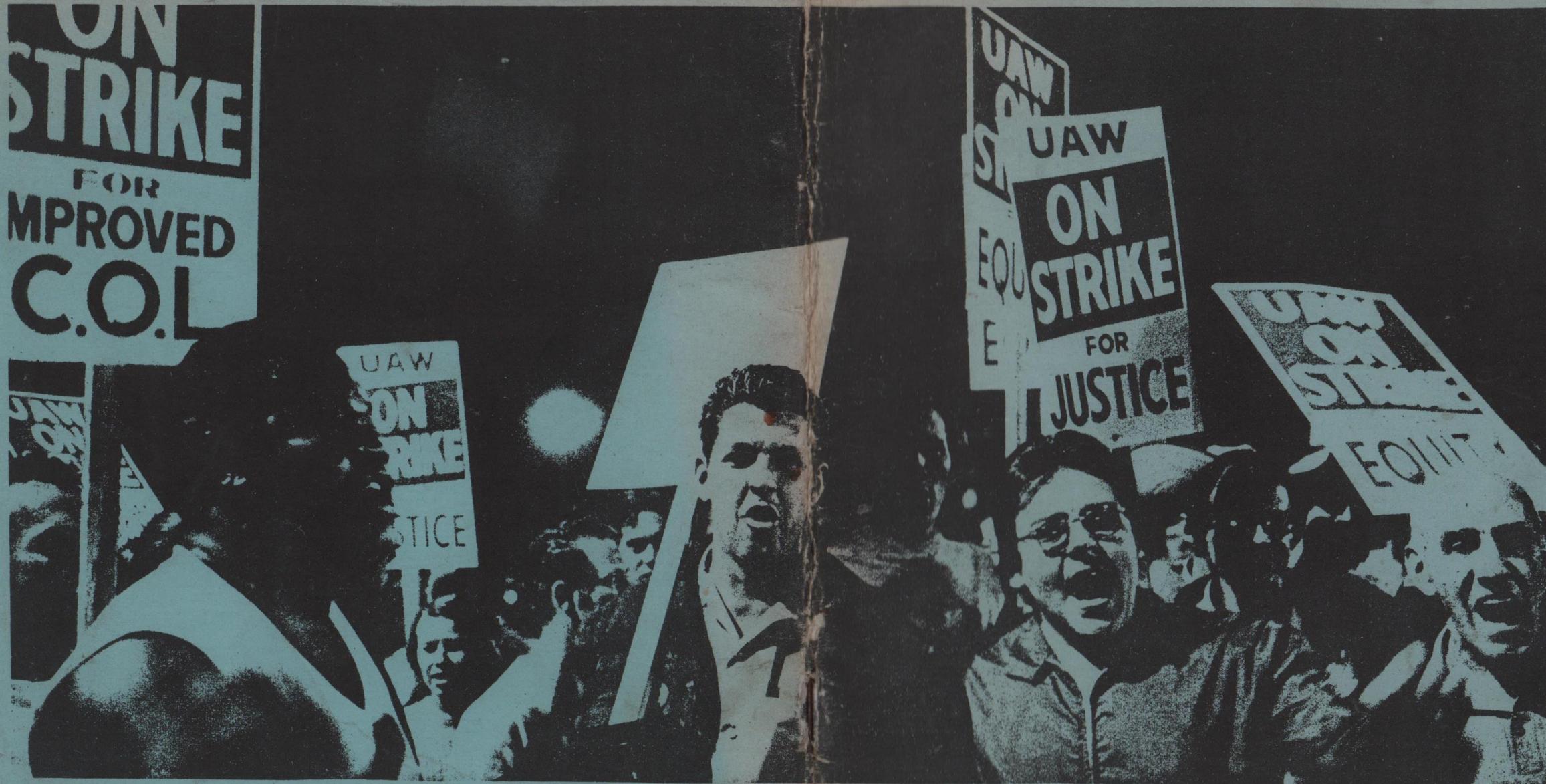


international · class · struggle

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"...Today, American workers are fighting from a position of force; the threats of redundancy and recession haven't diminished the force of their attack. The only ideology that the ruling class could use was that of the general interest... Indeed, for the first time since 1946 there is an open and direct confrontation in the USA between the general interests of American capitalism and the particular interests of workers..."

CLASS STRUGGLE

AND

THE



STRIKE

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Published in French:

- Lutte de Classe en Belgique, 1970
- Lutte de Classe au Portugal, 1970
- Lutte de Classe aux Etats Unis, 1970

Copies from:

Librairie La Vieille Taupe
1 rue des Fosses Saint Jacques
Paris - 5. France



Solidarity, September 30, 1970.

THE ORIGINAL WILD-CAT

Labor
produces
all wealth



all wealth
must go
to Labor



Published in English:

November 1970, Class Struggle in
Portugal

January 1971, Class Struggle in
USA

Copies from: A. Reay,
4 Lloyd Street South
Manchester 14

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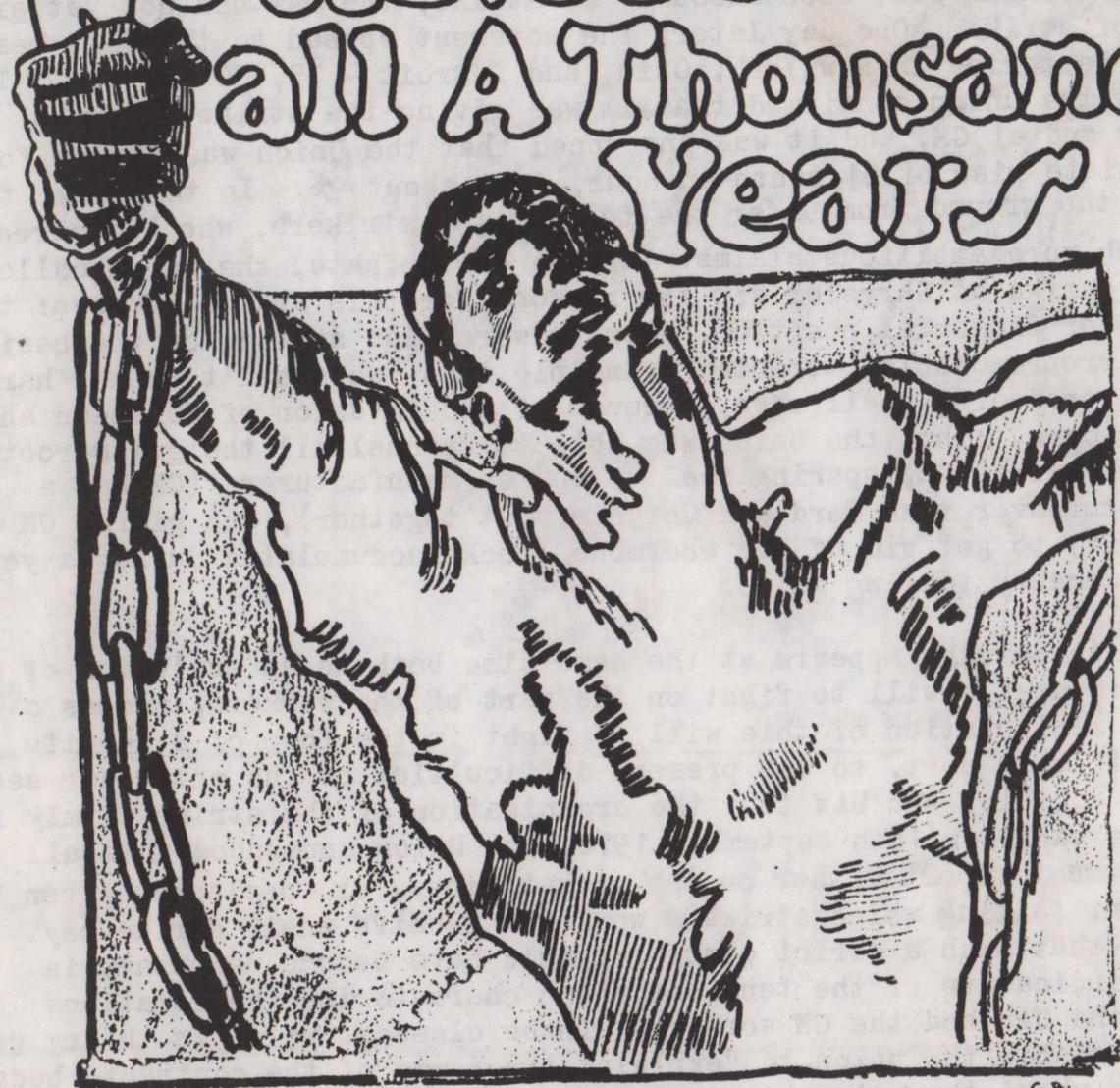
WORKING CLASS vs. UNION

When, on 11th September 1970 the 16,000 workers of the GM factories in Canada went spontaneously on strike, the UAW had not yet given notice of strike. One day later, the movement spread to the USA, reaching the factories in New York, Ohio, and Detroit - 35,000 workers. The same day the union confirmed that it was giving the strike order at Chrysler and at GM, and it was announced that the Union was asking for an immediate rise of 61 cents an hour, i.e. about 9%. In this way, the UAW cut the ground from under the feet of the strikers, who had already made much more ambitious claims. At the last minute, the union called off the strike at Chrysler's; the reasons for this are well-known: the firm's poor financial position. Ford's were also spared, on the basis of the irreproachable patriotic principle that "we mustn't do any harm to firms producing small cars, because of the invasion of European and Japanese cars. Thus the Union was able to channel all the grass-roots pressure against GM, sparing the two weaker manufacturers (GM has a greater turnover than Ford and Chrysler put together), and giving GM the opportunity to get rid of the enormous stocks accumulated during a year of considerably falling sales.

Thus the strike appears at the same time both as an explosion of an indisputable will to fight on the part of the workers, and as a gigantic manipulation of this will to fight in the form of a respite given, at least cost, to the present difficulties of the motor car sector. To do this, the UAW took the organization of the strike firmly in hand. As early as 14th September 1970, the Union announced that all strikers must report either on the picket lines, or to classes given by the union, failing which strikers wouldn't receive their strike pay. The fact that such a strict control should have become necessary is clearly indicative of the tensions which characterise the relations between the UAW and the GM workers. These classes, which in theory were meant to enable the union to "explain" the terms of the contract, became the place where the union big nobs came and asked the workers to have confidence in them, because "we know what we're doing, just give us time!" In fact it would seem that if the union only managed to obtain a mediocre contract, this would put it in a very bad position in the factory, and this, as we have said, at the very time when capital most needs a strict control over class movements. It should also be noted that these classes sometimes became points of contact for strikers and people outside GM, especially as they were of ten held in the Universities' Departments of Labour Relations/Problems.

* This text, with the exception of Part 3, was written during the course of the strike. Part 3 was written after the strike had ended, in December 1970.

We Have Fed You all A Thousand Years



COPYRIGHTED 1918 Wm D Haywood

W.D. G.D.

Poem by an unknown Proletarian
Music by Rudolph Von Liebich

Pub. by I.W.W. Educational Bureau
Chicago, U.S.A

- 2 - Sheet music of "We Have Fed You All a Thousand Years."

As it controls strike-fund contributions by the check-off system (union dues being held back at source by the boss, who hands them straight to the union), the UAW has no difficulty controlling the rank and file; what's more, in this way it avoids that traditional strike demand for payment of wages lost through the strike, as the workers receive allocations from the strike funds (not forgetting, though, that these payments are part of their past wages: each worker pays 27 ½ dollars a year into the strike fund, on an average annual salary of 8,000 dollars (over £ 3,300); this is on top of the basic dues of 60 dollars a year).

The claims put forward by the UAW concern on the one hand wage increases and pensions, holidays, bonuses and working conditions on the other. With regard to wages, the union began by not revealing to the workers the sum demanded at the negotiations: it was a "substantial" sum... In face of the workers' discontent, who remembered that "substantial" meant 20 cents in the 1967 contract, in view also of the unofficial strikes on the 11th and 12th September, the UAW announced the figure of 61 cents to be paid immediately, on an hourly wage of 4.03 dollars (over 30/-), whereas in most factories the workers were asking for a rise of 1 dollar. At the same time the UAW raised the question of a cost-of-living clause without ceiling; the rank-and-file strongly support the abolition of the former ceiling to the sliding scale. GM, which is offering 37 cents an hour as against the 61 cents demanded by the union, is firmly opposed to the cost-of-living claim. The boss is willing to raise the ceiling, but not to abolish it. In fact what he will not accept is the working class's formal refusal to suffer the consequences of inflation, and see their real wages cut. *

As regards working conditions, the union is asking for "improved and more human working conditions", which makes the workers quietly laugh! Also, the UAW is asking that overtime be made "voluntary"! In order to understand the importance that the struggle has for working conditions in the shop, a struggle which is asserting itself as a struggle against the physical destruction of living labour, it is necessary to realise to what extent the capitalists are obliged, in the present crisis context, to allow working conditions to become even worse, and to increase the risks to which workers are exposed. The growth in hourly profit per productive worker has been achieved at the price of an enormous increase in "occupational accidents". In 1970, there were far more workers killed by accidents in the job than servicemen who died in Vietnam. This is just another instance



Detroit strikers: soon the slogans may be reality in Britain

**THE SUNDAY TIMES,
15 NOVEMBER 1970**

Thirty and out— the pension revolution that could hit Britain

of the technical and organisational impasse in which US capital finds itself today.

Thus this point is one of the most important in the collective agreement: it is quite possible that GM will concede "substantial" material gains against an assurance of an effective disciplinary control by the union in the factory. The present deadlock in negotiations rests in the fact that the union doesn't want to, because it cannot, take this way out, although it urgently needs to obtain something concrete to throw to the tiger of workers' autonomy. Absenteeism, high turnover of workers, sabotage, all these are increasingly conscious and organised expressions of this autonomy. GM is asking quite firmly that a part of sickness benefits be taken over by union funds, which is in fact an attempt to give a financial incentive to the union to police the factory checking up on absences, sick leaves, etc.

The UAW has been making a lot of noise about the slogan 30 AND OUT: i.e. retirement after thirty years with the firm, with 500 dollars a month (about £ 50 a week) or 25% more than what the workers now get

when they leave at 60 years. This claim has received a lot of support from the older workers. GM, on its part, is offering retirement at 58, but without linking it to the time spent with the firm.

To this, the majority of workers, who are a long way from being 58, reply: "But who could possibly stay here twenty years?". In any case, on thing is certain: even if the 30 AND OUT claim has some appeal to those workers who would be immediately affected by such a measure, at the demos organised by the UAW, where the old-uns wore themselves out yelling this slogan, the mass of the demonstrators - three thousand in New York in October 1970 - replied by chanting: WAGES UP !

In fact one can see in this measure something similar to one of the aims pursued in France when basic monthly salaries were introduced - the "professionalization" of the factory, a means of combating a not altogether functional turnover. On the other hand, it might be thought that a straightforward lowering of the retirement age, even if it were restricted in the first instance to the motor industry (because in any case, the GM contract would serve as a basis for contracts with Ford and Chrysler), could be a claim worth generalising to include all American workers, irrespective of their sector of economic activity, qualifications or, of course, of the time they have spent with one firm.

In point of fact, the really interesting outcome of the GM strike will lie in the workers' capacity or incapacity to impose on both the unions and the bosses claims which will now enter into the whole cycle of current struggles. Already, workers in the steel industry are looking towards GM so that they might throw themselves in their turn into the fight, and it is obvious that all that the car workers succeed in getting will become their "minimum platform".

The capitalists are doing all they can to divide the workers, trying to blame the layoffs which are now multiplying in a whole series of sectors, on the GM strike. GM is the biggest taxpayer in the US; with 50% of the turnover of the car industry, it occupies a crucial position in the productive cycle. It consumes 10% of American steel and 27% of sheet steel. Consequently, the steel industry, already in difficulties because of the fall in exports and the general slowing down in sectors such as building, is now forced to sack some of its labour force. Its profits, which "Fortune" reckons to be over-estimated, have fallen from 5.8% in 1966 to 4.6% today. It is the same in the electricity industry, in road and rail transports (Penn

Central, the biggest railway company in America, will probably be in even greater difficulties through the strike, because GM represents 12% of its receipts). Thus the GM strike, while remaining on the whole under the control of the union, constitutes the core of the current modification of the balance of power between Capital and the Working Class in the United States. Foreseeing a long strike, the bosses tried to play on the wives' role: they called on the workers' wives' "good sense". (It is worth recalling here that it is not by spectacularly burning their bras that the Women's Liberation Movement will help the class struggle!)

The union has its own plans for breaking the strike. The UAW has already announced that while the national contract is in deadlock it will try to resolve local contracts one by one (in fact, besides the national contract, the union has to sign local contracts concerning each of the 155 GM factories). It is well-known that these local contracts have for the most part to take account of grass-roots pressure in deciding questions relating to each plant. The union has always come up against difficulties in getting them accepted, in the face of the radical nature of the claims worked out in the factory. Quite often waves of unofficial strikes have followed the signing of the national contract, using as a pretext the local-level discussions.

Well, this year, for the first time in the history of the UAW, the national contract weren't going to be signed until the local contracts have all been accepted one by one, smashing the unity of the 350,000 workers, struggling in the States as in Canada, in Detroit or in California, against the conditions of exploitation, the same everywhere. Thus as soon as the union succeeded in smashing one by one the forces of each factory, it would then be able to sign any old compromise at the national level, and that would have been the end of that. However, after four weeks of strike, around mid-October, the union had only managed to sign 55 of the 155 it had before it; it has met with such enormous difficulties that it has renounced its original intention, and has gone back to the bosses, asking that negotiations be taken up again on the national level, being prepared to repress any unofficial movements which will occur when the time comes to get the national contract accepted factory by factory, and which in any case will have been considerably weakened by a long, well-contained strike.

2 FIGHTING AGAINST WORK = CLASS AUTONOMY

Last October, James Johnson, a production worker fired from a Chrysler factory in Detroit, went home to get his gun, came back to the workshop, and killed two foremen and a trade-union official who tried to cool him down ... But the story doesn't end there, for the day after, all the workers in the assembly-lines of Detroit stuck press-cuttings reporting the event onto the foremen's desks. It was the third recent case of a foreman murdered.

It is doubtless because of this sort of "accident" and many others, perhaps less serious, that Establishment sociologists in the United States are talking about a "crisis of authority" within the factory. The workers' revolt in the workshops is currently taking the most varied forms of behaviour and organisation - from sabotage to physical violence against the immediate representatives of the employers' repression, not forgetting the new mass phenomenon of absenteeism. Such actions are all the more strongly felt by capitalism as they are not likely to be channelled through institutional means (trade-unions, etc). "Costs of absenteeism and of labour force turnover are increasing enormously and it is becoming more and more difficult to keep discipline in production" ("Business and Environment", Henry Ford).

Fortune, one of the spokesmen of American Big Capital, has recently published a survey on the conditions of a worker on the shop-floor. They are particularly concerned to know what's the matter with those people down there in order to decide on "what is to be done".

At Ford and GM, absenteeism has doubled during recent years, while at Chrysler it has already reached 18.6%. At GM, every day 5% of workers are missing "with no explanation whatever"; on Mondays and Fridays the percentage doubles: 10% are out. (Fortune, July 1970). Recently, the management of GM issued the following "communique": "Many workers who become ill in mid-week don't come back to work till the following Monday. Now, it's just not normal that everybody should recover on the same day!" (Wall Street Journal, 29 Sep. 1970).

In another firm, in another sector, a recent survey has recently been made public: "For every seven clerical workers in an average

office, one extra is needed in order to guarantee constant output. The reason is the rate of absenteeism." (Wall Street Journal, 6 Oct. 1970) Quite apart from, and in opposition to, the demagogical promises of trade unions, "fighting" to making overtime voluntary, this mass refusal of work is today the most radical expression of workers' autonomy.

Regarding sabotage, car manufacturers have recently announced that increasing protests against the poor quality of cars had had as first effect an increase in inspection work, which adds an extra burden on to production-costs. "In some plants worker discontent has reached such a degree that there has been overt sabotage. Screws have been left in brake drums, tool handles welded into fender compartments (to cause mysterious, unfindable, and eternal rattles), paint scratched, and upholstery cut." (Fortune, July 1970).

We can add to this the huge turnover rates of workers - about 25% a year at Ford, and increasing late arrival of the work-teams, meaning late starts on the production lines.

So Capital is well and truly up against a massive rejection (and in one sense an organised rejection - absenteeism used to be an individual gesture, but among the young workers of Detroit and Chicago today it has become a collective mass practice) of the whole of the job organisation, inside the factory as well as in the rest of the plant. Attempts have been made to divide the workers: at Chrysler, Baltimore, one day of particularly high absenteeism, management laid off those who did turn up for work, saying it was the absentees' fault, it was impossible to work under those conditions. The reaction was so violent that the method was immediately considered unsuitable. In any case, specialists in social problems are unanimous in criticising the use of force. "Whatever you do don't provoke them!", said the Steel Union bureaucrats.

In the Fortune study there are examples of some small firms who have reintroduced the production by each worker of whole units, in the hope of combatting the completely abstract nature of work on the production line. But apart from the fact that this kind of job organisation is possible only with small production units (for eg. radios) the specialists in any case quickly reached the conclusion that although productivity (that rare, sought-after fruit) did indeed increase, wages were rising even faster: the workers were becoming even more adamant in their demands when they could actually see the product of their labour !

But the latest great idea to come out of all this is what is called "democratisation of the factory". Fortune goes as far as the trade-union left in Europe, with its new ideology whereby self-management is joined up with workers' control in order to better persuade workers of the necessity to remain - workers. "Giving workers more responsibility means management must delegate its authority and accept decisions taken by workers. Diffuse authority doesn't mean abdication of management, but simply that decisions can be taken by the people directly engaged in production, that is, the most qualified to do so." (Fortune, It Pays To Weak Up The Blue Collar Workers, September 1970). In other words, capitalism faced with the powerful autonomy of working-class interests and with the working class's ability to rally the whole of the fragmented social labour force round its actions and its aims, is churning out its latest ideology (perhaps the last as well) - the ideology of the control of exploitation by those who are the exploited. Capitalism's power of recuperation of workers is great; the attempt to integrate workers' control itself into the process of exploitation is revealed in the statement made by GM's Head of Personnel to Fortune: "We are faced with fundamental, critical changes in our society. And the question now is to know how we can capitalise on all that, how we can exploit the forces of change and profit from them" ! French and Italian capitalists, weaker than their American partners, can't afford the luxury of this new ideology: they leave that to the Unions.

In the United States the problem lies in the fact that in the present class situation, the trade union is the only institution which could take on this job in the factory. But the unions today have much too unstable a relationship with the working class to be able, without any problems, to smash the latter's autonomous struggle against work. That would mean controlling absenteeism, preventing sabotage - today it would even mean instigating an open battle between union and working class inside the factory. The thought of losing all control over working-class action pleases nobody, especially not the bosses. In fact, if anything is profoundly worrying capitalism in the current struggles, it's precisely this "authority crisis". Better not make it even worse.

We aren't claiming that the GM strike is a radical movement, nor are we prophesying a catastrophic crisis in the American system. This strike is very closely tied up with the specific crisis in the motor industry. On the other hand, though, a crisis in the car industry, in such an advanced capitalist system, has repercussions, first of all throughout the whole productive machinery, then on the relationships between the US and her competitors, and finally it will be felt in the other areas of society.

American capitalists, under pressure from the workers' offensive, are trying to find a way out of the crisis, by a reorganisation of the whole productive apparatus and sources of accumulation, in the first instance in the USA, and then on a world-wide scale. This will be faithfully followed, of course, by a whole series of local adjustments in every country, with a redefinition of the international division of labour, which will include, let us not forget, the USSR and the Eastern bloc countries (note already the movements towards the East, of which the German-Soviet pact is one of the most spectacular instances). Meanwhile, the attempts to run down the Viet-Nam war (scaling-down of military operations, warming up of diplomatic relations through contacts with Eastern bloc countries, etc) are a result more of the class struggle situation than of protests from the well-meaning Left.

At the heart of this reorganisation programme, lies the car society, i.e. the whole of social life organised around the Motor Car: urbanism, transport, anti-pollution schemes, ... For the moment, they are trying to reply to working-class pressure by increasing the organic composition of capital, i.e. by a "technological leap" destined to increase the violence perpetrated by dead capital (machines and job organisation) against living labour (i.e., men, workers). Of course, such a "leap" immediately poses the far from new problem of falling rates of profit, and all the equally obvious problems of inter-capitalist competition (the US is today being directly and severely challenged by Japan and Germany, particularly in Latin America!). For example, GM has recently opened a highly automated factory in Lodestown, Ohio, in an attempt to counteract increasing production costs by reducing manpower needs; but whereas high profits are needed to pay off the enormous investments that have had to be made to build this factory, profits are falling by half, and even by two-thirds. (Business Week, 6 October 1970)

Confronted with this movement towards the unification of the class offensive, the student movement, for its part, is falling apart after the spontaneous movement which culminated in the general strike of 1969. The various left-wing groupings are showing themselves to be as incapable of understanding the capitalist situation (especially the productive function of the school as producer of skilled and unskilled labour-force) as they are of understanding the action of the working class. The American students have, they too, discovered the workers' movement, of course, but only with a view to "educating" them. The current struggle in the car industry, as well as those that will follow on from this struggle, and the working class's capacity to impose its aims and to develop its autonomous, extra-union, movement against factory work, are going to play a crucial role in the bold class confrontation that will take place on a mass level in the coming months.

END OF THE STRIKE : A BATTLE WON *

3

On the 12th of November, GM and the UAW announced that an agreement had been reached that would put an end to the strike. Signs had been imminent for several weeks, and suspense mounted as negotiations "behind closed doors" were begun. (This, incidentally, indicates just how democratic the great union of the late Walter Reuther is). The workers, on the picket lines, remained silent.

One point must be stressed with regard to these latest developments, and that is that representatives of American capital were exerting increasing pressure to bring an end to the strike. For the first time in the history of the motor industry, the government sent a member of the Department of Labour to Detroit. He was given the role of expressing the employers' grave concern, and also that of the government itself, especially as the latter had been unable to effect an active economic policy. "The strike has upset all our economic plans, and we couldn't wait any longer for the signing of the contract." (Declaration by the Government to "Wall Street Journal, 12 November 1970). GM itself had confirmed, a few days before, that the strike was affecting the company more than had been expected. In effect, the deflationary role that Washington had expected the strike to play did not function as anticipated. And so, in this context, the agreement first appeared as a "union victory". Actually, the union did obtain satisfaction on most of its demands. As we shall see, this element is of fundamental importance to the understanding of the actual significance of the agreement. Whereas the union demanded a pay increase of 61 cents for every worker in every factory, they were granted increases of between 48 and 61 cents during the first year; the sliding scale was completely accepted by management; finally, the "30 and out" demand has almost been met, with only a few changes: in 1971 a worker can retire at 58, and by 1972, the age will be lowered to 56. These changes mean little to the majority of the men. ("Who would ever want to remain in this job for 30 years??!!"). And so the only real gain is an increase in salary of about 30 % over 3 years,

* This part was written in December 1970, after the end of the GM strike.

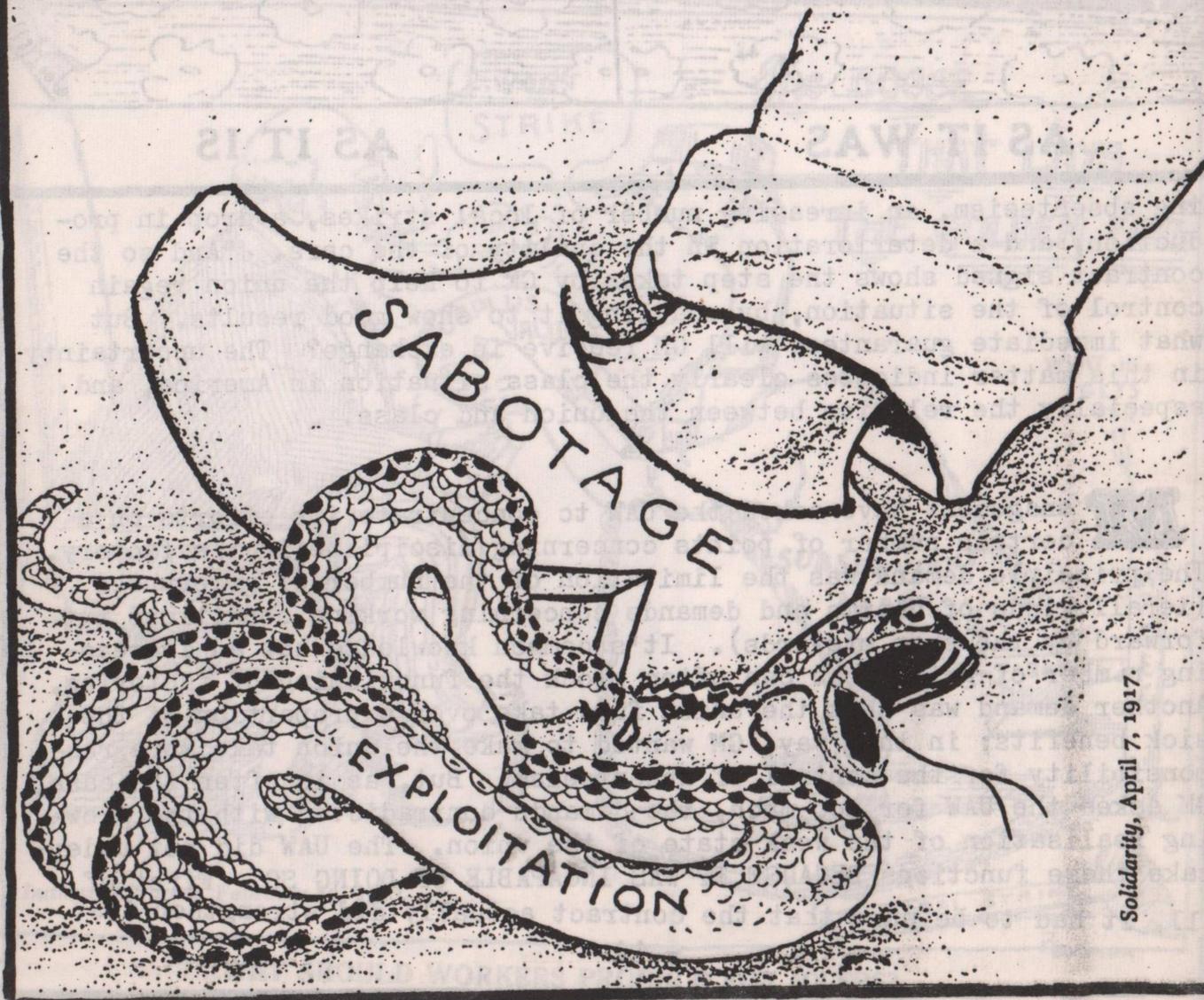
and a provision entitling the workers to an additional increase to correspond with a rise in the cost of living. This greatly surpassed the inflationist agreement made with General Electric at the beginning of the year. The contract, then, seems like a defeat for all those who expected GM to hold out. It was thought that the company's size and its imperviousness to competition would enable it to reverse the balance of power and regain the ground that the American working class had gained in the last year's continual battle over wages. GM did not fulfill the wish of the President of US Steel, the largest of the steel works, according to whom this strike should have been "The time to put an end to the employers' loss of ground." (Wall Street Journal, 9 October 1970).

At first the whole package was accepted by the majority of the workers, who, at least, considered it as not being too bad (if one thinks that what the workers in France won in May 1968 was on nothing like the same scale). One must not forget the role that the union strike fund plays, not underestimate its power on the working class. When the fund was almost exhausted, the time had come to put pressure on the workers to return to their jobs. The union is not unaware, however, that although this weapon has proved effective at the level of the national strike, there is now the problem of signing the local contracts, factory by factory. As one of the leaders of UAW said: "If all of the local contracts are not signed by mid-November, we risk losing control of the whole thing." (Wall Street Journal, 2 November 1970).

Did GM, the greatest business enterprise in the world, really surrender? "What happened?", asked Wall Street Journal. What ever could have happened? The agreement that put an end to the strike served only to confirm the positions of the union and the employer. The most crucial question in the US class situation is that of workers' insubordination, and this strike was merely one instance in this much bigger question. No answer has yet been given. For GM, there was no problem about wages, as any increase would be taken care of by an increase in productivity; the problem was insubordination. And it was around this that the struggle was to take place. Productivity means, of course, in economic terms, an increase in the organic composition of capital, that is, an increase in the proportion of constant capital (machines, technology, job organisation) to variable capital (wages); it also means an intensification of the famous tendency of profits to fall... In terms of class, though, this 'technological leap' (Lodestown's factory is the perfect example, with its extreme automatisa- - see page) means, quite simply, increasing violence against living labour, a stricter slavery to the machine and to the whole job organisation. For GM, the whole problem lies in its ability to repress the lack of discipline in the factory. The new spectres which are haunting US capitalism today, more perhaps than in any other country, are

sabotage, absenteeism, and too high mobility. It is here that the role of the union is crucial. We have seen how the control that it is capable of assuming at this level has progressively weakened during the last few years. This strike was in a sense its last chance to rehabilitate itself in the eyes of the working class, to put an end to the increasing number of wildcat strikes, and to allow it to once again take control of the rank and file.

It is in the light of this that the results of the GM-UAW agreement must be evaluated. On 20th November, the Wall Street Journal wrote that "the union, in the throes of its first crisis of authority for 20 years, must be given a chance to emerge with increased strength from the strike, so that it will then be in a position to reply with greater authority to its members, who nowadays are younger, less trustworthy, and more and more critical of the union and the company." To make things clearer, they add: "The leaders of UAW no longer exercise the authority over its members and shop stewards that GM needs. The result, according to GM, is grow-





One Big Union Monthly, November 1919.

AS IT WAS

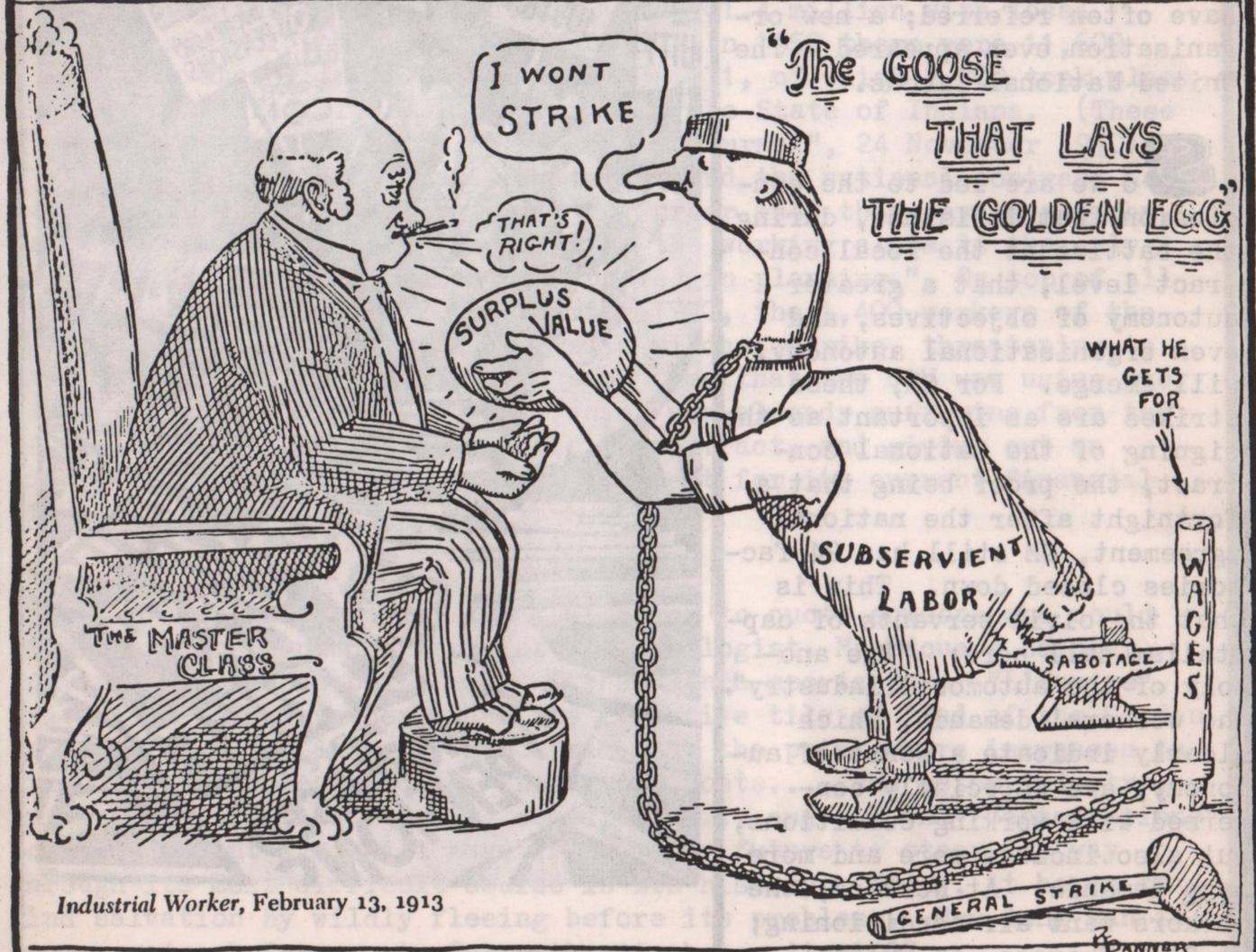
AS IT IS

ing absenteeism, an increasing number of local strikes, a drop in production, and a deterioration in the quality of the cars. "And so the contract signed shows the step taken by GM to help the union regain control of the situation, by enabling it to show good results. But what immediate guarantees will GM receive in exchange? The uncertainty in this matter indicates clearly the class situation in America, and especially the relation between the union and class.

Management have asked the UAW to concentrate its efforts on a certain number of points concerning discipline in the factory. The principle demand was the limitation of the number of grievances (ie all kinds of claims and demands concerning working conditions put forward by the shop stewards). It's common knowledge how an increasing number of grievances can often block the functioning of factories. Another demand was that the union fund take over a proportion of the sick benefits; in this way, GM wanted to make the union take more responsibility for the control of absenteeism. But, as is often the case, GM asked the UAW for too much, the demands contradicted with the growing realisation of the weak state of the union. The UAW did not undertake these functions BECAUSE IT WAS INCAPABLE OF DOING SO. First of all, it had to be sure that the contract actually did strengthen its

position, and nothing is less certain - the contrary is more likely to be the case.

And so it is quite true that the GM strike did not show the same amount of autonomy that was recently shown in the powerful wild-cat strikes, like the Mawah and Sterling strikes in Detroit. Nevertheless, several times the union could see quite clearly that there was a danger of events running away with them. The two most important instances of the revolt against the union during the strike occurred when the workers at Warren and Willow Run in Michigan refused the UAW's order to go back to work. At the factory at Warren, GM is undertaking research on non-pollutant motors; the union used this front to call the workers back to work in the name of the "antipollution front"; the 3,000 workers unanimously refused! In the factory at Willow Run, where some of the parts produced are used by the supposedly great rival, American Motors, the workers refused to obey the "back to work" orders given by the union under the pretext that the strike was stopping the production of AM jeeps... We know of many other factories where the national con-



Industrial Worker, February 13, 1913

WHY SHOULD WORKERS PRODUCE FOR IDLERS?

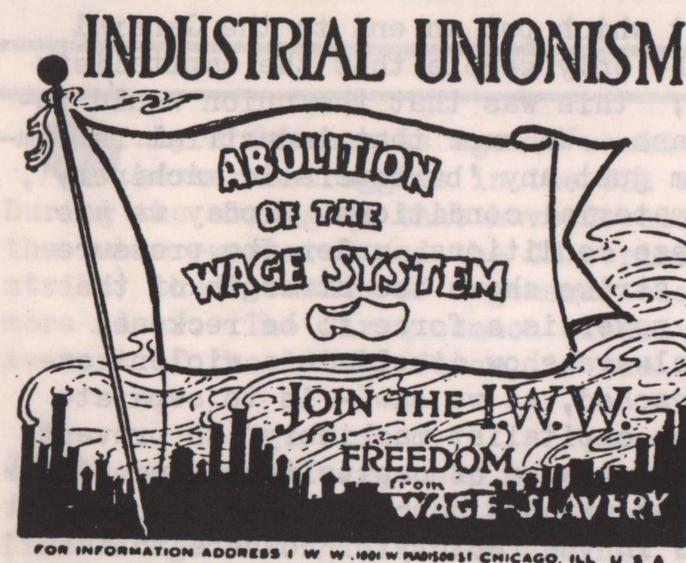
tract was refused. In Detroit, the signing of the contract was received with cries of "58 days of strike, and for what!" and "We want lots more!" And as for local contracts, half of the 155 factories in the US and Canada had not yet accepted the local terms, even though GM had decided in the beginning that the national agreement would not be signed before all (or at least two-thirds) of the local agreements had been signed. So the strike gave rise to small, anti-union groups in many factories, connected with the new working-class militancy to which we have often referred; a new organisation even appeared - The United National Caucus.

So we are led to the conclusion that it is now, during the battles at the local contract level, that a greater autonomy of objectives, and even organisational autonomy, will emerge. For GM, these strikes are as important as the signing of the national contract, the proof being that a fortnight after the national agreement, GM still has 24 factories closed down. This is what the civil servants of capitalism call here: "The anomaly of the automobil industry". The workers' demands, which clearly indicate a sense of autonomy, are especially concerned with working conditions, but also include more and more wage demands. At Norwood, the workers want air-conditioning; at Ste. Therese, in Quebec

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN UNIONISM : 1920 — 1970



UAW Local 22 members in Detroit collect strike signs as they move out to picket lines around General Motors.



call. Between 1955 and 1967, GM lost 14.9 million working hours with strikes over the national contract, and 101.4 million with local strikes, most of which were unofficial. In 1958 there were 11,600 local grievances; in 1970 there were 39,131, of which 2,200 took place in one single factory at Delco-Remy, in the State of Indiana. (These figures are taken from the "Wall Street Journal", 24 November 1970). It seems quite evident that the strikes and the national contract had no other function but to put a bit of order into this savage anarchy. Mario Tronti said that: "Henceforth, the working class is the only anarchy that capitalism does not succeed in planning." On top of all that happened at GM, on 20th November 1970, the 1,400 workers of the Chrysler foundry at Detroit started a wildcat strike, threatening to stop all production, at the very same time that the UAW was using every means possible to save Chrysler, which was already suffering from the necessity to align itself with the GM contract, and giving out an amount of money that was perhaps too great for its current financial situation.

Here we can't resist the temptation to quote someone who could never be considered as a leftist ideologist, Mr Edouard Seidler, columnist of the motoring page of the French sports paper "L'Equipe", written on 16th November under the evocative title of "End of the Golden Age": "The motor industry has arrived at the point where increases in productivity no longer cover increasing costs... The motor industry, up against inflation, growing competition... and all the "contestations" of the present age, will have in the near future to steer its way through its most difficult course in its history. Today, it hopes to find salvation by wildly fleeing before its problems. How long can it keep running before, out of breath, it chokes itself?"

(Canada), they want all working instructions to be written in French, the language of the majority of the Quebec workers. At the factory at Willow Run (referred to on the previous page) the workers want the management to pay their petrol for travel to and from work; at the same factory they are also demanding the installation of a direct telephone line to Detroit, so that each time that a worker decided to take his day off, they could notify management without being charged for the

It is evident that the contract which put an end to the General Motors strike was a gamble, the only gamble that the capitalists could make under the circumstances; this was that the union would regain its power over the working class. We know that industrial reformism does not draw its strength from just any 'bureaucratic machinery', but from a number of very precise material conditions. Today we are witnessing the rapid erosion of these conditions, under the pressure of the workers' offensive. The GM strike shows the strength of the working class, shows that workers' power is a force to be reckoned with, even though autonomy didn't always show itself in a violent explosion. This goal - which they reached, as we saw - is to separate the traditional organisations of the capitalist machinery, to prevent industrial reforms from coming to the rescue of capitalism. And so the union had to have all its demands met without conceding any counterpart in the form of increased discipline in the factory: "Nowhere in the contract is any provision made for penalties against absenteeism, or to limit the right to strike," wrote the Wall Street Journal, 20 November 1970.

All today's defiance by the American working class can be summed up in the fact that it is in insubordination that they manifest their class autonomy, in their refusal to pay a penny towards the enormous reorganisation which capitalism will need to make to resist the offensive against wages and working conditions. During the strike, the workers showed themselves to be such an enormous and powerful mass that merely its potential force sufficed to make the employer give in to their demands, and to stop the union from directly co-operating with the bosses' plan. When the capitalist resistance becomes more organised, steps towards which are already being taken in the form of attempts to impose wage controls, this factory power must reach every social sphere, every aspect of which is undermined by the irruption of massive dissent, by way, and by the increasing difficulty capital is having in managing its own enormity. But we're not quite there yet.

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**GM settlement upsets
inflation policy**

The view of the Press

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Only a few months ago it would have been impossible to see in workers' struggles in the USA an offensive by the whole class. During the struggles that have developed (from the drivers' strike to the rubber-workers' and the GM strikes - and now the steel-workers' strike) the elements of a general class offensive have become more and more clear. The first common element, which gradually reached all sectors of the labour force, is the use of the strike as a class weapon.

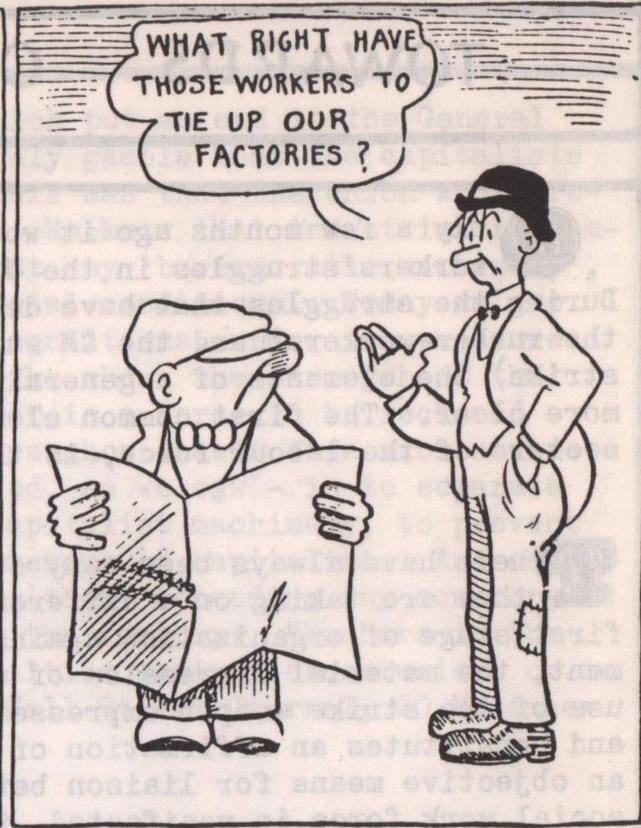
There have always been many strikes in the United States, but today they are taking on a different character: today they represent a first stage of organization against the interests of capitalist development, the material expression of a position of force. The generalised use of the strike weapon expresses a refusal of the general interest and constitutes an affirmation of class interest. Use of the strike as an objective means for liaison between the different sections of the social work force is manifested, in this increasingly white-collar country, in the unprecedented spread of movements in the public sector. After the big strike of the postal workers, the movements grew and spread to sector after sector: from teachers to school administrative staff, and then to hospital staff, etc. At the same time, the strike has become better organised within each sector: a general strike of school-teachers, spread from movements in isolated towns, was only just avoided at the beginning of 1970, and is still very much a possibility, such is the agitation in the schools, and the number of sporadic strikes (it should be remembered that, in terms of turnover and number of workers, education is the biggest industry in the United States).

Of course the present offensive is still limited in breadth by collective agreements. Nevertheless, workers are asserting their class autonomy through pressure in the factories which is growing daily, and which the unions manage to control only by taking it on themselves to launch large-scale movements, where obviously it is extremely difficult for the grass-roots to make their own aims felt, because of a lack of autonomous organisational forms (cf. the unofficial strikes which preceded the declaring of the GM strike by the UAW). On the other hand, these national movements that the unions launch do yield important immediate results, in that they tend to become unifying goals for the whole class: construction workers have, thanks to very militant strikes (five months in Kansas City), already won an average wage increase of about 1 dollar an hour, against 60 cents for the previous year.

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THATS AN OUTRAGE



WHAT RIGHT HAVE THOSE WORKERS TO TIE UP OUR FACTORIES?



OUR FACTORIES?



WHY YOU DON'T EVEN OWN THE SMOKE

Industrial Pioneer, August 1926.

Let them make pollution an issue for the 'general public' STRIKES are the workers' own business

The unity of the general aims and objectives of the various strikes is already pointing towards the spontaneous unification of the movement. The first phase of the struggle against inflation is the refusal to pay for it, i.e. the demand for a sliding scale for wages. Current struggles in the motor industry to eliminate the ceiling of the sliding scale (which was 80 cents per year) gives an indication of the workers' determination not to suffer the consequences of inflation. This is now becoming the aim of steel and public service (hospitals) workers. The contract signed at Caterpillar contains a cost-of-living clause without ceiling. Of course, there will be some who will be unable to see anything more in this than a "purely material demand" which doesn't in the least question the power of the bosses. Yet it would seem that such a demand is essentially political, in that capital's inability to make the workers pay for inflation constitutes right from the start an important modification in the balance of power.

"What my father was concerned about was giving me enough to eat. But I have to worry about sending my son to school." These were the words of a delegate at the congress of the steel workers' union, reported by the Wall Street Journal, which adds: "The young worker today will not wait thirty years to own his house, as his father did. The system under which he lives is too rich for him to be content to wait." (Our emphasis)

The wages offensive is also evident in claims for a reduction in working hours, for longer paid (and better paid) holidays, for increased retirement pensions, and specially in the demand for a free medical service for workers and their families. All these demands were made in the big struggles of 1970, from the rubber industry strike to the motor industry strike. They were also made, spontaneously and over and above the collective agreements, in other industrial sectors (electricity) and the public services. The workers' offensive in the United States is therefore becoming united around a material consciousness of their strength. **NATION-WIDE STRIKES AND CLASS OBJECTIVES** have reached such proportions that capital can no longer incorporate them in the social fabric, as it could sometimes in the past.

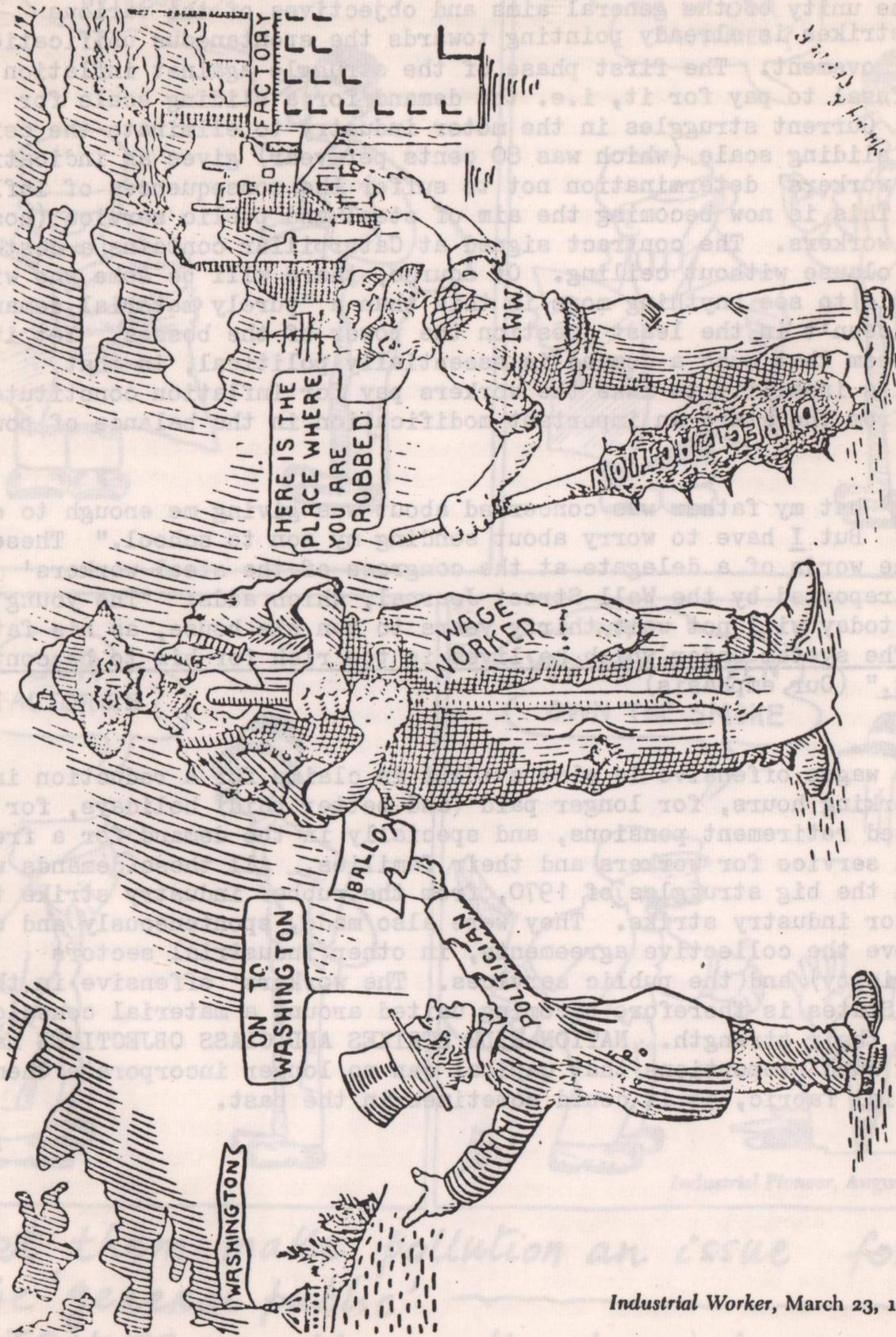
THE WORKING CLASS AND THE CRISIS OF CAPITALIST SOCIETY

5

DIRECT ACTION

[WHICH?]

PARLIAMENTARIANISM



ORGANIZE ON THE JOB WHERE YOU ARE ROBBED

Industrial Worker, March 23, 1911.

Over the last five years, the average wage in American industry has risen by £10. Yet this increase represents no increase whatsoever in real income, which has remained stable throughout the whole period, due to price inflation.

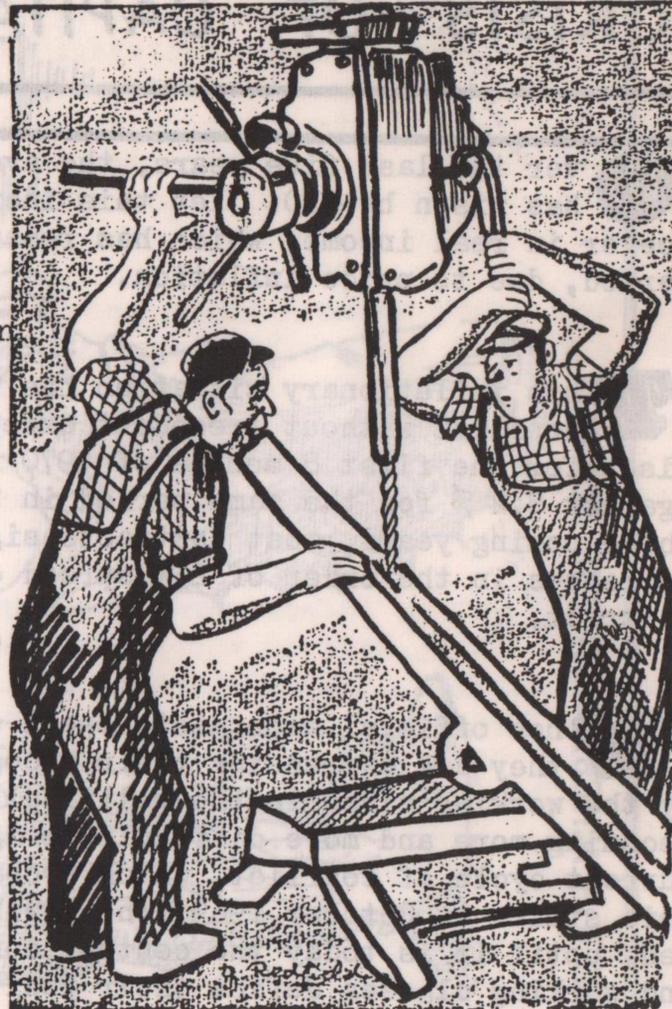
This inflationary situation has triggered off a spate of industrial conflict without precedent except for the post-war strikes. Wage rises for the first 8 months of 1970 reach record levels: 10 % as against 8.2 % for the same period in 1969, itself a record. For the three coming years, most contracts signed make provisions for wage increases in the order of 25% spread over the period covered by the contract.

When official economists speak of a "return to political economy", they are expressing their recognition of increasing intervention by the working class in the political arena, a development which it is becoming more and more difficult to ignore. Since the onset of the current cycle of conflict, which probably began with the General Electric strike of October 1969, the strike weapon has continually expanded, until it is today the central conflict around which the capitalist and working classes define their positions.

From the summer of 1966, following the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the economic leaders in America attempted to control inflation with deflationary measures designed to smash the workers' offensive by unemployment. This move soon proved to be useless, simply adding economic stagnation to the inflation, as the generalised pressure of wages remained as strong as ever, if not stronger. Consequently 1970 saw equal rises in prices, wages and unemployment, with stagnant production, which this cost-push inflation didn't budge an inch. To a certain extent, the original inflation had increased the efficiency of the productive apparatus, through mergers and an increase of constant capital. Nevertheless, since 1968 the consequent increase in productivity has been advancing neck and neck with wage increases. The increased capital accumulation resulting from this inflation didn't lead to expansion, but on the contrary had led to a considerable fall in profits since 1967.

Government's declarations regarding the end of inflation were consequently followed immediately by declarations regarding the end of stagnation. A discreet change in position was brought about by the need to bring about an unemployment rate of 5.5% (a socially explosive policy, especially when it is realised that young Black workers are the worst affected) in order to stabilise inflation around 4% at best. The recent lowering of interest rates, designed to encourage new investments, is one of the measures that have been taken with the aim of preventing a generalised recession, and of coming to terms with what economists call "chronic inflation" (an annual rate of about 4.5%)*.

THE UPPER CRUST



"Just work hard for the next 20 years, son, and maybe you'll be where I am now."
 "Where's that, Pop?"
 "On this side of the machine."

Here is where current contradictions of capital in the US fall back on the State. Whereas in the first instance capitalists and unionists were able to put pressure on the workers by threatening them with the bogey of stagnation and unemployment, today, government spokesmen are trying desperately to convince the "population", (if only in view of the Congressional elections) that the economy is surging forward again. Meanwhile, the well-meaning Left, and even the "revolutionaries", were discovering the working class, and beginning to retract from "integration" theories, nevertheless understanding no better than before the meaning of the wage struggle.

* The unemployment rate was about 6% in December 1970. Given the failure of previous budgets (considered responsible for the present "stagflation"), Nixon has recently declared a budget deficit for next year. The political price of unemployment would probably be too high by 1972 (an election year). The most dramatic dilemma of the President was in finding out which victims - unemployment victims or inflation victims - were the most likely potential voters.

On this subject it is worth quoting an Italian comrade, Mario Tronti, when he reminds us that "it is not the case that this possibility [ie the possibility of workers helping to give a shove forward to capitalist development towards its ultimate crisis] is directly linked to times of catastrophic crisis in the system; it can occur in an expansionist phase of development, and lead to a complete overturning of the whole social fabric of production."

We shouldn't believe that capitalists and their functionaries are absolutely and permanently conscious of their interests. This can only come about with the maturity of capitalism." (Mario Tronti, Le Plan du Capital, "Quaderni Rossi" 1963). Their difficulty in grasping the real meaning of the current wages offensive as an assault on the whole of social wealth, their incapacity to conceive of working-class struggle other than as a band of starving men forced onto the defensive, has led the American left, from the CPA to the smallest and most ridiculous of groups, to drag out once more the ideology of defensive fronts in face of the inflationist desires of big capital.

Let's see what the spokesmen of this capital have to say: Business Week, 11/11-70: "The difficult year that the country is currently experiencing could well end up with a disproportionate increase in wages. It is becoming apparent that at the critical moment it is the employers who give in, and not the workers. Even General Electric, which had preferred to suffer 3 months of strike rather than agree to large increases for the second and third years of the collective agreement, ended up accepting an agreement representing an increase of about 25% of the wage bill over a period of 3 years."

American workers are today fighting from a position of force; the threats of redundancy and recession haven't diminished the force of their attack. The only ideology that the ruling class could use was that of the 'general interest'. Nevertheless, this ideology loses its minimal material bases when American capitalism has just emerged from an almost uninterrupted period of unprecedented growth. The forerunner of the collapse of the ideology of the general interest was precisely the massive irruption of movements representing particular expressions of this general interest: those of women, of Blacks, of Mexican-Americans in the south-west (Chicanos), of Puerto-Ricans in New York and Chicago (Young Lords Movement), of youth (youth culture), not to mention homosexuals etc. Today, the open intervention of the working class, firmly clinging to its 'particular' interests, has knocked the final nail in the coffin of this already seriously eroded ideology. It is interesting to note that it has been the incursion of the working class into the social arena that has provoked the poli-

reject the assembly line, and have sent their children to school so that they may escape the fate to which they themselves had to submit. Nevertheless, many young people have been caught by the factory, but "they hate work" (Fortune, Blue-Collar Blues On The Assembly Line, July 1970). Moreover, the problem of racism is much less acute than in the 40's, when the Black people, to earn the "right to work" and to get themselves accepted in the trade unions, scabbed on strikes led for the most part by Whites. Consequently, the trade unions have today to face up to tremendous pressure from the factory, with this "explosive mixture" of angry young proletarians, and old workers who have lived through 1935 and 1946.

For example, take the case of the Steel Union, where a lot has happened recently. With all the strength of its 1.2 million members, United Steel Workers Union has just held its Congress. To the great surprise of "public opinion" (i.e. the papers) and of the bosses, Mr Abel, union leader, denied his friendly promises of a peaceful settlement of the next collective contract, and making a complete about-face, announced a strike of steel, alluminium and white iron workers for February 1971. The administrators of the economy are, of course, extremely worried about such a "change of attitude". The Wall Street Journal, very aptly named, confided to its readers that all that is a product of pressure from the base. "I've never seen so much pressure for a strike in the history of the union. Never has there been anything of the kind", declared a responsible trade unionist. We also learn that at the latest elections in the USWU, permanent officials were in several branches thrown out and replaced by young workers. At the same time, the trade union leaders expressed "their pessimism" regarding the strike's chances of success, but, they add, "in the factories, 95% of the workers want to strike, The claims put forward in the Union Congress concern the insertion of a cost-of-living clause (sliding scale, such as is at stake in the GM strike) and the striking out of the anti-strike clause of the previous contract. This latest demand by the rank-and-file met with fervent opposition in the union hierarchy, who warned the bosses: "The question of the anti-strike clause is so explosive that there could be a wave of strong unofficial strikes before the end of the contract (February). Any provocation on the part of the employers could give rise to unofficial movements." (Wall Street Journal, 20 Oct. 1970). In other words, the union bosses are about to lose control of spontaneous movements, and here, as is happening everywhere today, are sitting between two stools: not that their hearts are vacillating between the workers and the bosses - this choice was made, once and for all, a long time ago; quite simply, if they are to do their job, which is to control the working class for the benefit of the development of capitalism, the union bosses can no longer merely take to the workers what the management has decided it is in his own interests to give them!

PHILADELPHIA SOLIDARITY, c/o S.C.C., GPO Box 13.011, Phil., Pa. 19101, USA.



Solidarity, June 16, 1917.

WILL HE CONTINUE, OR WILL HE BUCK?

THE CLASS WAR RECRUITS
WE DON'T