Through the first half of 1976 workers at other plants, among them AMC Milwaukee Body, Ford Truck in Avon Lake, Ohio, and GM in Wilmington, Delaware, also put the company on notice with strike votes in fights over speedup, health and safety, stacked up grievances and runaway lines. Workers at Ford Metuchen in New Jersey twice walked out when the company tried to schedule compulsory overtime, saying "To hell with the contract, we're not working OT 'till everyone on layoff is called back."

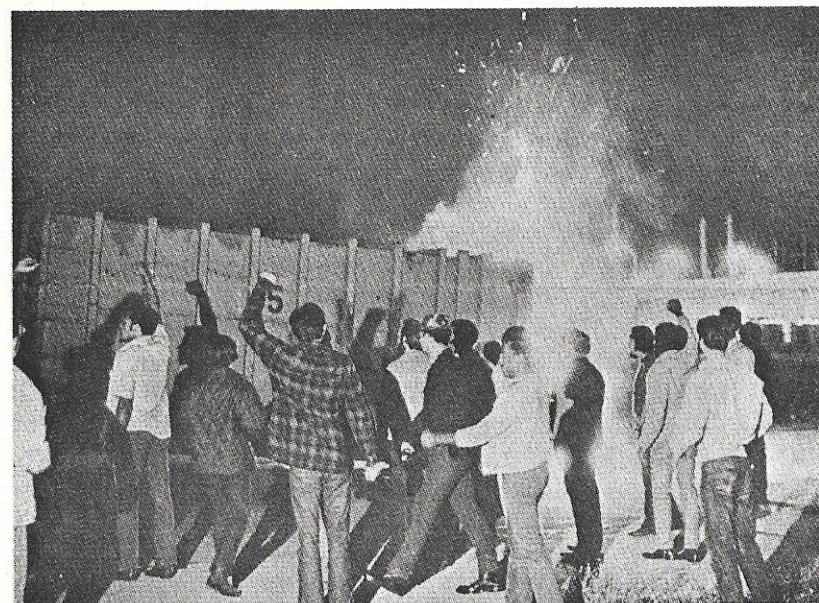
But as the fighting anger of the rank and file has mounted, so have the union officials tried to increase their role — not by helping to build unity and struggle against the companies but by coming out even more upfront in sticking up for the companies. These "leaders" are even able to perform a task for the bosses which the bosses themselves can't always accomplish. The company must attack the growing resistance of auto workers openly and from without, but this often only heightens the anger and strength of the movement. The top officials who pretend to lead auto workers are able to sabotage the movement from within.

### Sellouts

These hacks have grown fascinated and envious of the companies' wealth and want more for themselves. They justify their actions by telling the rank and file, "What's good for the boss is good for the workers" and "You have a stake in the profits of the companies, too." They have completely accepted the pathetic future the bosses and their system have in store for us.

These chumps don't always talk and act as straight-up pro-company as the bosses themselves. Sometimes they pound their fists and talk militant. But this slickness only makes them more dangerous to the rank and file and more useful to the companies.

No action is too low for the International leaders and their flunkies. Their performance over the last few years shows just how quick they are to jump in bed with the company and hand-



*500 workers showed up at GM in Fremont, Ca. to start the 1970 strike off strong. Even as the hacks work to turn every strike into an orderly sellout, the workers fight to make it a real battle.*

cuff the struggles of the rank and file.

Take 1972. A lot of anger was building up in assembly plants all over the country against the speedup General Motors was trying to push through with its GMAD program. UAW chief Woodcock started woofing about how he wouldn't stand for it and announced his "mini-strike" strategy. This turned out to be a scheme to let individual locals take on the world's largest industrial corporation one at a time, effectively weakening the rank and file and pouring water on the sparks of resistance.

The International told the company in each case not only when the men would walk out, but exactly when the company could expect them back on the job! The Norwood, Ohio, local went out on a strike that wound up lasting 174 days, the longest in the history of GM. It was weakened by Woodcock backing down on the promise International Vice President Irving Bluestone made to let the Lordstown, Ohio and St. Louis plants hit the bricks in support. GM was able to push on with its speedup plans.

Or 1973. Through the summer and fall the UAW leadership kept the rank and file completely in the dark about the contract

negotiations. When it expired Chrysler was pulled out on strike but Woodcock and the company settled after 72 hours, the shortest strike in UAW history. According to *Newsweek* magazine at the time, "Both company and union officials were aware that some kind of walkout was inevitable at many plants even if an agreement were concluded at the national level. But according to sources close to the talks, a short company-wide strike would allow workers to let off steam and make it less likely that they would pull another stoppage over local grievances."

Woodcock and Fraser, the head of the UAW Chrysler division, claimed the Chrysler contract was the best ever, but by the time the same deal was reached at Ford everybody knew the Chrysler workers had been screwed and didn't want any part of it. It is widely known that the skilled trades at Ford voted this turkey down, but that's only half the story. The majority of Ford assembly workers walked off the job for a day — in defiance of leadership pleas to "stay cool"— and rejected the contract on the first ballot.

To weasel out of this bind, revotes were ordered at a couple units in Local 600, the Ford River Rouge local, the largest in the country. After harangues from local and International hacks and some fancy "counting," they claimed the ratification vote had carried in Local 600. Then they treated *all* of Local 600's votes as "yes" votes, which was enough to rig the national election. When they tried the same thing on the skilled workers, the "no" vote increased several times over but they rammed the contract through anyway and tried to ignore the angry demonstrations of skilled workers.

When sellouts like this come down, a lot of auto workers say, "Well, the union has gone and stabbed us in the back again." The top officials have put their stamp on the whole UAW to such an extent that for many workers *they* are "the union." They go out of their way to build up this idea, for example constantly claiming that auto workers are too "apathetic" and that they could win much more if the rank and file would just line up behind them with more enthusiasm.

But the union and the hacks are not the same thing! As the *Programme* of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) points out, "The trade unions in this country, especially the powerful industrial unions, were not built by these bloated toads, but by the struggle and sacrifice of millions of workers." (pp. 103-4)

## A Fighting History

The first auto company in the U.S., the Duryea Company, was formed before the turn of the century and in its first year produced 12 cars. Early autos were made one by one, with most of the work being done by skilled craftsmen — carriage builders, metal workers, steamboat engine builders. But the companies plowed most of their profits back into the business and soon had large plants turning out thousands of cars each year.

Jobs were divided and divided again, so that unskilled workers could be hired at low wages and quickly trained to perform one or two basic operations day in and day out. At the time workers labored anywhere from 10 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week for a couple dollars a day, and faced the constant threat of losing their jobs — individually at some foreman's whim or by the millions during periodic crises in the system. If a worker didn't sweat hard enough for the bosses or started making noise about higher pay, he was easy to replace.

The last major advance in automobile manufacture was introduced by Henry Ford over 60 years ago in his new Highland Park, Michigan plant on July 14, 1914. This was the endless chain conveyor. It was to completely overhaul the production not only of automobiles but most consumer goods, and to provide a magnificent source of speedup and profits for the capitalists, better than an army of the most vicious foremen.

A German writer who toured early auto plants described it thus, "The conveyor started as a simple means of carrying articles, but became a tyrant dominating the workers. When the conveyor is speeded up, the workers are forced to follow its dictates, and hurry with their jobs accordingly . . . the workers are bound to the conveyor the way galley slaves were bound to the vessel."

By the 1920s more than two dozen auto companies were turning out around 4 million cars a year, although even then 80% of them came from the Big 3: Ford, GM and Chrysler. Hundreds of thousands of men and women poured into Detroit and Flint to fill the jobs and growing industry needed. In part they were lured by reports of high pay, but mainly they were driven by the workings of the capitalist system itself — from the rural Mid-

west where farm bankruptcies were running high, from Europe ravaged by war, poverty and political repression, and from the South where Blacks lived under Jim Crow segregation and lynch terror and Black and white tenant farmers alike were bound more tightly every year by chains of debt to the land-owners. Few had mechanical skills or even much factory experience, but the employment managers promised, "We'll teach 'em what work is, quick enough!"

Horrible though working conditions were in those days before the union was won, they will still ring a familiar bell with auto workers today. Although wages were supposedly high for those times, they could not keep up with the cost of living. Overtime was the rule. One worker at Briggs Motors reported in 1928, "We must often work 12 and 14 hours with no extra for overtime. The same for Sundays and holidays. I had to work this Sunday and also on the Fourth of July, both for straight time." His general foreman came out with the familiar song, saying those who didn't like it could quit, "There are plenty of men



*"The conveyor started as a simple means of carrying articles, but became a tyrant dominating the workers...[who] are bound to the conveyor the way galley slaves were bound to the vessel." Auto assembly line—1930s.*

outside anxious to go to work."

Speedup wore out the workers so fast that many other employers would refuse to hire anyone who had worked in an auto plant for more than four or five years. Job security was non-existent and few workers lasted in the plants past the age of 40. Auto workers were subject to unpaid layoffs of varying lengths at any time, so much so that the Bureau of Labor Statistics admitted that auto showed "the greatest instability of employment" of any industry. A worker could be fired at any time for any reason.

In the face of these miserable conditions workers fought back, trying to build unions and with their backs to the wall pulling wildcat walkouts. In doing so they came up against vast obstacles. The companies were dead set against organization. The motto of the Employers Association of Detroit was: "Detroit is Detroit because of the Open Shop," capital letters and all.

Besides firing all suspected "troublemakers" instantly, the companies promoted all manner of divisions among the workers. Black workers, who were told they were leaving segregation in the South, were generally kept in the most menial and lowest paying of jobs when they could find work at all. Discrimination was a profitable tool for the capitalists in the North. Eastern and Southern European immigrants were also ground down. The companies used low pay for one group to hold down everyone's pay and pushed competition between nationalities to get more production out of the workers, even encouraging an occasional outbreak of racial violence to keep things stirred up.

But the companies' most powerful weapon was their force of goons and labor spies who were everywhere, looking to break up any step toward unionization. The most notorious was Ford's Service Department, a three thousand man army, mostly ex-convicts, who prowled the aisles of River Rouge and Highland Park packing brass knuckles, blackjacks and revolvers, looking for someone "out of line"—talking, for instance.

They also had the job of checking on workers' home lives. Ford went to any extreme to try and make sure "his" workers were subservient and loyal to him. To hold a job in his plants they were supposed to live up to his "moral code"—including no smoking or drinking, even at home. And every worker was expected to take two subscriptions to Ford's own daily newspaper, the anti-Semitic *Dearborn Independent*.



The last major obstacle faced by the auto workers was the top leadership of the American Federation of Labor, the spiritual forefathers of the Meanys and Woodcocks of today. The great majority of AFL unions were skilled crafts unions and their leaders looked down on the hundreds of thousands of semi-skilled auto workers as an ignorant mob. Even when they discussed organizing in auto, they refused to consider building a powerful united industrial union.

They dreamed of dividing the workers up among themselves, so most would probably be in the Machinists Union, but guys on the paint line might be painters, some in the body shops go to a sheet metal union, and so on. However, in practice the AFL made only the most feeble efforts to organize even the skilled trades in the shops.

### Great Depression

With the collapse of the capitalist economy in 1929 and the Great Depression, conditions got a thousand times worse for auto workers along with the whole working class. With millions of people across the country facing starvation, auto sales sank like a stone. The auto bosses cut production, slashed the workforce, cut hours worked and made deep wage cuts. But they did not cut speedup — they stepped it up to try to squeeze out enough profits to weather the storm, as sales fell and competition between automakers became fierce with prices cut frequently.

At Briggs, where wages in the 1920s had been in many cases over \$5 a day, they were cut and cut again until men were getting 10¢ an hour — and women only 4¢! The workers had a chant, "If poison doesn't work, try Briggs." In Detroit, the eviction rate went as high as 7500 families a month. 150,000 people left the city entirely and an even greater number were forced to exist on charity from welfare agencies.

During this time the auto industry became more heavily monopolized than ever. Even in the years before the Great Depression the bigger companies were wiping out the small ones. Chrysler merged with Dodge in 1928, for instance. In the Depression, small firms like Austin and Hupp dropped like flies, with the Big 3 usually picking up the pieces for a song.

Even the hardship of the Depression and threat of starvation and police attacks could not keep people from fighting back. By 1930 there was a powerful movement of the unemployed in the country demanding jobs or unemployment insurance and fight-

ing evictions and repossessions every day. This was organized mainly by the Unemployed Councils, a mass organization of jobless workers with members of the Communist Party playing an active role.

The response of the ruling class was typified by Henry Ford who constantly issued statements like, "If there is any unemployment it is simply because the unemployed do not want to work." The Detroit Unemployed Councils decided to take him up on it and on March 7, 1932 led a Hunger March to the Ford plant in Dearborn demanding jobs and relief. Dearborn police tear gassed the three thousand marchers and firemen turned hoses on them in the freezing weather, but the demonstrators pressed forward. Suddenly the cops and the Ford Service Department opened fire with pistols and a mounted machine gun. Dozens were wounded and four men, Joe York, Coleman Lenz, Joe DeBlasio and Joe Bussel, were killed.

Five days later 30,000 workers turned out in Detroit to bury the four men in a common grave, their caskets draped with the red flag, and to vow that Ford and all his high and mighty fellow capitalists would not stop the struggle. Around the world workers rose in solidarity with the struggles in Detroit. Even in Italy where the capitalist class had installed an open, terrorist dictatorship, fascism, and outlawed unions, workers nevertheless quickly organized angry demonstrations and destroyed Ford showrooms, powerfully showing that workers of all countries have the same interests and the same enemies.

By the mid-1930s the struggle of the working class began to really catch fire. The center shifted from unemployed demonstrations to organizing drives and strikes in the shops. Men and women who had been in the earlier fights took their experience with them when they found work. Employed workers knew that when they struggled they could count on backing from strong unemployed organizations with battle cries like, "We won't starve and we won't scab."

Organizing in auto got a real boost in Toledo, Ohio in 1934 with a strike at a parts plant, the Toledo Electric Auto-Lite Company. Mass picket lines of 10,000 and more, including the local unemployed organization, trapped 1800 scabs in the plant and shelled them with bricks from giant inner tube slingshots.

It took the National Guard to rescue the scabs and the workers fought a six day and night running battle which finally drove the Guard, many of whom were workers and sympathized with the strike, out of the whole area. A general strike



*The victory of the 1934 Toledo, Ohio Auto-Lite strike helped trigger the great upsurge of the working class in the late 1930s and was a step towards winning unionization in the auto industry.*

supporting the Auto-Lite workers followed, and soon the company caved in.

### The CIO

The old craft unions were proving to be nearly powerless in the face of the employers' offensive and growing monopolization. They were chewed up badly by the Depression and membership dropped dramatically. Most of the AFL bigwigs just sat in their plush offices and either tried to ignore or actively sabotaged the upsurge of the class, but a few, like John L. Lewis of the Mine Workers, heard opportunity knocking.

If they ditched their outdated marriage with craft unionism, they could perhaps ride this wave of struggle to positions of greater power as the "leaders" of millions of industrial workers. This would greatly enhance their importance to the capitalist class and their rewards from it. In late 1935 Lewis and a few others set up the Committee for Industrial Organization (later to become the Congress of Industrial Organizations) and split the AFL.

With the question of industrial unions the main one facing the working class, the CIO became the storm center of the struggle. Among the first to see the potential of the CIO was the Communist Party, which had been fighting for industrial unions since its formation in 1919. In the CIO organizing drives, communists and other working class fighters found themselves uniting with labor traitors like Lewis and with up and coming opportunists who talked a good fight but were looking to carve themselves a career out of the turmoil of the struggle.

Of such a kind were the Reuther brothers in the auto industry. When they came on the scene they called themselves "socialists" to win support among the workers, but they had entered the UAW with the avowed intention of building a faction in the union strong enough to get them into high office. Nevertheless, the Reuthers and others like them had, for whatever opportunist reasons, staked all the resources at their command on the organizing of millions of angry and determined workers. To this extent they could, and had to be, united with, even though they tried to use this unity to further their careers at the expense of the workers.

The CIO officials planned to make their first organizing drive in steel, but things were so explosive among rank and file auto workers that they were the first to go. The newly formed United Auto Workers Union had affiliated with the CIO in May, 1936, and auto workers everywhere were talking union. Speedup was so bad, one Chrysler worker said, "It seemed like every time you came back from the can, the line was going faster." Piecework rates were cut constantly. 1936 was a hot year and in one four-day stretch that summer hundreds of auto workers were hospitalized and many died.

As members flocked into the UAW, the companies refused point blank to bargain. The workers responded with a tactic they had learned from rubber strikers in Akron, Ohio — the sit-down strike where workers just took over their plant and stopped production cold, cutting off any chance of scabbing and holding millions of dollars of production equipment hostage.

GM went first. On November 18 the Atlanta plant was seized. On December 15, Kansas City. December 28, Cleveland. December 30, Fisher Body #1 and Fisher Body #2 in Flint, Michigan. December 31, GM Guide Lamp in Anderson, Indiana and Chevy Transmission in Norwood, Ohio. By January 8 Toledo Chevy, Chevy and Fisher in Janesville, Wisconsin and Cadillac in Detroit were down too, all holding out for a national agreement with GM.



*With most strikers in the plants, their outer defenses were set up by the other workers who poured into Flint and the Women's Emergency Brigade, made up of wives and sweethearts whose 2 by 4 clubs kept the cops at a distance.*

### Sit-Down at Flint

The battle was to center near Detroit at Flint, the heart of the GM empire and a company town if ever there was one. As the most powerful capitalist firm in the area, General Motors totally controlled the government, the courts, the cops, the newspapers, the radio station, the priests and ministers — but they could not forever control the workers

Strikers and other workers surrounded the occupied plants with mass picket lines to protect the guys inside. Wives and other workers organized a constant flow of food, supplies and information into the plant. Some of the women set up the Women's Emergency Brigade, a flying squad wearing red berets and armed with lengths of two-by-four and pipe to fight off police or vigilante attacks on the occupied plants.

In the plants the thousands of auto workers organized themselves — first and foremost setting up defenses; but also making sleeping areas with car seat beds; passing rules, for instance against drinking; and setting up classes and entertainment committees with skits and music. While the capitalists talked about “chaos” and “senseless violence,” the working class was giving a powerful demonstration of its potential to overthrow the capitalists, set up its own rule and remake, organize and run all of society.

GM's first big bid to bust the Great Flint Sit-Down Strike came on January 11 at the smaller occupied plant, Fisher #2. Company guards prevented strike supporters from bringing

food to the workers until a simultaneous attack from inside and out reestablished contact. The cops showed up, gassing the picketers, then shooting gas grenades into the plant. The workers responded with high pressure fire hoses, soaking the cops in 16-degree weather, and with a hail of two-pound door hinges from the roof.

The police regrouped but were beaten back even quicker as the workers and their wives outside grabbed clubs and heaved pop bottles. The cops took off, firing pistols at the union ranks as they retreated. The fleeing cops gave the union victory its name, “The Battle of Bulls Run.”

Across the country workers were listening breathlessly to radio news or grabbing the morning paper to see “how they're doing in Flint.” After the attack on Fisher #2, thousands of them packed into cars, especially auto workers from places like Cleveland, Norwood and Toledo, and steamrolled their way into Flint through police roadblocks and weapons shakedowns. They knew this was not just a strike but a showdown between the working class and the capitalists and they knew they were needed.

The ruling class was displaying its own version of “class solidarity”— within the limits of the dog-eat-dog competition basic to their whole system, of course. Corporate fat cats were frothing at the mouth demanding that the Army, the Air Force, anything, be brought in to break the strikes. Politicians and media mouthpieces denounced the workers’ “criminal irresponsibility” and demanded GM and the government do something.

GM tried trickery, promising to negotiate if the plants were evacuated. Just as the sit-downers began to leave word came that GM had no intention of recognizing the UAW and the workers were back inside like a shot.

GM then turned to the full force of the capitalist government, getting court injunctions to clear the plants and a call-up of 3500 National Guard troops to enforce it. More workers began to see where the government stood and their response was direct: “Damn the injunctions, damn the courts, damn the army and double damn General Motors.” They sent a letter to the governor telling him that to get them out he would have to kill them.

Among the leaders of the auto workers occupying the plants and on the Flint city strike committee were many members and sympathizers of the Communist Party, USA, then the political party and revolutionary leadership of the working class.

Earlier in the Depression they had helped form and lead the Unemployed Councils and now they were among the hardest fighters for building the UAW and all the CIO unions. The newspapers and politicians went all out to convince the workers they were being "used by the Reds" but the workers recognized these "Reds" as leaders, seeing they acted and fought for the interests of the working class.

As the strike dragged on into February, the strike leadership decided on a bold stroke to strengthen its hand. They spread the word that Chevy #9 would be seized February 1 and made sure a couple of known company informers heard it. Several thousand workers marched to #9 where GM's guard force had been concentrated and workers inside sat down, triggering a major battle.

Meanwhile, under the cover of this diversionary action, a handful of organizers pulled out the workers at Chevy #6 and with them marched into the barricaded Chevy #4, perhaps the key Chevrolet plant in the whole country where all the million Chevy engines made every year were built. In the face of threatened injunctions and police and National Guard attacks on the other plants, this move kept the initiative firmly in the



*The sit-down strike proved to be a powerful weapon and after Flint (shown above) it spread like wildfire in the working class. Holding the bosses' machinery hostage made scabbing impossible and beat back attacks by the companies and the government.*

hands of the workers and greatly weakened GM.

That night National Guard troops with fixed bayonets marched in the streets of Flint. A thousand vigilantes were deputized by the police. On the other side of this class battle thousands more workers — miners from Pennsylvania, rubber workers from Akron and others — left home and headed for Flint.

The governor did not dare use the Guard and its machine guns against the sit-downers because he feared it would trigger armed revolts. General Motors did not dare push him to because they were afraid their precious plants and machinery would be totalled. They couldn't budge the sit-down strikers with threats and meanwhile they were losing millions of dollars in sales.

Finally, on February 11, 44 days after the sit-in started, GM admitted defeat. They recognized the UAW and agreed to negotiate nationally over wages, hours and speedup. The workers marched out, joining thousands of supporters in a march through Flint chanting "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!"

The workers felt the joy of having won a tremendous and historic victory over the capitalist class. The winning of the union did not, of course, mean that the workers were now free from being robbed and oppressed by the moneyed rulers. But they had improved the conditions under which American workers could wage their struggle in the future. Their victory represented a real advance toward the final emancipation of the working class.

In the course of organizing themselves in the plants and of standing up and exchanging blows with the enemy, the Flint workers had got a taste of genuine freedom, of the bright hope in the future, of how life can be when those who rob and grind the workers down are finally overthrown.

### Sparks More Victories

This same fighting spirit had been building throughout the entire working class and the victory at Flint fanned it into a blaze that swept the country. Sit-down strikes spread like wildfire through 1937. Workers in big industries like electrical sat down. Sales clerks in department stores sat down. Movie projectionists sat down in the projection booths. The United Electrical Workers, the United Steelworkers, the National Maritime Union and many others soon had won contracts from the major companies in their industries.

The auto workers continued to forge ahead, too. A sit-down at

Chrysler later in 1937 won the same agreement as with GM. By 1938 the UAW had 500,000 members in basic auto and parts companies. Wages went up from 30-40¢ an hour to \$1 an hour in many cases. This left only Ford to conquer, a job which took until 1941. Sit-downs had been declared illegal by the Supreme Court and President Roosevelt. Ford's Service Department goons were stalking the plants like wild animals, union men were fired left and right, but the handwriting was on the wall.

In a last-ditch effort Ford tried to divide the workers along Black/white lines. He hired thousands more Black workers and, in a noticeable change from the discrimination his plants shared with the rest of the industry, raised their pay levels and gave them a few "privileges." This outright attempt to purchase the workers' loyalty in case of a strike was backed by a few Black ministers and other mouthpieces Ford had already bought and paid for in the community. Meanwhile, the Service Department and foremen tried to fan resentment and hostility towards Black workers among their white co-workers.

But when the Ford workers walked out of the mammoth River Rouge complex on April 12, 1941 and surrounded the plant with cars and mass pickets, 8500 of the 10,000 Black workers were among them and more left the plant in the next few days. With his last desperate ploy to divide the workers and cripple the organizing drive down the drain, beaten by the workers' opposition to discrimination and fight for unity, Henry Ford agreed to union elections after nine days of strike and within two months he had signed a pacesetter contract with the UAW.

The great upsurge of class struggle in the late 1930s and the victories it won scared the hell out of the capitalists. They had been forced to make concessions around unionization, unemployment insurance, etc., and many people began to look to revolution as the way to resolve the contradictions of capitalism. But at the same time they were making these concessions, their political leaders and representatives immediately proclaimed their twisted summations of the struggle and attempted to divert the growing revolutionary ferment of the workers and to bolster the rule of the capitalists.

At the same time the ruling class fought the workers with police, court injunctions and the National Guard, much of their press and speeches were full of praise for the role played by President Roosevelt, who "looked out for the working man," John L. Lewis, who was described as a "tower of strength," and the "sympathetic" Frank Murphy, governor of Michigan at the



*With sit-downs outlawed, Ford workers turned to their own cars and blockaded the River Rouge plant in 1941. Key to their victory was the unity of Black and white workers, strengthened by the stand the UAW took against discrimination.*

time of the Great Flint Sit-down Strike. All this was an effort designed to stand reality on its head and give the capitalists and their representatives credit for concessions the working class had shed its blood to wring out of them.

### Roosevelt's Role

A quick look at Roosevelt's role in the struggles of auto workers shows what a snow job this is. During an earlier effort to organize the industry in 1934, he guaranteed its failure by forcing a settlement that endorsed the company unions the bosses had set up to oppose organizing drives. GM president Sloane chortled, "All's well that ends well!" During Flint it was fear of the workers' strength that prevented Roosevelt from doing the same again and he showed his true sympathies by admitting, "It took real calm not to call out the troops."

Within a few years, in 1941, with the great CIO drives over and the threat the capitalists felt from the workers not so immediate, Roosevelt was not as "calm." When UAW Local 683 struck North American Aviation in California he sent 2500 federal troops to bust the strike by going door to door with submachine guns to force the workers back into the plant.

To some degree the capitalists were able to put this summation over due to the errors of the Communist Party, which did not correctly sum up the experience the working class had gained in its struggle and point the road forward. The CP played a

major role in helping to build the struggle for unions and their members were respected and looked to for leadership by millions.

But the CP did not use every opportunity the struggle presented to sum up the *class* nature of the system — the robbery and exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class — and in so doing raise the revolutionary consciousness of the working class. Instead, the CP promoted the wrong idea that there was a “progressive” wing of the capitalist class represented by Roosevelt and a “reactionary” wing represented by the Republican Party, Henry Ford and so on. Thus the CP actually played up the very illusions that were so important for the capitalists to get the people to believe.

In addition the CP treated the winning of the industrial unions as the sole goal of the workers’ struggle, and didn’t show how the struggle for this and other reforms was part of the broader struggle which must eventually end in the victory of the working class through the overthrow of the capitalist class, the establishment of working class rule in society, and the elimination of capitalism and its evils.

As part of these errors, the CP called on workers to dissolve all caucuses and other forms of organization which united the more active fighters and politically aware, class-conscious workers and just work within the unions as individuals. This move seriously hurt the ability of the workers to take on the flunkies the capitalists were pushing into union leadership.

The state of the UAW and other unions today shows what these errors lead to: as long as the capitalists are in power they will continue to attack and try to corrupt every gain won by the working class — and will sooner or later succeed in setting back the workers movement, if the workers struggle is restricted to fighting for concessions as the only goal.

The capitalists were able to climb out of the Depression through World War 2. Letting other countries do the main bulk of the fighting the U.S. moved in a big way near the end of the war to clean up on the spoils. While they were relatively undamaged in the war, their rivals in other capitalist countries were greatly weakened and the U.S. capitalists were able to take advantage of this to extend their economic and military empire.

Sitting at the top of the capitalist dunghheap they were able to stabilize the U.S. economy — *temporarily*. Only temporarily because the measures they took to get out of the crisis — ex-

tending their exploitation and robbery around the world, spending huge sums to maintain their military to enforce and protect this plunder, building up the capitalists in Europe and Japan to stave off the threat of working class revolution — were the very measures that laid the basis for the even bigger crisis they are now entering. Now they face wars of national liberation directed at U.S. imperialism, huge deficits, the devaluation of the dollar and inflation and, especially with the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, the re-emergence of sharp inter-imperialist rivalry and the growing danger of a new world war.

### Capitalists Counter-Attack

After the victory over Germany and Japan the capitalists of this country set out with new vigor to try and beat back the strength the working class had built up during the ‘30s. A big part of this was to test the strength of the UAW. With the workers demanding a long overdue wage increase and a basic 40 hour week, GM, Ford and Chrysler wouldn’t budge an inch, holding to a unified position among major corporations against any wage increase.

On November 21, 1945, 225,000 auto workers walked out of 92 General Motors plants around the country. It took them 113 days on the picket line to back down GM and win an 18½¢ an hour increase. This long struggle was the heart of a post war strike wave by over four million workers who went into battle to force better wages and conditions out of the capitalist class.

When attacks like this only strengthened the determination of workers to defend the gains they had made, the capitalists moved to put the clamps on their struggle through a number of labor laws. The most general of these, the Taft-Hartley Act, among other things, reinstated many types of anti-labor injunctions and provided for court-ordered fines to back them up, outlawed mass picketing, prohibited secondary boycotts and encouraged state “right to work” laws.

Taken together, these laws insured that any individual company in combat with its workers would have the backing of the whole capitalist class through its state — all in the guise of the “neutral” government “enforcing the law” and looking out for the interests of both “labor and management.”

But the main thrust of the capitalists’ attacks did not come from without. Inside the unions the capitalists worked to promote “leaders” who would serve their interests, like Walter Reuther in the UAW. They built up their favorites by tactics like

massive media coverage and sometimes, when they could afford it, favoring them in negotiations. The capitalists have always done this kind of "inside job." The AFL bigwigs during the Depression, for instance, outdid each other in coming out *against* unemployment insurance, refusing to organize industrial workers and even denouncing the Flint sit-down.

The capitalists have never had too much trouble finding candidates to act as their henchmen in the unions. Their system breeds opportunists who care about nothing but a title and an office. Often auto workers have seen even real fighters get into union office, even at the local level, only to wind up sellouts. Once in office there is a tendency for an official to become isolated from the rank and file he or she came from. On the one hand he has more prestige and is usually better paid, while on the other hand when he tries to fight for the workers' interests he gets tied up in red tape and contract formalities. All the while the company is trying to pressure him to "be reasonable" and take their interests to heart.

The capitalists use carrot-and-stick tactics to drive a deeper wedge between the official and the workers and drag him into their camp. If someone is a militant fighter, he will be singled out for merciless attack to weaken him and further the separation. On the other hand, if he goes along with the look-out-for-number-one philosophy of capitalist society and "plays ball," they can make things pretty good for him.

The International does the same thing, slapping locals with militants in office under receivership, while those who're "loyal" and don't make waves get vacations at Black Lake, the UAW's fancy resort, and maybe a chance to move up in the union bureaucracy. The rewards for siding with the capitalists grow greater the higher the union office, to the point where many of the top leaders of big international unions like the UAW, who control millions of dollars in dues and other union funds and have large sums of their own invested, are capitalists themselves.

All the same, none of this means that the leaders the working class brings forward in its struggles are somehow bound to wind up on the ruling class' side. In fact, the very tactics the capitalists use to try and gradually make officials their agents show that the key questions are maintaining the closest links with the workers and their struggle and developing policies which build that struggle and direct it against the enemies of the working class. These are things that working class leaders

can do only by learning from and relying on the workers themselves. When they stand solidly with the rank and file, whose daily experience constantly provides proof that the conflict between the workers and the capitalists is irreconcilable, they can resist and struggle against ideas of "labor peace" or class collaboration which serve only to undercut the struggle.

Despite these pressures of capitalist society the leaders of the working class do not have to go bad. Primarily it is a question of the working class organizing around the correct political line. When the struggle is guided by an understanding of the irreconcilable conflict between the working class and the capitalists not only can the working class advance its struggle to overthrow the robber barons, but its leaders can *consciously* maintain firm roots within the working class and play a key role in leading the struggle against the enemy, while learning from the masses of workers in order to lead them.

#### Walter Reuther — Opportunist

From its very formation, there were a lot of opportunists out to make a career in the UAW. Some of the leaders, though, genuinely had the interests of the workers at heart and a basic understanding of what those interests are. The result was intense struggle over the way the UAW should grow and the policies it should take.

While confined too much to the leadership, this was real class struggle in the union over who the union should serve, the working class or the capitalists. The confusion and in-fighting in this early period were among the reasons Ford was not organized until four years after GM and Chrysler. Finally, by 1947 the faction put together by Walter Reuther and his brothers Roy and Victor had grabbed firm hold of the leadership of the UAW.

With Reuther heading up the union it became crystal clear why the capitalists had backed him in his bid for power. He not only accepted the capitalist system but stood foursquare behind it. The capitalists could not allow the great upsurge of working class struggle in the '30s to advance and Reuther's career was dedicated to helping them. His role was to channel the struggle and consciousness of the masses, their hatred for the system of exploitation, and take it down a dead end.

Instead of building the UAW to serve the workers movement, he held that trade unions were an end in themselves and the workers should settle for "bargaining" with the capitalists for the terms of their slavery, disguised as a "fair day's pay for a

fair day's work," rather than moving to free themselves of capitalist servitude forever. So shameless was Reuther in pushing this view in the working class that he proclaimed of the capitalists at the 1958 convention, "I say about these fellows, I don't begrudge them one penny they get, not one penny."

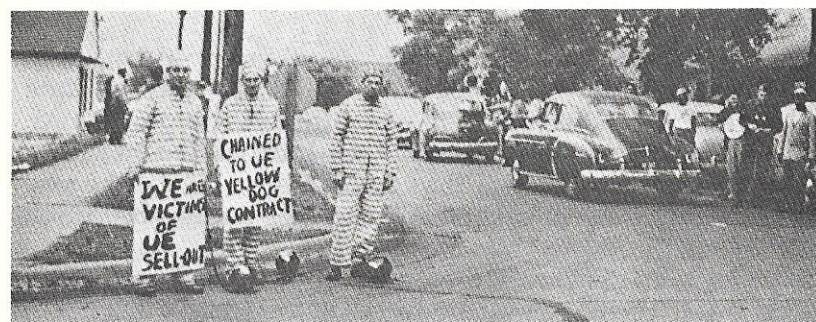
Furthermore, Reuther followed the tradition set years before by Samuel Gompers, first head of the AFL, of tying the workers not only to the bosses but to the capitalists' political system, specifically to the Democratic Party. Under the slogan, "Labor rewards its friends and punishes its enemies," hacks like Reuther substituted the theory of labor as just one pressure group among many lobbying for its interests for the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and their whole system of robbery and misery.

With this thoroughly treacherous outlook it is no surprise that upon assuming office Walter Reuther launched an all-out attack on the Communist Party, whose members and supporters in the UAW had been a major obstacle in his rise to power. This was part and parcel of an overall ruling class attack on the old CP which included passing laws forbidding communists to hold any union office.

The communists were not able to wage a successful resistance to these attacks, in part due to their continuing errors of reformism, despite their leading role in many struggles. The mistakes of the Communist Party actually helped create the conditions for the ruling class and the trade union hacks to spread class collaborationism among the workers and to isolate and purge communists in the union.

The bourgeoisie and their sidekicks in the unions wanted to get rid of the CP, not just because they were fighters and would throw a wrench in the "labor peace" schemes of the hacks, but because the CP, despite its errors, challenged the rule of capital itself — though not correctly or consistently enough. The attacks on the communists grew through the McCarthy witch-hunts of the early 1950s until, betrayed from within, the CP gave up the class struggle entirely in the mid-1950s and took sides with the ruling class, even hailing dogs like Reuther and Woodcock as "progressive leaders of labor."

The effective elimination of class-conscious revolutionary leadership was not the only thing that permitted Reuther and his ideas to hold sway in the UAW for so long, even as the same ideas did throughout American society. He frequently struck militant poses in front of the rank and file to cover his



*Instead of organizing the unorganized, Reuther sent UAW staff, like these three, to raid other unions, especially ones he had helped kick out of the CIO when their members refused to turn against Communists who had helped lead their struggles.*

treachery. Harry Coen, a top GM official, said approvingly, "There are two kinds of Walter Reuthers, the Reuther we deal with and one who's out throwing punches before the public."

The capitalists did their part, too. Basically in Fat City, raking in profits from working people around the world on top of those they squeezed out of workers in the U.S., they were able, in the face of some militancy and struggle, to give up some concessions to the workers in order to cool out the threat of "labor unrest" and interference with production. From the late '40s to the early '60s the UAW won increases in pay and benefits, SUB pay and the cost of living escalator. These concessions not only kept the autos rolling off the lines, but gave support to Reuther and his line and helped bolster up the myth that workers and capitalists had a common interest in the capitalist system.

The concessions the ruling class made in this period paid off not only in the decline of a militant, class-conscious workers movement, but Reuther and company made plenty of concessions, too, "on behalf of the union membership," which tied the workers in a web of legalism designed to weaken and harness their struggle. As early as the 1948 contract the UAW bigshots included a no-strike clause for the duration of the contract, aimed at any auto worker who fought back against the company.

This system of shackles on the struggle has grown right up to the present day: Got a beef with the company? File a grievance. Got a beef with some union sellout? Try to vote him out in an election. Want to fight? Occasionally there's a contract strike or



an authorized local strike with a little formal picketing under tight control by the officials.

Furthermore, the capitalists by no means stopped attacking the workers during this period. Massive automation in plants fueled the cycle of layoffs and speedup. Reuther proclaimed, "The UAW-CIO and its one and one-half million members welcome automation," as if the companies would use the new technology to better the workers' lot rather than to better rob them.

Hudson and Packard closed down and at Dodge Main in Hamtramck, Michigan the workforce fell from 33,000 to 9,000 in the space of a few months in 1954, never to go above 13,000 again. For Reuther and Co., who did nothing to fight such layoffs, all this was just an unfortunate part of how the system worked — a system that rewarded them well.

The real results of Reuther's policies and the real nature of his treachery became still clearer in the 1967 auto contract. By this time the U.S. ruling class' worldwide empire was getting shaky. The government was losing in its effort to crush the liberation struggle in Vietnam and competition was on the rise from the capitalists of Europe, Japan and a new rival, the new capitalists who had seized control of the Soviet Union in the 1950s. The capitalist class of the U.S., in general, and the auto companies in particular, were far less able by then to readily grant concessions to the workers. In fact, the Big 3 demanded an end to the cost of living clause.

Reuther's line was to "avoid a fight at all costs," but the company attack and the determination of the workers not to knuckle under forced him to call a strike at Ford. After 48 days Reuther announced victory, the cost of living escalator was "saved" — with a 16¢ cap that by 1970 would fall so far behind inflation as to wipe out all the wage increases in the contract.

But Reuther's treachery was, of course, not finished. Few plants, less than 20% at GM, had negotiated local contracts. Some stayed out, others struck over local issues and years of stacked-up grievances. After the workers had been out for a couple weeks and Reuther figured they had "let off steam," he approved a company letter threatening everybody with loss of Christmas and New Year's holiday pay and over a hundred bucks in back pay if they didn't go back in. With this kind of pressure from the International, by the spring hundreds of locals had been forced to accept "settlements" that threw out literally tens of thousands of grievances.

## The Battles to Come

The history of UAW is an extremely rich one, both in terms of the proud struggle of the working class that went into building the union and in terms of the way the capitalists undermined this victory, turning the union leadership into an obstacle to the struggle. Summing up the lessons of this history helps point the way to advance the struggle today and the pitfalls that must be avoided.

One major thing history teaches is something that contradicts one of the favorite messages of the union officials. They love to say how the rank and file should thank shrewd negotiating and their brilliant leadership for every advance in the struggle. Or if it isn't them personally, it is a good lawyer or the Labor Board or some politician.

But the fact is that throughout the history of the UAW every step forward for auto workers was the result of the strength and organization of the rank and file itself, not some "great labor statesman." It is in the interests of these pocket-stuffing hacks to compromise. For blowing hot air in some back room negotiations they get huge salaries and unlimited expense accounts, living like and associating with the powerful capitalist owners.

But auto workers, facing the capitalists' unmasked, brutal drive for profit every day on the line, getting a paycheck that barely makes ends meet, have no interest in compromising with their exploiters. At the same time rank and file auto workers, together with the whole working class, producing all, have the power in their hands to shut down production to give muscle to their movement.

This is not to say there is no need for leadership, but the need is for leadership that sticks with the ranks in the struggle and keeps to policies and a philosophy that really represents the working class in direct opposition to the capitalists.

This was one of the lessons of the Great Flint Sit-down Strike. It was the auto workers in the plants who initiated the takeover and carried it through to victory. Along the road there were various attempts to sabotage the struggle, from court injunctions, to appeals to "reason" by every stripe of politician, to outright attacks by the police backed up by the National Guard. At every point, giving in to these attacks would have meant

defeat.

But the Flint workers, guided by leadership that stood firmly with them in the midst of their struggle and a beginning understanding of the antagonistic interests between their class and the capitalist class, refused to leave the plants and succeeded in winning tremendous support from the entire working class. It was by seizing the initiative and keeping it in their own hands that they were able to achieve this great victory.

Another main lesson of this history flows out of what happened to the UAW. Unionizing the auto industry, along with much of basic industry, was something the parents and grandparents of today's working class sacrificed and even died to win. It was a great victory when General Motors was forced to recognize the UAW in 1937.

But as soon as they were forced to give in to unionization, the capitalists turned around and worked to take away with a shovel what they had given with an eyedropper. They made a big push to promote opportunists like Reuther, to cut the communists out of the union, and to pass anti-union and anti-strike legislation. Through these efforts and their strengthened position following World War 2, they were able to solidify their labor lieutenants at the head of the UAW international and every other major union. This undermined the original victory and dealt the working class a serious setback.

This setback teaches a lot. The working class cannot win its emancipation "piece by piece" through struggles aimed at just getting a better deal under capitalism. Many struggles never win any of their original demands. And even if a concession is won it immediately falls under attack. To limit the struggle to this is to chain the working class generation after generation to this rotten system, to put the struggle on a treadmill where the fight for the same concessions must be waged over and over.

It can be no different under capitalism. They can increase their profits only by pushing the working class down, only through more speedup, more wage cuts, more job combinations, more violations of seniority, more layoffs, only by savage attacks on the historic victories the working class has won. To survive, they must attack the workers — as long as the capitalist system survives such attacks are inevitable.

The aim of the struggle must be to overthrow capitalism. Their interests and the interests of the workers can never be reconciled. They need the working class — which is the source of all their wealth. The working class doesn't need them — they

produce *nothing* and live to leech off the labor of others. It is only by overthrowing their system that the working class can break the chains that enslave it, smash the treadmill by which they seek to undermine each victory.

By overthrowing the capitalists the working class will be able to establish its own rule, socialism. Under socialism no parasites will grow fat off the labor of others. Instead the tremendous strength and creative powers of millions upon millions of workers and all the productive forces of society will go to make a good life for everyone, to build a brighter future for generations to come and to fight towards the elimination of all class distinctions in society.

In the fight toward this high goal the struggle for concessions is very important. Workers must fight for their basic needs and to keep from being crushed and broken. But this struggle must be conducted as part of the overall fight to overthrow capitalism. The real advances in the long run lie not in what few concessions might be forced out of the capitalists at any one time, but in the extent to which the strength, organization and understanding of the workers develops in their war against the capitalists.

### Today's Battles

How do these lessons apply today? Every day hundreds of battles are being fought in the auto plants. Sometimes it may be just one individual getting fed up with some abuse and writing up a grievance. Or it may be part of a line slowing down, resisting overloaded jobs by going in the hole. At other times a whole plant may walk out over company attacks. Throughout the auto industry workers are fed up and fighting back.

These struggles have two aspects. On the one hand these struggles are widespread and auto workers are learning a great deal in the course of them. The more militant the fight, the more they break through the shackles held on the struggles by the UAW bigshots. The more desperate and vicious the auto companies become the more it stands out clearly that to them auto workers are nothing more than animals to chain to their assembly lines as a means of making profit.

In the course of these struggles workers are beginning to see that they must fight collectively and not individually. They are starting to throw the foot of the companies off their necks, to raise their heads, bringing the face of the enemy into sharper focus. But on the other hand these struggles are scattered and

disconnected, isolated from each other, and though some victories, even important ones, are gained in the short run, these struggles in and of themselves don't change the basic way the system works.

The companies and their lackeys heading up the UAW try to use this last aspect to keep the handcuffs on auto workers. They attempt to squash each small-scale skirmish before it breaks out. Those that they can't stop they try to channel into dead ends, trying to strangle the struggle in red tape, legal hocus-pocus and reliance on grievances, which they then sit on.

They go all out to keep each struggle isolated from every other, blacking out information even on contract negotiations. Whenever a struggle doesn't achieve its original goals they spread cynicism, the idea that the workers are weak and ignorant while the capitalists are all-powerful.

But these struggles also lay a basis to break the handcuffs the companies and top UAW officials put on auto workers and can contribute to building a revolutionary workers movement to overthrow their rule. To do this auto workers need to pit their strength against the enemy's weakness.

The fact is there are hundreds of thousands of auto workers, part of a much larger working class numbering in the millions, working cooperatively side by side in huge plants, with a grow-



When a fighting chief steward was fired at Dodge Truck in Detroit in 1974, workers launched a 4 day wildcat against the company, fought the hacks for the union hall and tore up court injunctions.

ing sense of organization and understanding coming out of widespread struggle. There is only a small handful of capitalists and their pitiful agents who now control the high offices of the union, who not only grow increasingly isolated and exposed but must claw even at each other to determine who gets the biggest piece of the profits.

By building on this strength, by building each struggle as strongly as possible, drawing in the maximum number of workers, spreading it as broadly as possible, pointing it squarely at the capitalists, and summing up the lessons to build future struggles, the rank and file can hit the enemy where he is weakest.

The Revolutionary Communist Party calls this *the single spark method* and attaches great importance to it as a way of advancing the current struggles of the working class, weakening the capitalists and moving towards overthrowing their rule forever. As it says in the *Programme* of the RCP: "The method of the proletariat and its Party is to mobilize the masses of workers to take matters into their own hands and wage a blow for blow struggle against the enemy, inside and outside the unions. To seize on every spark of struggle, fan and spread it as broadly as possible throughout the working class and among its allies. To build every possible struggle and build off of it to launch new struggles. And through the course of this to fan every spark of consciousness, to identify and isolate the bourgeoisie and its agents, and unite all struggles against this enemy." (pp. 106-7)

To carry out the single spark method, to raise the level of the current struggles, will require organization. Auto workers have always organized against the companies. Today, in light of the sellout leadership of the UAW, a number of rank and file caucuses have sprung up in an effort to reestablish the union as a strong, fighting organization. Some of these caucuses are organized by the rank and file to defend its immediate interests on the shop floor; others are organized to carry on the struggle within the UAW, and at other times they spring up to give leadership to strikes. These caucuses are very important and need to be built, where possible, as organizations that are powerful weapons in the struggle against the enemy.

But the question arises, is it enough to rebuild the UAW into an organization which once again fights the auto companies? The answer must be and can only be "no."

If there is one lesson to be learned from the history of the

struggle it is this: as long as they are in power, the capitalists will attempt to undermine and sabotage every victory of the working class. In their mad scramble for profit what they are forced by struggle to give with an eyedropper, they will try to take back with a steamshovel. The UAW *was* once one of the finest unions built in the history of the American working class, the product and victory of years of self-sacrificing struggle by the entire working class. But *even this* the rulers were able to turn around to a great extent and use as an obstacle to the struggle.

Auto workers must fight the auto companies tooth and nail. But they can in no way afford to *restrict* this struggle to a struggle of *auto workers against the auto companies*.

The fight is far broader. The fact is workers in industries and plants all over the country are facing the same attacks as auto workers — speedup, sinking standard of living, the threat of unemployment. Nor are the attacks of the ruling class limited to the shop floor. Outside the plants, the working class along with the great majority of people suffer a thousand abuses — housing falling apart, schools rotting, cutbacks in social services, skyrocketing prices, crime running rampant. Discrimination, violent police repression, super-high unemployment, low paid jobs and bad housing, the worst of a bad lot, is the daily life faced by the masses of Black people and people of other minorities.

Just as the Big 3 and AMC battle it out for control of the auto market, so too the U.S. capitalists are driven into fierce competition with the capitalists of other countries, competition which leads to wars of plunder to divide and redivide the world, like the new war on the horizon today against their rivals in the Soviet Union.

What is needed, what every struggle must be aimed at achieving, is a broad struggle against the capitalists which fights them blow for blow on every front. What is needed is not just a struggle of auto workers, confining their struggle to one company or one industry, but a struggle of the entire *working class against the capitalist class*.

The struggle for higher wages, better working conditions, and benefits from the auto companies is an important struggle which must and is being waged. But experiences like those of the International Harvester workers in San Leandro, California show this has its limits, too. With no warning the whole plant was shut down in 1975, leaving 1000 jobless, despite

sharp resistance by the workers. IH, following the same laws that drive every capitalist, had thrown its capital elsewhere in its wild chase for higher profit. So the struggle must go beyond its present focus to challenge the basic system in which a small handful of parasites lives off the labor of the working class and dictates to the vast majority.

### Building Organization for Broad Fight

This kind of struggle needs to have an organizational form — fighting workers' organizations — which would reflect the broad struggle of the working class against the enemy. These organizations would be based in every major industry, including the auto industry, and would link auto workers together with steel workers, electrical workers and workers in many other industries.

These organizations would use the single spark method to build the major struggles of workers and others on every front into campaigns of the working class and aim them squarely at the capitalist class. They would be permanent organizations, drawing together active workers who saw the need to carry the fight beyond an immediate struggle, not one that died out after an issue had died down.

As this happens the movement of the working class will begin to take a qualitative leap to a higher level, overcoming the narrowness in which each struggle is isolated and confined to workers of one industry against bosses of one industry, and



When International Harvester closed an "unprofitable" California plant in 1975, workers fought the shutdown and joined with unemployed and other workers in demanding "Jobs or Income!"



*Workers cannot afford to limit themselves to fighting against the companies, but must take on every abuse the capitalists heap on the masses of people, like police terror.*

becoming a true political struggle of the working class fighting for its own interests. In this way the working class will be able to turn every factory into a fortress against the enemy.

Besides carrying on the fight in every shop against company attacks, these organizations would bring together workers from many different industries and use the single spark method to build the fight around key battlefronts. Important areas of focus for these campaigns would be the following:

- Key economic battles of the working class as a whole, like taking up support for the miners' struggle and the rubber strike of 1976, helping to build them stronger, pointing them at the capitalist class and spreading their lessons.

- The struggle for jobs or income.

- The fight against wars of aggression and plunder by the imperialist rulers.

- The fight around other outrages and abuses of capitalist society, for example the struggle against police repression and indiscriminate killings, the fight for decent and equal education, against segregation and discrimination at work and throughout society, and against deportation of immigrants.

Fighting workers organizations of this kind already exist in several areas of the country. For example, individual workers and groups in different plants and areas have joined together to

form organizations like the United Workers Organization in the New York-Northern New Jersey area, the May First Workers Organization in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the United Workers Organization in the Milwaukee area. These organizations are made up of workers from many industries in each area.

Even in areas where such area organizations have not yet been built, there are plant and industry groups bringing together active workers to build the struggle and aim it at the capitalist class. Not only is the basis being laid through these for the formation of broad multi-industry groups in more areas, but groups in some particular industries are already working together in national committees around contracts, like Auto Workers United to Fight in '76, and setting up nationwide contact networks to strengthen the struggle and initiative of the rank and file.

One important industry where real fighting workers organizations have been formed is the auto industry. To build these organizations stronger and to form them in areas where they do not yet exist it is important for active auto workers to use the single spark method to build on the key battles taking place in the auto industry, as well as other important battles taking place throughout society, and aim them squarely at the capitalists.

### Key Battles in Auto

There are a number of key battlefronts for these fighting workers organizations to take up.

There is a sharp struggle against speedup, layoffs, wage-cuts, forced overtime and to defend and strengthen the right to strike in the auto industry. In opposition to the capitalists and their top union officials who say more jobs and better working conditions will come as the companies increase their profits (which means increase their exploitation of the auto workers), these fighting workers organizations need to put out a program which says to hell with their profits and fights for every job, against every layoff, wage-cut and every other attack.

Overloading and combining jobs, getting foremen to work the line, violating job classifications, especially of skilled workers, bringing in outside contractors and working overtime during layoffs are all ways the auto companies try to increase their profits and they lead to constant and widespread struggle. Auto workers need organizations which can use the single spark

method to build these struggles and bring out how they are part and parcel of the fight against the capitalist system.

The auto companies and the union officials are trying to restrict the right of auto workers to strike, waving the contract to say auto workers cannot strike, saying local strikes must be sanctioned by the International, calling in the courts and police to break any strike that breaks out. These workers organizations need to lead auto workers to break through this bull about how weak 1.4 million UAW members are — let alone the rest of the working class. Auto workers have to be prepared to strike whenever necessary to kick the companies and their lackeys running the UAW in the teeth.

A very important task of these fighting workers organizations is to build the unity of the working class in the course of the struggle, uniting Black, white and other nationalities as well as men and women. The history of the development of U.S. capitalism, as well as the particular history of the auto companies, is a history of the most savage oppression of Black people and other minority peoples, as well as the most brutal exploitation of the working class as a whole.

Capitalists like Henry Ford and others have promoted the KKK, the Black Legion and other organizations to spread the poisonous idea that whites are superior to other nationalities and to launch vicious attacks on Blacks and other minorities. Especially in the face of the recent upsurge of struggle of Black people against their oppression in industry and throughout society, the capitalists have promoted a number of Blacks within both the company and union hierarchy who help spread confusion and distrust by preaching that the enemy of all Black workers is white workers.

To really deal with the enemy the working class needs iron unity. A key task of these fighting workers organizations is to develop this unity in the course of the fight against the capitalists. Part of this is to wage struggle against discrimination and other oppression faced by Blacks and minorities. By waging the fight against the common enemy on every front, the working class — whites, Blacks and other minorities — can unite its diverse ranks and rally broad forces to its cause.

Another very important battlefield for these fighting workers organizations is to make the UAW a weapon which fights the auto companies and not the rank and file. They do this by mobilizing the rank and file around a program representing its interests and in the course of struggle “jam” the UAW officials

## Buy American?

The UAW leadership has been running this business about “Buy an American Car—Save an American Job” for some time. Some local hacks have gone so far as pushing “their” company’s product to “save jobs.”

The companies love it—they even help finance the advertising of this slogan. For them it’s a helpful way to push up sales and undercut foreign rivals. For the hacks it’s a way to justify not fighting unemployment and a way to push the illusion that there’s unity of interests between the companies and the workers.

On the surface “Buy an American Car—Save an American Job” may sound good. But actually this scheme is no guarantee of more jobs. Even if one company did jack its sales up at the expense of its competitors, this would not necessarily mean more jobs. It would mean more profits for the company, but auto workers have seen time and again this only means more misery for them. Rather than hiring more workers, the companies try to make do with what they have or invest in newer machinery on the line. The result? The same number or fewer workers working faster, jobs combined or automated out of existence, maybe more workers on the street.

Big profits are also used by the companies to expand their operations overseas. They put their money where they can get the most profit, not where it will “create jobs” for Americans or anyone else. Ford has almost half its operations in other countries, GM produces two out of every ten vehicles there and Chrysler 3 out of 10. They push “Buy American,” but their real slogan is “Plunder the World.”

“Buy American” actually puts up a smokescreen around the capitalists and their unquenchable profit drive. To advance their cutthroat competition with foreign automakers, it aims at setting up American workers as rivals to their brothers and sisters in Germany, Japan and other foreign countries. With the ruling class gearing up for yet another war to preserve and expand their worldwide profit empire, “Buy American” helps prepare the ground for them to send U.S. workers out to fight and die for them.

In short, “Buy American” is nothing more than another skinny worm wiggling on the capitalists’ same old jive hook: “What’s good for us is good for you.”

— exposing the traitors at the top, rolling over them, breaking the bureaucracy's hold and uniting with those in the lower levels of the UAW who can be won to stand with the working class.

An important part of this struggle is to kick the hacks out of office and replace them with true fighters for the working class in UAW office. In doing this these organizations need to make clear to all auto workers that their aim is not to destroy or replace the UAW, but in the course of the overall struggle to fight to strengthen it as an organization that fights the companies.

In the auto industry there is a whole circus of opportunists who come forward in the fight against the present union officials, whose whole pitch is "vote for me and I'll set you free." These would-be leaders all bill themselves as more militant and more concerned about the rank and file than the hated UAW hacks, a claim that would not be hard for a head of cabbage to make. They actively promote the idea that the cure-all to auto workers' problems is to put a few "good-willed" people into union office.

The rank and file of the UAW needs to be on guard against these kinds, distinguishing between real fighters and opportunists on the basis of their program and practice in organizing their fellow workers to actually fight the companies.

But even more important than opposing individual opportunists, the workers need to refute the politics raised by them: that the future for auto workers lies in electing "better" officials to UAW office. By seeing the lessons of the history of the UAW itself and through the course of summing up struggles today, it becomes clear that the only strategy for auto workers is not to restrict the struggle to fighting for a few good leaders but to build their struggle, relying on their own initiative, as part of the revolutionary movement of the entire working class.

### The Future

But this still leaves open the question: can the working class achieve a brighter future than it has today? As we have seen in this pamphlet the history of auto workers and indeed of the entire working class has been a history of tremendous struggle and resistance to the brutal exploitation and oppression at the hands of the capitalists. This was true in the '30s and this is true today.

Is there hope for a better tomorrow? To this there can only be

one answer: Yes — there is a future that will begin to be fully realized when the working class rises up in revolution, overthrows the rule of the capitalists and establishes socialism, the rule of the working class. Having seized power the working class will establish its own state, strip the hated capitalists of their ownership of the means of production and suppress them to stop exploitation and prevent capitalism from being restored.

But even more, as the master of society the working class will be able to set out to transform all of society and overcome all the ulcers left over from capitalist society. Under working class rule society will take a great leap forward, unleashing the tremendous productive power of the working class, eliminating the crises and recessions of capitalism, ending discrimination, promoting the unity of the working class and eliminating step by step the material basis for the oppression of Blacks and other minorities, building decent schools, housing, providing decent social services and health for its citizens.

Then by gradually eliminating class differences and establishing communism, a society where each works according to his ability and receives according to his need, the working class will indeed have carried the struggle through and emancipated all of mankind.

### Forward in the Struggle!

The auto companies are in great crisis today, no exception to the problems facing their whole class. Flailing around like wounded dinosaurs they are raining attacks on the auto workers from all sides, hoping to give themselves a transfusion back to health by squeezing out even more profit on the line.

But auto workers are fed up and starting to fight back, taking up their battle gear alongside workers everywhere. In this battle the working class is becoming steeled, gaining courage and understanding, and consolidating itself. Hatred of the enemy is growing and its hideous features are starting to come into clearer focus.

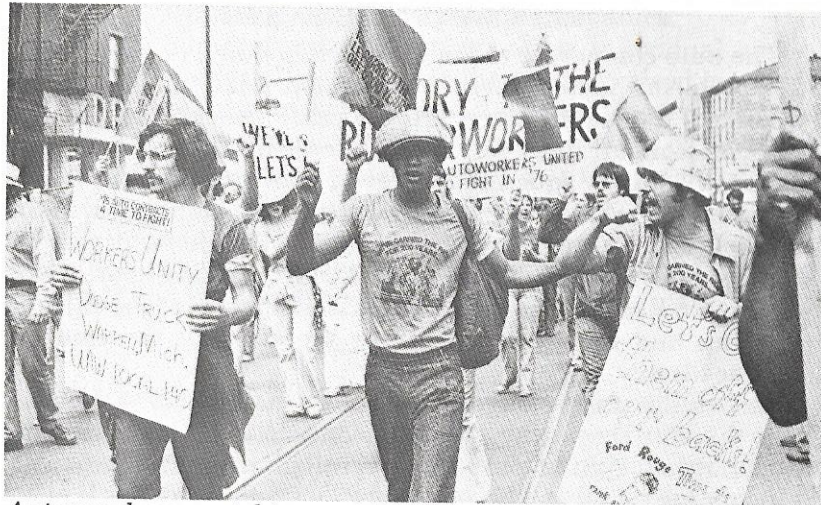
But as the great struggle in auto in the late 1930s shows, to win the war this army of workers needs to be organized and each battle fought as part of an overall plan against the enemy. This pamphlet lays out a battle plan for auto workers. It points toward how to build the fight using the single spark method to break the handcuffs of the union officials and companies. It outlines different battlefronts around which the battle can be organized and forms of organization to help build the fight.

But, as the pamphlet also points out, only by overthrowing the capitalists and transforming all of society can the working class get off the life-stealing treadmill of fighting for the same concessions generation after generation.

Auto workers, along with their class brothers and sisters in the United States and throughout the world, face a protracted and complicated task. There are sure to be ups and downs in this struggle but its triumph is inevitable because only a working class revolution can continue to move society forward.

The future for the auto companies and all capitalists is bleak. Although they may manage temporary recoveries they are true dinosaurs, part of a dying capitalist class which is growing weaker, increasingly isolated, increasingly in crisis and divided even among itself. Their situation grows more and more desperate.

But the future of auto workers along with the entire working class is bright with hope. This class is not perishing. It is growing, becoming stronger, educating itself. Not only is the working class fighting and standing on the threshold of a great new upsurge of struggle, but through this struggle workers are bound to break the chains of exploitation and go on to win their freedom at last.



*Auto workers are taking part in the growing upsurge of the whole working class. On July 4th, 1976, on the occasion of the capitalists' Bicentennial, they marched in Philadelphia declaring, "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!"*