

Soul Power or Workers Power?

The Rise and Fall of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers

Crippling three major Chrysler facilities in this past summer's wave of wildcats (including the first auto plant takeovers since the historic sit-downs of the late thirties), the Detroit working class has once again demonstrated its capacity for militant action. It was among the largely black work force of these same inner-city plants that the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was born in the late 1960's.

Unlike other black nationalist groups, the League insisted on the centrality of the working class and, in the beginning, seriously oriented toward organizing at "the point of production." The LRBW and its various auto factory groups (DRUM, FRUM, ELRUM) have since disappeared, inevitable victims of their own internal contradictions. But it is important for working-class militants to examine the League and its evolution, which clearly reveal the incompatibility of nationalist and proletarian politics.

Reuther Betrayals Pave the Way

It was no accident that such a group developed in Detroit, where blacks have long been an important element in the auto plants. At first courted by Henry Ford as a counter-force to unionism, the vast majority nevertheless refused to serve as Ford's scabs in the crucial 1940 River Rouge organizing strike.

The increasing population of blacks in the city and the plants after World War II contributed to the pressure on the Reuther bureaucracy to support the early civil rights movement—a movement characterized by the non-violent protest politics of Martin Luther King and well within the framework of Reuther's "labor-Democratic alliance." But despite Reuther's social-democratic past and demagogic "progressive" image, the "red-haired wonder" failed to apply even these minimal liberal capitalist policies to the widespread racism permeating the lower levels of his own bureaucracy.

This situation led aspiring black bureaucrats to set up such opportunist formations as the Trade Union Leadership Council. The TULC was founded in 1957 by a group of lower-level blacks in the UAW apparatus (like Buddy Battle of Ford's River Rouge Local 600) and black labor diplomats like venerable social democrat A. Philip Randolph, whose main concern was simply to garner a bit of face-saving independence from the Reuther machine, while maintaining its liberal politics.

At the same time, the combination of Reuther's hypocritical liberalism and the impotent pressure-group politics of King and the black bureaucrats provided fertile ground for the spawning of more militant black nationalist political currents and organizations. Detroit is the home of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, the Republic of New Africa (RNA) and the Pan-African Congress; scene of the Black Economic Development Conference and the "Black Manifesto" (April 1969); and battleground for the race riot of 1943 and the ghetto rebellion of 1967.

The 1943 riot was a result of the mass migration of southern whites and blacks into Detroit during the war. Extremely overcrowded housing and the hostility with which the southern poor whites viewed the relative equality which black workers enjoyed in the war-production plants turned the city into a bloody no-man's land for several days. Yet the mass lynchings elicited little more from the UAW than a pious

call to end racial discrimination and to appoint a black assistant prosecutor in the investigation and a self-congratulatory pat on the back that the bloodshed had not entered the plants!

The conflagration of July 1967 was the bloodiest, and one of the last, of a series of anti-cop ghetto riots that buried the liberal illusions of the civil rights movement. This uprising was the product of a combination of circumstances. On the one hand, the "progressive" Reuther UAW bureaucracy and its liberal Democratic "friends in the White House" had done nothing to stem Detroit's recurring massive auto-related unemployment, which during the 1957-58 recession reached 19.5 percent, and topped 15.2 percent at the height of the next recession in March 1961. More damning still was the unemployment figure for Detroit blacks in the same 1961 period—39 percent, and a phenomenal 78 percent for black youth as compared to 33 percent for youth overall!

On the other hand, for the first time in almost two decades large numbers of young blacks were being hired into the auto plants to replace older white workers. Seniority lists at Detroit's Chrysler plants invariably show a gap for the period 1953-1965 or so. Thus, the upsurge in militancy coincided, as in 1943, with rising expectations on the part of the oppressed black minority (now a majority).

As in 1943, the UAW response was hypocritical do-nothingism. After 43 blacks had been killed by cops and National Guardsmen, Reuther offered a union volunteer crew for cleaning up debris on bloody 12th Street—an offer he never fulfilled.

The Black Panthers' acclaim of black lumpen street youth as the socialist vanguard was made ludicrous

Ken Cockrel, John Watson, Mike Hamlin, General Baker and John Williams (among others) coalesced shortly after the rebellion around a community-oriented paper, the *Inner City Voice*. Some among the original *Inner City Voice* group, such as John Watson, had earlier been around the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, while others came from a Maoist background. They were held together by a vague, but militant, determination to create a "black Marxist-Leninist party." Maintaining their adherence to nationalist ideology, they nonetheless saw that black workers occupied a key role in the American economy and the working class. As Watson pointed out in his pamphlet, *To the Point of Production*:

"Our analysis tells us that the basic power of black people lies at the point of production, that the basic power we have is our power as workers. As workers, as black workers, we have historically been, and are now, essential elements in the American economic sense.... This is probably different from these kinds of analysis which say where it's at is to go out and organize the so-called 'brother on the street.' It's not that we're opposed to this type of organization, but without a more solid base such as that which the working class represents, this type of organization, that is, community based organization, is generally a pretty long, stretched-out, and futile development."

DRUM, ELRUM Lead Wildcats

As a result of its orientation, the *Inner City Voice* group reportedly soon attracted a group of young black workers from the Chrysler Hamtramck Assembly plant—Dodge Main. Disgusted with the bureaucratic union politics they had experienced, these workers crystallized around an ICV member in the plant to form the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). A wildcat over line speed-up in May 1968, involving both black and white workers, resulted in racist disciplinary actions being applied overwhelmingly to the black militants.

The high level of nationalist sentiment among the recently hired young black workers, the isolation of the largely older, Polish bureaucracy and the absence of any other alternative leadership opened the way for a spectacular and rapid success by DRUM in establishing itself as the leadership of the 60 percent-black work force at Dodge. Within six weeks of its first newsletter distribution, DRUM organized a highly effective boycott by the black workers of two nearby bars that refused to hire blacks. Three weeks later, in the crucial pre-changeover period, they led a three-day wildcat which shut down the plant and held a rally of 3,000 workers in the plant parking lot.

Besides calling for reinstatement of seven workers fired in the May walkout, DRUM demanded an end to union and company discrimination, and demanded, in particular, more upgrading and apprenticeship openings for blacks. It also called, however, for more black foremen and other supervisory personnel and launched an attack on the "racist" seniority system.

Such demands can hardly be expected to lead to united working-class struggle against capitalism. Demands to change the skin color of the companies' disciplinary personnel implicitly assume that the brutal realities of capitalist exploitation can be changed by a few reforms. Instead, revolutionaries who seek to take the struggle

beyond such pitiful reforms would vigorously protest cases of racial discrimination, while calling for the elimination of company supervisory personnel from the shop floor and for workers control of production. (Incidentally, the auto companies have since hired large numbers of black foremen without changing one iota the oppressiveness of the plants.)

Similarly, while militants must oppose racially and sexually discriminatory aspects of existing seniority systems, and call for a sliding scale of wages and hours to provide jobs for all, they must also recognize that seniority systems are a primitive form of job security that must be defended. And although class-conscious workers must pay special attention to the needs of the more oppressed sections of the proletariat, they would seek to unite blacks and whites by simultaneously raising demands which directly benefit all workers.

Despite the demands' nationalist inspiration, a number of white workers did support the walkout. But the DRUM leadership consciously avoided organizing them. "No attempt was made to interfere with white workers.... Most of the white workers reported to work after they saw that it was safe for them to go through the gate. Those who stayed out did so for various reasons. Some believed in honoring picket lines, and a few were sympathetic" (*The South End*, 23 January 1969).

Though the UAW responded with heavy red-baiting (which led DRUM to deny that it was indeed communist!), the wildcat resulted in the reinstatement of five of the fired seven (an



Ken Cockrel

DETROIT NEWS



Ron March

RPM

open DRUM supporter and founding ICV member was not rehired). In addition, DRUM's reputation was firmly established; it continued publication of a weekly newsletter, went on to consolidate its support into an organizational structure in September and shortly decided to run a candidate for union office.

Taking advantage of a special election for trustee of Dodge Local 3, DRUM ran Ron March in a campaign designed to demonstrate "DRUM power and black solidarity," on such demands as:

"1. The complete accountability to the black majority of the entire membership....

"3. Advocating a revolutionary change in the UAW (including a referendum vote and revive the grievance procedure)....

"5. A refusal to be dictated to by the International staff of the UAW...."

—DRUM Newsletter No. 13

March barely lost in a runoff election to the candidate of a temporarily unified bureaucracy, after initially beating

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out a field of 21 candidates. In a later election for vice-president, the in-and-out-bureaucrats again blocked to support Andy Hardy (current Local 3 president), who defeated the DRUM candidate by 2,600 to 1,600.

Word of DRUM's audacity spread to other plants and even outside the industry. ELRUM was formed at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle plant in late 1968, and less important groups arose at Detroit Forge (FORUM), Jefferson Assembly (JARUM), Mack Avenue Stamping (MARUM), Ford River

and Nigger Executive Board," ELRUM's solution "to break up this union-management partnership" was "to obtain BLACK representation," as though the problem were the lack of "blackness" (i.e., nationalism) of the sellout bureaucrats.

Concretely, this meant running a slate which included Jordan Sims (now Local 961 president and co-chairman of the reformist United National Caucus) for committeeman, and later supporting the opportunist Sims (though he cautiously refused to accept their

by Blacks acting in their own interests. We believe that this can best be accomplished through a League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

"...Those Brothers and Sisters who are interested in a truly militant organization that is dedicated to the cause of Black labor and Black liberation should contact the League of Revolutionary Black Workers now."

-*Spear*, Vol. 1, No. 1

But the inability to square a nationalist orientation with the realities of class struggle in the plants and the decline of plant-related activity, plus pressure in that direction from a section of the leadership, led to an increasing emphasis on the black worker's role in the community:

"Black workers have the ability to deal with the overall problems that exist within the black community....CHRY-RUM will be concerned not only with problems that exist inside the plants but problems that exist inside our community—the Black Community. The first two projects that CHRY-RUM has undertaken are the International Black Appeal and Parents and Students for Community Control (control of our school system)."

-*CHRY-RUM*, Vol. 1, No. 1

The abortive IBA was conceived of as a black alternative to the United Foundation—a charity fund to be supported by "communities of the black and poor." This is the logic of community control: the poor supporting the poor!

Detroit had recently passed a school decentralization measure setting up regional school boards (which were to become centers of strike-breaking activity in the recent DFT strike). In response, the League's front group, Parents and Students for Community Control (PASCC), demanded that regional boundaries be redrawn so that blacks would exercise a majority in most districts. Black worker-student-faculty committees would then be elected to ensure such things as community kitchens and the "teaching of skills that have longevity and are marketable." A PASCC slate was run in the regional school board elections based on that program.

The League simultaneously developed a base in several ghetto high schools. Its Black Students United Front apparently had no working-class orientation whatsoever. In an illustrative campaign against the suspensions of several students disciplined for taking part in a "revolt" at militant Northern High School in September 1969, it called for a total amnesty for all disciplined students and the removal of cops from the school, but also demanded "that all pictures of whites be removed from Northern High School and be replaced with pictures of our own heroes...[and] the Nationalist Flag of Unity (Red, Green, Black) be raised each morning" (*Inner City Voice*, February 1970). While the League gave its community-control campaign some "working-class" rhetorical flourishes, its basic appeal was to black nationalism. And, like the nationalist demand for black foremen, it simply oriented to changing the trappings (the flag!), without attacking the essence of the racist, anti-working class educational system.

-DRUM leaflet, February 1970

Fram the Plants to the Community

Based on the apparent strength of DRUM and ELRUM after the initial wildcats and the obvious attractiveness of the DRUM concept to other black workers, yet seeing the need to transcend the isolation of individual plant caucuses, the ICV cadre moved to organize the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in early 1969. The impetus behind the League's formation led to conflicting notions within the leadership: whether to expand into the community or orient toward a pan-plant, pan-industry workers' organization.

Reflecting its success and base in the plants, the League introduced itself as follows:

"DRUM, FRUM, and ELRUM are organizations of and for the super-exploited, over-worked, last-hired, first-fired, sick and tired Black workers of Detroit. These organizations are dedicated to the development of unified, disciplined, and effective action

courtroom defense with massive demonstrations in the black community and open-air "People's Courts" staged in downtown Detroit. Later that year, LRBW also led the campaign against the attempted extradition of RNA head, Robert F. Williams to North Carolina.

James Johnson, an Eldon worker who killed two white foremen and a co-worker, was successfully defended by Cockrel on the grounds that the pressure of the assembly line and the continual racial harassment had driven Johnson temporarily insane. The Labor Defense Coalition, a League front, was able to mobilize Coleman Young, John Conyers and other black liberals (not to mention the Guardians, a black policemen's association) against police harassment and U.S. Senate surveillance of the League. In a fine example of adaptation, the League demanded not the dismantling of the police, but rather its reorganization to "concentrate its efforts on organized crime and the heroin traffic in Detroit" (*Detroit News*, 4 May 1971)—a demand even the black cops could easily support!

"White-Skin Privilege" and All-Black Unions

It was the key programmatic points of "white-skin privilege" and separatist dual-unionism which were the focal points of DRUM's approach to the plants. The strong support they elicited resulted in large part from the condition facing the newly hired black youth. Besides the gross negligence of safety standards and the massive speed-up, they were confronted by older, conservatismized racist white workers, an all-white management, and a ponderous, isolated, heavily white bureaucracy dominated by cold-war anti-communism. The "progressive" Reuther bureaucracy had no response to the dramatic increase in speed-up which greeted the black new-hires and was of course hostile to the nationalist currents circulating in the ghetto. Being unfamiliar with the UAW's relatively more radical and democratic past, new black workers were presented with a view of the union as a hostile, white-controlled apparatus allied with the company. The response was a widespread nationalist hostility to the union itself rather than class-struggle opposition to the sellout bureaucracy.

For the consciously nationalist League leadership and the guilt-tripping white New Left, which also embraced the theory, "white-skin privilege" was nothing but a cover for evading the difficult task of uniting the entire proletariat around a revolutionary program. Rather than seeing the struggle against the rampant chauvinism among white workers as an integral part of the strategy for socialist revolution, they wrote off that section of the working class as an "aristocracy of white labor which gives white labor a huge stake in the imperialist system, and renders white labor unable and unfit to lead the working class in the U.S." (LRBW General Program).

Consequently, DRUM and ELRUM actively discouraged militant white workers from following their leadership, and, at times, lapsed into the crudest race-baiting and ethnic slurs. The DRUM constitution explicitly "denied [membership] to all honkies due to the fact that said honkey has been the historic enemy, betrayer, and exploiter of black people." It went on to state its main task as:

"Getting rid of the racist, tyrannical, and unrepresentative UAW as representation for Black workers, so that with this enemy out of the way we can deal directly with our main adversary, the white racist, owners of the means of production."

DRUM forsook a serious struggle for leadership in the UAW and attempted instead to substitute itself for the existing organizations of the class which encompassed the masses of black, as well as white, workers. By offering itself as a revolutionary alternative to the UAW it was caught, as well, in the organizational bind of attempting to satisfy the needs of a conscious revolutionary vanguard and those of a

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NATIONAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE (DETROIT)
League of Revolutionary Black Workers pickets UAW Solidarity House

Rouge (FRUM), Cadillac Fleetwood (CADRUM), the Detroit News (NEWRUM), United Parcel warehouse (UPRUM) and other places.

The Eldon plant, in particular, is crucial to Chrysler's entire operation, supplying parts to all of its assembly plants, and is part of the vital Lynch Road complex which includes the Detroit Forge and Plymouth Assembly. ELRUM launched itself by organizing a mass rally in front of the Local 961 union hall in January 1969, demanding that the union act on the many unresolved health and safety grievances.

The firing of two militants who participated in the rally, and the local president's agnostic response, led to a wildcat the following week with an expanded list of demands, similar to those raised by DRUM, including "the removal of the non-English speaking witch doctor we have at present and replaced with a Black doctor" (*The South End*, 10 February 1969)! This second action resulted in the firing of a large number of workers, of whom 25 were not reinstated.

By May, Eldon was again shut down in a two-day wildcat organized by the Eldon Safety Committee, "a loose coalition composed by ELRUM, Eldon Wildcat (a small syndicalist group) and several discharged union officials" (*Radical America*, March-April 1971). The wildcat, which resulted in the firing of three ELRUM militants, was a response to the death of a young, black forklift driver and the mounting pile-up of safety violations.

Though the ELRUM newsletter pointed out that it was betrayed by those "Uncle Tom" union officials and ignored by "Our Uncle Tom President

which has consistently fought for the interests of the working class is the Socialist Labour League." (*Labour Press*, October 8, 1973) The class can be won to revolutionary politics, and its potential allies mobilised, only on the basis of struggle around a programme which meets the felt needs of the oppressed today and leads to socialist revolution. Such a programme the SLL replaces with economism and simple calls of "Follow me!" This was not the way of Trotsky.

The Fourth International's Transitional Programme—valid in all its fundamentals today—called for "... committees on prices, made up of delegates from factories, trade unions, co-operatives, farmers' organisations, the 'little man' of the city, housewives, etc." These committees must not be based on illusions that the state can control prices, nor that their own demands to themselves control prices can be met under capitalism. They must be organised on a programme of: a sliding scale of wages (so they go up with prices); open the account books of business; and nationalisation of industry without compensation under workers control. As the Transitional Programme says, "By this means the workers will be able to prove to the farmers that the real reason for high prices is not high wages but the exorbitant profits of the capitalists and the overhead expenses of capitalist anarchy." (The small farmers Trotsky uses as an example of the oppressed sections of the petty-bourgeoisie are no longer a significant stratum in Australia.) The struggle of the working class and its potential allies against high prices must be led beyond the boundaries of capitalism to proletarian revolution.

SWL Perverts Trotskyism

The reformist Socialist Workers League, which gives lip service to Trotskyism, criminally transforms the call of the Transitional Programme for committees on prices into a classless, single-issue campaign subordinating the working class to petty-bourgeois protest politics. The SWL holds up as a model for an "anti-inflation" movement last May's meat boycott in the United States (*Direct Action*, November 9, 1973), a self-defeating and completely bankrupt tactic cynically used by the "progressive" wing of the American labour bureaucracy to lobby President Nixon for... a more "equitable" wage-price freeze! The SWL also provides a clear example of the tailist politics of Pabloism in the workers movement when the same issue of *Direct Action* engages in apologetics for the "Socialist Left" in the Victorian ALP: "Real opposition [to the wage freeze] is coming from the Labor movement including some of the leaders of the Victorian Socialist Left of the ALP and ourselves..." We find that this "real opposition" consisted of tacking an addendum to the Socialist Left's "Yes-No" position calling for a cost-of-living escalator—which even Whitlam has occasionally endorsed! The SWL's Pabloist methodology leads it to adopt the role of a left pressure on the Socialist Left, which is—apparently—supposed to become the instrument of proletarian revolution. In reality the SWL simply serves as a left support to the union bureaucracy.

For Revolutionary Alternative Leadership in the Unions

The working class needs not left-wing apologies for the treachery of the labour lieutenants of capital, but an alternative political leadership openly based on a programme adequate to the tasks of the proletariat, a transitional programme beginning with the day-to-day, immediate demands of the class and leading inexorably to the dictatorship of the proletariat, the overthrow of capitalist property relations as a whole. Revolutionaries must create an opposition within the workers' organisations clearly based on such a full programme of struggle against capitalism, as the only real alternative to the policies of Whitlam/Hawke. ■

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broadly based trade union. Thus, while the DRUM constitution demanded a membership based on programmatic agreement, it was forced to set up various makeshift levels of "affiliation."

Dual-unionist in principle, the League caucuses nonetheless vacillated in their conceptions concerning the degree to which it was permissible to work within the UAW. At times, they emphasized the similar positions of black and white workers under capitalism, or claimed interest in "a peaceful change in our Local 3. DRUM has always represented all elements of Hamtramck Assembly" (*DRUM Newsletter*, undated). In a march on a UAW Special Convention (November 1969), they demanded "50% representation for black workers on the international executive board" and Reuther's replacement by a black president, yet maintained the need for autonomous League control over the black membership.

Their program raised a number of transitional demands, indicating a certain familiarity with Trotskyism and the Transitional Program. These demands included an end to unemployment through a shortened workweek, organizing the unorganized and unemployed, organization of workers militias for self-defense and the call for a general strike against the Indochina war. However, their work in the plants was characterized by simple shop-floor economism coupled with exposés of company and union racism. The plant newsletters would describe the racist, shoddy medical care provided by the clinic or the racism of an individual foreman or union official. Having rejected the perspective of a long, but necessary struggle to replace the International bureaucracy with a revolutionary leadership, the League rationalized its impotence with an emphasis on local issues: "We must keep our eyes open and see through the elaborate smoke screen of the National contracts and focus on our local supplement which is the point at which we lose or gain" (ELRUM leaflet, 1970).

This parochial outlook resulting from the absence of a program to unite the entire class eventually facilitated

a motion away from the auto plants as well as the UAW and led the League to seek support from non-working-class elements in the black community. In *Our Thing is DRUM*, LRBW leader Hamlin said:

"We always had an impulse to stay with the plants and organize the plants because that's where the power was. That's where blacks have power, they are the producers, they can close down the economy. But after we recognized that we had to involve all our people in supporting those struggles in the plants, we began to look beyond factories.... What had happened was that the League represents a merger of a number of various elements in the black community and includes students...."

That these "various elements," essentially hostile class forces, could not be cohesively unified into a single political formation became evident with the later factional split in the LRBW. The logical conclusion of their nationalism, in a country where no material basis for a black nation exists, was to tail after the petty-bourgeois elements (and Cockrel's personal ambitions) in openly reformist community-control struggles, abandoning the struggle for a militant opposition in the plants. Thus, the caucuses became tools in the struggle for community control, and the League went full circle from seeing the black community as a supportive mechanism behind the vanguard struggle of the black proletariat, to assigning the black worker a supportive role in the community struggle.

The factors leading to the League's rightward shift in emphasis were not accidental, of course, since its dual-unionism, anti-white-worker approach did not accept the reality of American society which the League itself put forward: that black workers are an essential sector of the American proletariat. And while an organization of black workers could play an important role in class struggle if linked to a united proletarian vanguard party, the League's nationalist orientation led it to orient black workers against white, thus condemning itself to impotence in the face of the company and UAW bureaucracy.

The League Splits

Though the split of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in June 1971 concerned the question of merging with the newly-formed Black Workers Congress, it was a result of the long-standing tension inherent in the League's contradictory "pro-working-class" nationalism. The League had not effectively struggled for programmatic clarity to begin with, and the factional lineups clearly reflected the different sections and appetites in the heterogeneous organization. The faction favoring the maintenance of a separate identity for the League consisted of the worker cadre and those leadership elements involved in the early plant

activities—Baker, Wooten, Williams, Luke-Tripp. Rooted in the day-to-day reality of the assembly line, their driving concern was a struggle to change the conditions on the shop floor. On the other side were the petty-bourgeois types like Cockrel, Hamlin and Watson in the pro-BWC faction, who saw black workers as a tool to enable the "black people" to get a piece of the action.

Dubiously, the major factional issue involved in the split was nationalism. In fact, both sides were strongly nationalist. The pro-LRBW held a third-period Stalinist position calling for the creation of a black nation after a successful proletarian revolution, whereas the ostensibly anti-nationalist Cockrel wing had an openly reformist, popular-front conception of involvement "in mass struggles in the community as well as the plant" (LRBW split documents).

Socialism in One City

The community-control nationalism of the pro-BWC wing was a theoretical mask for its opportunistic appetite for political power in Detroit. Thus, it was Cockrel and Hamlin who served as the League's spokesmen to the white radical community, and it was Watson who achieved notoriety as editor of *The South End*, when he turned that campus newspaper into an unofficial organ of the League and an avowedly revolutionary daily paper. Watson's role in the West Central Organization and the PASCC, and Hamlin's in the Black Student United Front, were the main elements in the League's community-control work.

They, along with ex-SNCC leader, and sometime LRBW leader, James Foreman, were the organizers of the Black Economic Development Conference, a scheme to finance black charities and small businesses through extortion from white churches. Cockrel's major work was in the flashy legal defense cases, and all three were instrumental in setting up the Motor City Labor League and Control, Conflict, and Change Book Club, a white support group. Cockrel and Hamlin viewed the League's isolation in Detroit as a strength and foresaw the possibility of winning electoral control of the city: "the resources we want to acquire in Detroit is, you know, monopolistic control of the use of force... control over the apparatus of state power" (*Our Thing is DRUM*).

If Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country" was a criminal apology for Soviet Russia's isolation, Cockrel's "socialism in one city" is a cover for appetites to win a place in respectable bourgeois politics. Cockrel's direction is straight toward the Democratic Party as a newer model Coleman Young.

This orientation is as far removed from the motivation which initially attracted black workers to DRUM as is

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Soul Power...

the Mayor's desk in Detroit City Hall from the assembly lines at Dodge Main. Their nationalism was a raging reaction to the racism of the bureaucrats and the bosses and a violent disappointment in the apparent apathy of their white class brothers. The pro-BWC faction somewhat accurately accused the other wing of "contending that in essence all League activity should be focused upon Dodge Main and Eldon plants, [and posing] a reformist, economist program that opposed the anti-imperialist line of the BWC with a mass line of 'Black Workers Unite'."

Though it still called for community control, the pro-LRBW wing was motivated by a workerist impulse which nonetheless recognized the BWC's anti-imperialist emphasis as a liquidation of class interests into a classless front:

"A calling for everyone to struggle against imperialism subsumes one's own struggle to the majority to the extent that the specific form of our struggle is overlooked and we end up for example with anti-war demonstrations as the prime form as opposed to organizing Black people around concrete conditions."

-Split documents,
pro-LRBW position

The pro-LRBW wing alternative was "zeroing in on the plant settings with the appropriate use of the Marxist-Leninist method" and "building the mass base of Black workers around proletarian consciousness." Its nationalist line was that "the removal of capitalism does not stamp out racists," and thus, blacks must have "the revolutionary right to self-determination and secession after capitalism is smashed." This position, and the general identification of these elements with Maoism, led a number of them to join the latter-day third-period Stalinists of the Communist League. Of the other faction, only Mike

Hamlin was to remain active in the BWC, now closely connected with the right-Maoist Revolutionary Union.

The splintered League left behind a twofold legacy in Detroit: on the one hand, a nationalist-tinged social-democracy-in-embryo (manifested in the complementary appetites of Ken Cockrel and Jordan Sims), and, on the other, a hard nationalist semi-syndicalist cadre embedded in the inner-city auto plants.

Cockrel's pro-BWC position in the split was designed to propel him into a more acceptable milieu for his political appetites. Already, through the Labor Defense Coalition (which he took with him out of the League) and his earlier legal defense work, Cockrel had established ties with white radicals like "Marxist" Judge Justin Ravitz and black liberals like Coleman Young. After his brief stay in the BWC, Cockrel's LDC initiated the anti-STRESS campaign, with its watered-down version of community control of the police.

Cockrel's changing rhetoric is a barometer of his adaptability in pursuit of personal ambitions: his earlier black workerese ("Dig the whole characterization that black people give jobs man: it's a 'yoke,' it's a 'hang,' it's a 'slave'...") [*Our Thing is DRUM*] gave way to "responsible radical"-sounding declarations of the need "to use the 1973 municipal elections to take power and use that power in the interests of the people." This in turn gave way to a diplomatically neutral, back-handed support for Democrat Coleman Young when Cockrel realized he personally had no chance of winning a mayoral election at this time: "of all the individuals being talked about as being 'electable,' Coleman Young comes closest to an individual with whom we could work." (*Groundwork*, July 1973).

At a time when both bourgeois parties stand increasingly exposed as being unable to satisfy the most minimal needs of the working class, Cockrel is grooming his base in preparation for diverting the dissatisfaction of Detroit's largely black proletariat into the snare of a homegrown social democracy.

The logical complement to Cockrel's city-hall social democracy is, of course, a slicker, blacker, more palatable bureaucracy in the UAW. The fragile position of the present bureaucrats was revealed by the fear with which they viewed the relatively small LRBW caucuses, as well as their panic during the recent Mack Avenue Stamping Plant sitdown, the River Rouge shootout and the UAW's desperate maneuvering to shove the 1973 contract down auto workers' throats.

The League's failure to build a principled opposition to that bureaucracy, not to abandon the existing mass workers organizations but to struggle *within* the UAW for a united movement of class-conscious black and white workers, opened the way for demagogic reformists like Jordan Sims. Sims, now president of Eldon Local 961, saw the futility of the League's separatist line, and then opted for joining the bureaucracy rather than fighting it. In the recent Chrysler negotiations last September, Sims voted for the grossly sell-out contract before claiming he had been "duped" into it.

Neither the minimally economist demands that Sims' United National Caucus puts forward in its role as the respectable "left" opposition to the Woodcock leadership, nor the shop-floor economism of DRUM's earlier "mass line," can advance by one iota the political consciousness of workers—black or white! This is not to deny that there are differences. Whereas many of the original LRBW cadre were apparently driven by a revolutionary impulse, Sims is driven by something much more mundane—a thirst to replace the presently isolated, ineffective Woodcock bureaucracy with a more streamlined machine, better capable of serving as the "labor lieutenants of capital."

The other legacy, the League's semi-syndicalist, "third-world" nationalism, as expressed by the pro-LRBW faction, now finds itself

supporting the Communist League while clandestinely buried in the inner-city auto plants. Subjectively revolutionary instincts notwithstanding, its members will find no revolutionary solution within the framework of the CL's reformist Stalinism. Once more, they will be confronted with many of the contradictions that wracked DRUM and ELRUM early on.

There may be a militant impulse behind rejection of the Moscow-line Stalinists' pipedreams of a "peaceful road to socialism" and Martin Luther King-style pleas for interracial harmony. But the CL's Peking-brand of peaceful coexistence and crackpot-nationalist theory of a "negro nation" in the Deep South (with a majority of "white negroes") are no better.

Only by breaking sharply with the petty-bourgeois politics of trade-union reformism and Stalinism and adopting the proletarian program of Trotskyism can subjectively revolutionary black worker militants contribute to overcoming the crisis of proletarian leadership which is today the decisive roadblock to socialist revolution. In struggling to build a unified Leninist vanguard party based on the Transitional Program and to rebuild the Fourth International destroyed by Pabloist revisionism, it is now possible to lay the bases to replace the symbiotic duo of petty-bourgeois black nationalism and reactionary white racism with proletarian internationalism.

For a United Vanguard Party and Class-Struggle Union Caucuses

The membership of the League was certainly motivated in good part by militant opposition to the pro-company bureaucracy of the UAW and by a desire for a proletarian strategy for black liberation, as opposed to the Panthers' idolization of "brother-on-the-block" lumpen elements. But this is not to ignore the pernicious honky-baiting and anti-white pseudo-nationalism which were also an integral part of the LRBW—and to which so much of the left accommodated or prostrated itself in a pathetic attempt to tail after the popular petty-bourgeois current of the moment. As Lenin remarked repeatedly, it is the task of the proletariat "to combat nationalism of every kind" ("The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," 1914).

Unprincipled tailism is not the way to win and educate solid communist cadre, capable of leading the masses to victory over capitalism by successfully combatting all forms of reformist false consciousness, among them nationalism. Among the tasks of the Trotskyist vanguard, rather, is to state clearly the responsibilities of socialist militants who claim to stand for Marxism-Leninism and the historic interests of the proletariat.

The "black question" is one of the most difficult, and at the same time strategically most important, problems for U.S. communists. Its solution requires an uncompromising fight against white chauvinism and the myriad forms of special oppression of minority workers and an equally consistent struggle against the bourgeois ideology of nationalism, even in the most "proletarian" guise. The latter is no academic question.

Black workers are a doubly oppressed section of the U.S. proletariat, forcibly segregated at the lowest levels. Consequently, their liberation will come about only through socialist revolution and common struggle with white workers under the leadership of a unified vanguard party. The concept of a separate black nation in the U.S. not only lacks an objective basis in the class struggle and political economy of the country, but actually plays into the hands of those whose answer to social conflicts is race war—the inevitable result of which would be the massacre of thousands of blacks and the triumph of white racism. More than any other social group, minority working people have a direct interest in working-class unity.

In the factories, even with the pres-

ent level of widespread racial discrimination, separate organizations of black workers would be a hindrance rather than an aid to class unity. Instead, the best guarantee for a struggle against racial discrimination is uncompromising hostility to any form of labor reformism. Thus the SL's call for trade-union caucuses based on the full transitional program, rather than opportunist lowest-common denominator "militant" formations pushed by various fake lefts, is of particular importance for black worker militants.

Though their concerns are not limited to the fight against racial discrimination, such caucuses are a much more effective weapon in securing even immediate gains for specially-oppressed minority workers than reformist formations organized around the single issue of racial oppression—which is what the League's caucuses (DRUM, ELRUM, etc.) effectively became. On the other hand, to the extent that DRUM demands such as ending unemployment through a shortened workweek, organization of workers militias for self-defense and a general strike against the Indochina war were intended seriously to pose a revolutionary alternative to the bureaucracy (and not some reformist mishmash), then clearly it can only be harmful to divide supporters of such a program on racial lines.

The struggle against white racism and special oppression of minority workers will depend on winning the working masses to understand the need for a class-struggle program on all questions facing the labor movement, and on posing the struggle against special oppression in a manner that strengthens class unity instead of setting one part of the class against another. Thus a class-struggle trade-union caucus would call for ending unemployment through a sliding scale of wages and hours and for an end to all discriminatory practices in hiring and upgrading.

On the other hand, while struggling within the unions for the elimination of all racial, national and sexual discrimination, such a caucus would vigorously oppose taking the union to court, i.e., calling on the bourgeois state to arbitrate disputes within the workers movement. It would raise demands which emphasize the international character of labor's struggle for emancipation (labor strikes against imperialist wars, against protectionism, full citizenship rights for foreign workers, for international strike action) and fight for its program on an explicitly political basis. Thus in opposition to the bureaucracy's policies of begging for crumbs from the capitalist parties (Democratic and Republican) and petty-bourgeois nationalist calls for a black party (which—witness the 1971 Gary convention—end up tailing after black Democrats), we call for a workers party based on the unions to fight for a workers government.

While the Stalinists occasionally pay grudging lip service to Marxist principles when it does not interfere with their reformist maneuvers, their trade-union work is uniformly characterized by simple union militancy. As Trotsky correctly remarked, the purpose of raising transitional demands is to make a bridge between the present consciousness and needs of the masses and the socialist program of the revolution. In the epoch of decaying capitalism, when successful reformism is impossible, the trade unions will either be won to revolutionary leadership standing for the Transitional Program or they will serve as instruments of the bourgeoisie in crushing the workers movement and obliterating those gains already won by labor through bitter struggle. Just as worker-militants must transcend narrow trade unionism, so must revolutionists among the specially oppressed social strata transcend the special-interest pressure group strategy—which offers no real solution to their felt oppression—and embrace a socialist world view, which alone provides a consistent strategy for a unified fight against capitalist exploitation and oppression. ■

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