

Interview with Supernova (<https://revuesupernova.com/>) on the current state of the U.S. working class movement and the role of communists in its development

This interview, conducted by the journal Supernova, is forthcoming in French translation and presented here for our English-speaking audience.

What is the current situation of the labor movement in the USA, and what is its class, racial, and gender composition?

In recent years the U.S. labor movement has seen an important, but still relatively modest, upsurge after a long stagnation. While the official statistics are misleading—given the numerical wizardry of the ruling class which tirelessly works to obscure the reality of the class struggle—at the beginning of the 1980s, the U.S. working class movement began a sharp decline which has lasted for decades. The sad reality is that the favorable conditions of the 1960s and 70s were squandered and the people of this country and the world paid dearly for this. In the U.S., a long period of reaction followed the defeats of the communist, revolutionary, and popular movements of this period. These defeats had a massive demoralizing impact on the U.S. proletariat.

Thus, the situation for the last 40+ years is, in some sense, analogous to the stagnation the British working class movement experienced after the defeat of the Chartist Movement in 1848. It should be noted that the British Empire was the most powerful empire and most developed capitalist country in the world during this period of stagnation. So there is a parallel there as well. It is helpful to have this as a historical frame of reference—provided that we understand that this parallel in no way implies a one-to-one correspondence—insofar as it serves as a reminder that such periods of stagnation are not unprecedented, but rather that they arise due to certain particular historical circumstances and are eventually overcome.

In fact, as noted above, there has been an upsurge in class struggle in recent years. However, it is important not to overstate the significance of this upsurge. The number of strikes and new unionization efforts are still relatively modest compared to past periods. The present workers struggles, unsurprisingly, are also economic in their nature (though there is a growing interest in study of Marxism among the advanced elements in the working class movement). What's more, it is not yet clear if this upsurge will be sustained over the coming years. Regardless, MCU's view is that the present situation is relatively more favorable, both objectively and subjectively, for communist work in the working class movement than it has been in decades. For example, 2023 saw the greatest number of work stoppages in the U.S. in the 21st Century. What's more, public support for unions is very high, at around 70%. And around 60 million unorganized workers say they would join a union if they could. All of this points to the fairly rapid growth in favorable subjective conditions among the workers for the continued growth and development of the working class movement.

It is also worth noting that the most recent period of major upsurge in the U.S. working class struggle, during the 1960s and 1970s, occurred when the Bretton Woods System was collapsing. This was only one factor which influenced the situation in that period, but it played a significant role, as the U.S. imperialists had to make a number of adjustments to their form of class rule at home and their imperialist domination of other countries. Here we can draw another parallel with the present situation, insofar as the informal imperialist system (of floating exchange rates, so-called “fiat currency,” the Eurodollar market, etc.), which replaced the Bretton Woods System, is now in major crisis—which is particularly evident in Trump’s tariffs and trade policies—a situation brought about by the relative decline of the U.S. compared to Chinese imperialism in particular, but also due to sharpening contradictions between the U.S. imperialists and their allied imperialist powers in Europe. All of this seems to indicate we will see continued improvement in the objective conditions for increased working class struggle in the U.S.

On the subjective side, it is important to note that many workers in this country are increasingly disillusioned with both major political parties. For some, who have become recently disillusioned with the Democrats, this has meant an increased interest in right-wing politics (which is an inevitable phenomenon in an imperialist power in decline). However, it is important to see that the phenomenon of disillusionment with the two parties is not reducible to this, and instead that it provides major openings for communists to teach the workers about Marxism.

The most advanced elements in the working class movement are already interested in Marxism, though they are small in number and they tend to study Marxism eclectically at present. But a large stratum of intermediate workers in the unions are quite supportive of the idea of the formation of a labor party. Actually, there was a short-lived effort to form a labor party in the 1990s as a result of mass working class anger at the Democrats for the passage of NAFTA. Although the union leaders and opportunists betrayed this movement, it was the pressure of the broad intermediate strata, following the leadership of the advanced workers, that turned the tide initially and forced the misleaders of labor to support, even if meekly and temporarily, a break with the Democrats and the formation of a labor party.

Of course, we in MCU have no illusions that such a party would be capable of addressing the fundamental issues that the proletariat faces under capitalism. But the workers frustrations with the prevailing bourgeois system and the two-party system is an important barometer of their interest in broader political change in the country and indicative of a growing, if still embryonic, awareness of the need for the proletariat to have its own party to represent its distinct class interests. All of this is an encouraging development. In this regard, we think it is important for communists in the U.S. to study closely the advice Lenin gave to British communists around the question of the labor party in *“Leftwing” Communism*.

Another important factor is the influx of progressive, revolutionary, and Marxist youth into the working class movement. A significant part of this has been due to the downward socio-economic pressure on the college

educated petty-bourgeoisie since the 2008 Financial Crisis. In a sense, Occupy Wall Street signaled the disgruntlement of this section of society in particular. The movement showed that they realized that “the American Dream” was not attainable for them; that they had accumulated a crushing burden of student loans; and that the Obama administration would not deliver anything fundamentally different politically than the Bush administration that many of them had spent their youth opposing.¹ Of course, Occupy was defeated in a few short months, unable as it was to propose any stable sort of organization and anything approaching a political strategy. But the ideological impact of this movement extended far beyond the occupations themselves.

Today, a large percentage of young people in this country are openly opposed to capitalism. Faced with little in the way of prospects to “succeed” in capitalist society, they are searching for alternatives. A significant subset of them have turned to Marxism and the working class movement. While many are still quite confused on the basics of Marxism (as is evident in the present popularity of social democratic groups, as well as revisionist groups which support Chinese Imperialism), all of this has had an impact on the working class movement. The spread of social democratic and “radical” trade unionist ideas among the workers, ideas tinged with liberalism and post-modernism, has, despite all the ideological weaknesses of these ideas, had a positive impact on the working class movement and raised some basic questions about the workers’ distinct class interest.

In summation, the labor movement faces a challenging situation at present. There are some favorable factors, and these seem poised to become more favorable in the coming years. Despite all the present challenges, and the long half-century of reaction in this country, events in recent years show the latent possibilities as well as the heroism of the working class. For example, despite the weaknesses of the UAW strike,² it showed that even with a timid social-democratic leadership, when the workers struck, they were able to win some significant victories.

Likewise, in the Summer of 2022 when the railway workers tried to strike (against the wishes of their corrupt union leadership), the Biden administration and Congress intervened to legally bar them from striking. This action to suppress the strike showed the bourgeoisie’s fear of the U.S. proletariat. It also demonstrates that the existing system of corrupt union leadership is beginning to be discredited, at least in some unions. This example is particularly important, as the advanced section of the railway workers put forward, in the lead up to the potential strike, a series of political demands (including nationalization of the railroads), which had the bourgeoisie particularly worried.

1 It should be noted that a little understood factor in discrediting Obama (and the Democratic Party more broadly) and influencing the Occupy Movement was Obama’s suppression of the Arab Spring. For many young people, this clarified, once and for all, that towards the Arab people, the Obama administration was pursuing the same racist and imperialist policies of the Bush administration.

2 These weaknesses were most evident, for example, in that the contract did not fully address the tier system in UAW nor did it address many of the other demands made by the autoworkers. This article (from a sectarian Trotskyist organization) has some correct criticisms of the limitations of the contract (though it tends to incorrectly dismiss the victories won), despite the author’s limited and sectarian perspective: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/12/08/left-d08.html>

All of this analysis of the situation can be concisely summed up in Mao's famous thesis that "the future is bright but the road is tortuous."

As for the demographics of the labor movement, they are quite interesting and do not coincide with common popular understandings of the U.S. proletariat. First, we need to differentiate between the labor movement broadly (the movement of labor against capital) and the metonymic—and therefore more narrow—use of the term "labor movement" which refers to the union movement. Contrary to the common understanding, the latter is actually quite diverse. For example, the unionization rate among women is 9.5% and among men 10.2%, meaning that in the unions as a whole there is, at present, a relatively equal gender ratio. This is a major change from even a few decades ago when the unionization rate among men was nearly double that of women.

Within the workplaces and industries with a high unionization rate there is still a gendered division of labor. But, as Engels noted, the large-scale involvement of women in productive labor and the working class movement is an important step in the fight for the liberation of women. Of course, there is still much to be done to overcome patriarchy, but the significant participation of women in the union movement is a favorable objective factor at present and the result of victories won in past struggles.

Additionally, the unionization rate among black workers is highest of all what the government classifies as "race and ethnicity groups." 11.8% of black workers are unionized compared to 9.6% of white workers and 8.5% of Asian and Hispanic workers. This is a trend which arose during, and in the wake of, the Civil Rights and Black Liberation struggles in the 1960s and 70s, and reflects the real concessions the working class won from the bourgeoisie. Again, despite the obvious objective difficulties of our present situation, the diversity of the union movement is a positive factor, especially when one considers how the ruling class in the U.S. has historically used racism to divide and weaken the working class movement.

Another notable trend is that the unionization rate is presently much higher among public sector workers (32.2%) than private sector workers (5.9%). That said, in absolute terms the number of unionized workers in the private and public sectors is almost equal. During the upheavals of the 1960s and 70s, the bourgeoisie granted the people some concessions in the form of better paying and unionized government jobs (although with these jobs, which include everything from teachers, to low-level bureaucrats, garbage workers, and everything in between, there are often legal prohibitions against striking at all) to the proletariat, especially the urban workers from oppressed groups. While these concessions were won in struggle, the bourgeoisie has, for the last fifty years, seen these jobs as essential to curtail open antagonism in the class struggle. They hope these jobs will buy complacency from a significant enough section of the urban workers to prevent the developing of urban rebellions akin to what occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s. Therefore, it is particularly notable that many of these jobs are now potentially being cut under the aegis of the "government efficiency" efforts of DOGE and the Trump Administration. It should also be noted that a small, but not totally insignificant sec-

tion, of the public sector union employees are not working class. These include higher ranking government bureaucrats as well as the police (who are generally unionized in the U.S.).

In the private sector, there is a particularly high unionization rate among utilities and logistical workers (and we have found conditions particularly favorable for communist organizing among the latter). In contrast, unionization rates among farm workers and retail workers are very low. What's more, the unionization rates for farm workers would be even lower if the huge number of undocumented workers were taken into account.

It is also important to note that the unionization rate is particularly low among young people and part-time workers, but that the part-time unionization rate has been growing, especially as unionization efforts in service sector work, such as Starbucks, have experienced some successes.

There is tremendous regional variation in the U.S. Our country is large and very diverse; the regional particularities are quite significant. This is reflected in the union movement as well. For example, some states (such as Hawaii and New York) have union membership rates over 20%, while others (such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and South Dakota) have rates below 3%.

The unionization rates are, of course, only one factor to take into account when considering the proletariat's level of class consciousness. For example, among a significant section of organized workers, there has been long-standing complacency in the face of decades of attacks from the capitalists. On the other hand, with the shifting objective and subjective situation in recent years, many workers have grown more militant, even while unionization rates have not yet changed significantly.

All of this is just a broad overview of the union movement in the U.S. It is a diverse and complex movement, with a rich history of struggle, but this history is also checkered with many defeats and betrayals. This is not surprising, given that, as Mao noted, the logic of the people is "struggle, defeat; struggle, defeat; struggle, defeat; until the final victory." However, it is incumbent upon communists to take stock of both sides of this legacy so as to build off the victories and avoid repeating the defeats. It should also be noted that while the union movement is only one section of the broader movement of labor against capital, it is a particularly important one.

What are the main trade union organizations, and what is their influence within the labor movement in the USA? Are there currents and organizations of class-struggle unionism and workers' autonomy?

In the U.S. there are a few main trade union organizations. The largest is the National Education Association (NEA) which is comprised of public school employees, including teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, janitors, and more. It has around 3 million members. The second largest is the Service Employees International

Union (SEIU) which has close to two million members in the private and public sectors, mostly janitor, nurses, and other healthcare workers. Two other important and large unions are the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) and the United Autoworkers (UAW). They have around 1,400,000 and 1 million members respectively. The Teamsters primarily are logistics and warehouse workers, where the UAW is comprised of autoworkers and other workers in similar industrial jobs, but also (and this is a new development in recent years), UAW has had a large influx of graduate students who have unionized.

A large number of unions in the U.S. are part of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which in total represents around 15 million workers. In order to understand what the AFL-CIO is today, it is necessary to understand at least a bit of its history. This organization traces its roots back to the late 19th century when the union movement began and the various craft unions established a federation to increase their collective power. However, the limitations of the craft union movement were not overcome by federating, and the AFL, from its inception, played, at best a divided role in advancing the working class interest. For example, from the beginning the AFL was openly pro-business unionism. Its leadership, especially the infamous Samuel Gompers (who had previously been something of a socialist), openly collaborated with the bourgeoisie, adopted racist and discriminatory policies against non-white workers, and opposed Marxists and communists efforts in the unions.

From its inception, the Communist Party USA led struggles to amalgamate the existing craft unions in the AFL into industrial unions. Amalgamation was actually a movement that predated the formation of the Communist Party and had been taken up, in various forms and in various ways, by the advanced elements in the working class movement for decades. The struggle for amalgamation were struggles against the narrow craft-unionism and class collaborationist leadership of the AFL. The Communist Party leaders, especially William Z. Foster, were actually inspired by the work of French Syndicalists and their strategy of “boring from within” to wrest leadership of the unions from the reactionary misleaders of labor. This campaign of amalgamation and boring from within, which the Communist Party took up from its formation at the beginning of the 1920s, was incredibly popular among the proletariat, but met with fierce opposition from the bourgeoisie and its agents in the AFL leadership.

Due to some mistakes the CPUSA made (but also a challenging objective situation), the amalgamation movement was partially unsuccessful and did not initially lead to large-scale amalgamation of the craft unions (thus many craft unions persist to this day, especially in construction and in the railway industries). One significant mistake that the CPUSA made, under the guidance from the Comintern, was to basically cease their efforts to bore from within for a number of years after 1929. They instead tried to create independent “red” unions under an organization which they created, known as the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). While they were somewhat successful—at its peak the TUUL unions had over 100,000 members—they severely neglected work in the AFL in this period (which was much larger than the TUUL). They thus prematurely tried to break a large section of workers away from the reactionary union leadership, but instead ended up pulling out

only the most advanced workers, who saw the basis for a semi-revolutionary unionism, and thereby isolated themselves from many intermediate and backwards workers.

With the turn to the Popular Front Policy, the CPUSA and the Comintern realized the mistake they made and the TUUL reintegrated into the AFL. This was in 1935 when the movement for amalgamation and industrial unionization was quite strong *within the AFL*. A section of the union leadership, including even some die-hard reactionaries, were strongly supporting the push for industrial unionism. The reasons for this are complex, and cannot be analyzed in full in this article, but they include the immense popularity of industrial unionism among the proletariat, *as well as* the recognition among a section of the capitalists that a regulated and controlled industrial unionism could help to ensure greater stability politically and in production itself.

The CPUSA, in part because of their late reintegration of the TUUL into the AFL, was thus somewhat unprepared to lead the movement for industrial unionism, given their limited influence among the masses of workers in the AFL. However, more significant than this were the ideological confusions and mistakes among the CPUSA leadership. In part due to the mistakes of the Popular Front policy as a whole, but primarily due to the internal political weaknesses in the CPUSA, the party was content to cede not just official leadership but initiative overall to the reactionary union leaders in the fight for industrial unionism. This was most evident in the dissolution of the communist fractions in the unions, a policy which, at the 7th Congress of the Comintern, Dimitrov had suggested might be necessary to maintain united fronts with social-democrats. Thus reactionaries like John Lewis ended up leading the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) when it broke off from the AFL. The communists, despite being incredibly dedicated and skilled organizers and doing the bulk of the work in many industrial unionizing drives, often ceded their independent initiative to the reactionary union leaders, and thus acted as tails of the bourgeoisie. This played a key role in the consolidation of the CPUSA to revisionism, the particular form of which was initially Browderism (a vulgar pragmatism and American exceptionalism).

The CPUSA had totally degenerated by the end of the Popular Front period, eventually dissolving during the World War. While it reconstituted itself after WWII, it never resolved its basic ideological issues or regained its political or organizational strength. Thus, when Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 and drove all communists out of the unions, the CPUSA was not able to mount anything approaching an effective fight against this reactionary measure. This was during the McCarthyist era, when not just communists but all real working class leaders and progressives were driven from the unions and the U.S. government directly installed pliant reactionary leaders, such as George Meaney, in the unions. This laid the groundwork for the CIO to re-join the AFL in 1955.

There is, of course, much more to this history that I can cover in this brief overview, and a number of important struggles have obviously taken place since 1955. But this digression on the history of the AFL-CIO is

meant to clarify that we are presently living in a situation defined by the successes and failures of the past working class movement and of the communist movement.

In particular, the union movement today still suffers from the failures to accomplish widespread amalgamation. Thus, when the railway workers tried to strike in the Fall of 2022, one of the main demands of the most advanced workers was for amalgamation of the old craft union system which still divides railway workers by trade. Likewise, in the construction industry, many workers who work on the same building are members of different unions. The ruling class uses this system to pit the workers against each other by trade and weaken their ability to organize together. The continued existence of the craft-union system speaks to the weaknesses of the U.S. working class movement and is a result of the defeats of past efforts at amalgamation. Needless to say, the present leadership of the AFL-CIO has no interest in taking up the campaign for amalgamation.

In another sense, our present situation is also defined by the struggles of the 1930s. Namely, that it was in this period that the New Deal was passed by the FDR administration. This represented a significant change in the bourgeoisie's strategy for class rule domestically. One important feature of the New Deal was the basically open alliance between the union leadership and the Democratic Party. This was the era when major legislation such as the National Labor Relations Act was passed, that formalized and legally codified a new framework of government-company-union relations. To be clear, the working class movement had grown powerful enough, in this period, to force the bourgeoisie to make significant concessions, including the legal right to organize a union, to strike around economic issues, etc. But the bourgeoisie made these concessions so as to co-opt the working class movement and prevent the form of struggle from becoming openly antagonistic. This cooptation was not inevitable but the political and ideological weaknesses of the CPUSA prevented it from successfully exposing and opposing the machinations of the bourgeoisie.

This paradigm of alignment between the Democratic Party and union leadership is presently breaking down. For decades, major unions would organize their members, in every election cycle, to campaign for Democratic Party candidates. A significant number still do. However, increasingly some of the unions are less closely aligned with the Democrats. This does not mean that union leadership is promoting an independent working class politics. The tendency has been instead for some leaders, such as Teamsters President Sean O'Brien, to effectively say they will work with whichever of the two parties gives them a better deal. In articulating this pragmatic approach—and it is important to note that pragmatism is an imperialist ideology—O'Brien openly promoted chauvinist and "America First" politics, arguing that these serve the interests of American workers. However, despite all this, the shift away from the Democrats is helpful, insofar as it indicates the weakening of the paradigm that unions must support the Democrats because they are the lesser evil and that any opposition to the Democrats will supposedly mean disaster for workers. All of this provides some greater opening for communists to struggle in the unions for an independent working class politics.

In the U.S. today, there are also various organizations within the unions. Of particular numerical and ideological significance are the reform organizations founded and inspired by the Trotskyists. The most significant of these are Labor Notes and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). These organizations were founded by Trotskyists who explicitly reject Lenin's analysis of class consciousness in *What is to Be Done?* Instead, they argue that by simply growing the union movement, this will automatically lead to "socialist consciousness" among the workers. One of their leaders infamously stated that "the Maoists ruined the labor movement in the 1970s by trying to talk to workers about the Vietnam War." His argument is that such discussion of key political questions is "divisive." It is notable that these Trotskyists also explicitly reject Lenin's analysis in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

TDU is a reform organization in the Teamsters Union. Despite the backwards politics of its leadership, it did fight, for a significant time, for some real reform in the union against the corrupt and mafia-affiliated leadership of people like Jimmy Hoffa Jr. However, in the most recent IBT Elections, the TDU leadership joined a coalition with Sean O'Brien and were rewarded with many official positions of leadership in the union. They have since abandoned any effort at reforming the union and abandoned much of their prior reform program (such as calling for the elimination of pay and tier differentials between part and full time workers, etc.).

Despite this betrayal, TDU and Labor Notes remain incredibly influential in the Teamsters and the broad left. Many progressive young people and semi-Marxists who get involved in the working class movement initially look to these organizations for inspiration, guidance, and education. Even reform movements in other unions have drawn a lot of inspiration, and strategy, from TDU and Labor Notes. For example, the erstwhile caucus Uniting All Workers of Democracy (UAWD) within UAW—which just dissolved—drew heavily from TDU in their efforts to reform UAW.

On the other hand, TDU's compromises with the reactionary union leadership have partially discredited them. For example, out of frustration with TDU, a section of Teamsters split off a few years ago and formed a new workers organization called Teamsters Mobilize (TM). After its formation, some of our comrades joined this organization. Teamsters Mobilize played the leading role in opposing the sell-out UPS contract in the summer of 2023. In contrast TDU supported this contract and tried to discredit those opposing it. In Teamsters Mobilize's principles they state, "True reform and militancy against large corporations is essential to building worker power and turning the tide towards a worker-led union, and a worker-led country."

Additionally, at the 2023 TDU convention, TDU leadership shut down attempts, spearheaded by Teamsters Mobilize, to pass a resolution calling for Teamsters to support the Palestinian Trade Unions and to sell the Israel Bonds they own (the Teamsters' pension funds invests heavily in Israel) after October 7th. This discredited TDU in the eyes of many workers, progressive young people, and semi-Marxists. All of this provided fertile ground for communists to grow our influence in the union movement as the established "left" and reform groups so openly collaborate with the bourgeois misleaders of labor.

There are other organizations, like TM, which represent the advanced workers in given unions and industries. These include groups like Railroad Workers United (RWU) which was the leading force in the push for the railroad strike in 2022. Across the union movement a number of smaller groups have formed in recent years, often with the involvement of communists and semi-Marxists, which have as their aim the ousting of corrupt union leadership, breaking the alliance of the Democratic Party with the unions, and the establishment of an independent working class politics. These are promising signs, even if many of these efforts are still in their infancy.

As for the question you raised about class struggle unionism, the term has a specific connotation in the U.S. left. A book titled *Class Struggle Unionism* was written by Joe Burns (a union contract negotiator) and published in 2022. The book has some positive aspects and calls for a more militant unionism (in contrast to the typical “business unionism” in the U.S.) and nominally opposes capitalism. However, the framework proposed in this book is extremely limited and reduces the goals of the working class movement to a narrow trade union struggle for gradual reforms. Burns and his adherents do not understand at all the lessons of *What is to Be Done?*, in which Lenin points out “trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie.”

So, while there is a positive aspect that more people are interested in opposing the corrupt and reactionary union officialdom (and waging some increased level of class struggle), the framework proposed by Burns is extremely politically and ideologically limited (it is often literally limited to the shop floor). What’s more, we have found that most adherents of Burns’ views are not even consistent opponents of the reactionary union leadership. They are not stalwart or reliable forces in waging the trade-union struggle “pure and simple” despite their professed commitment to this. In other words, a commitment to the pure and simple trade-union struggle is actually an excuse not just for abdicating the important ideological and political tasks that must be done to raise the consciousness of the class *beyond* trade union consciousness, but actually also a justification for retreat from, compromise with, and deference towards the established union leadership.

In contrast to the idea of a simple class struggle unionism, our view in MCU is that communists must work tirelessly to constitute the proletariat into a class-for-itself. This means far more than just promoting union struggles—though communist work in the unions is essential—it means training the workers to be class conscious (which requires an understanding of all the classes in society, the need for revolution, and the ultimate aim of the emancipation of labor from capital) so that the proletariat can exist as a class in open antagonism with the bourgeoisie and lead the other progressive sections of the population in the revolutionary struggle. This requires, of course, the eventual formation of a communist party.

Leaving aside Joe Burns’ views in particular, I should note that our assessment is that there is a growing interest in more militant union politics broadly among workers and specifically among the left and semi-Marxists.

In my view, the term “worker’s autonomy” should likewise be divided. In MCU, we generally have used the term “political independence of the proletariat” instead of workers autonomy. We have done this both to take a distance from the autonomous movements in Italy, with which we have some deeper ideological disagreements, and because we do not think autonomy is the correct framework to understand the antagonistic contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels note:

“It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today.”

Their point, which is subtle, is that in *its being* the proletariat is antagonistic to the bourgeoisie, but in its *existence* in the bourgeois world at a given time, it does not necessarily have class consciousness or organization. Therefore, the form of struggle between these two classes may be non-antagonistic, even though, in its essence, the contradiction is antagonistic. Communists must do the work to develop the proletariat, ideologically, politically, and organizationally so that the form of struggle can reflect the essence of the contradiction.

This is what Marx and Engels referred to in *The Communist Manifesto* when they emphasized that one of the immediate aims of communists is the “formation of the proletariat into a class.” They were not referring to the proletariat’s existence as a social class, but rather its existence as a political class in open antagonism with the bourgeoisie. This is the difference between class-in-itself and class-for-itself. However, even when the proletariat forms into a class-for-itself—and therefore is engaged in active political struggle against the bourgeoisie and therefore putting forward the goal of fundamentally reshaping society—it is still impacted by its existence in the bourgeois world and must wage a continuous struggle against the corrosive and deleterious impact of bourgeois ideology in its ranks.

This is tied to one final point on this topic. As noted above, in MCU we see communists’ work in the unions as indispensable. However, this is not easy or simple work. As Lenin noted in *“Leftwing” Communism*, it is a long and arduous struggle to discredit the reactionary union leaders, drive them out of the unions, and break their ideological and organizational influence over the backwards and intermediate workers. Every step along the way our work as communists is exposed to the dangers of right and “left” deviations. There is no way to completely eliminate the dangers of making these deviations, as they result from the dialectical nature of reality itself. Those who vainly hope to, once and for all, eliminate any danger of deviation from communist work—often through a supposedly perfect form of organization or through the guarantee of a teleological concept of history—fall into idealism. One such attempt historically has been the creation of supposedly “pure” revolutionary unions.

This idealist fantasy is similar to Hegel’s idealism. Insofar as Hegel posits that the development of the Absolute Idea is a circle, and the Whole is the self-movement of the One, he is incapable of thinking of deviations. As communists we must not only reject explicit Hegelian Idealism (which openly posits the being of the

One), but also tendencies within the communist movement itself, to fall into idealist circularity, tendencies which are opposed to the materialist spirals of periodization. Indeed, the whole history of the communist movement shows that deviations abound within the movement, and if left unchecked, no form of organization can save us the setbacks that follow from these deviations.

In the pages of our magazine, we have often discussed the “new” unionization of precarious and low-wage sectors in the USA (Amazon, Starbucks, the Fight for \$15 campaign, etc.). What is the weight of these sectors within the labor movement in the USA?

To adequately answer this question, it is necessary to explain some history of the recent decades in the U.S. Readers who are interested in a more in-depth analysis can refer to our paper on *Neomercantilism*, which covers all of this in much greater detail. After the collapse of the Bretton Woods System, the U.S. went into what was known as the stagflation in the 1970s. Measured in dollar prices, this period was in fact inflationary with little economic growth. However, if measured in gold prices, it is clear that this period was much closer to a classical depression with significant deflation; this is important to understand as this period saw the massive debasement of the dollar with the abandonment of the gold standard. While it was, in a meaningful sense, a classical depression in the U.S. it was also a depression exacerbated by the significant challenges the U.S. ruling class faced at home and abroad.

Thus by the end of the 1970s, the majority of the ruling class had consolidated to the view that some significant changes were needed from the post-War consensus of a Keynesian economics inspired form of bourgeois class rule. The Volcker Rate Hike marks this shift, which was the beginning of the Neoliberal era. This led to significant changes not only in the superstructure, but, of course, also the economic base in the U.S. This period is sometimes incorrectly referred to as one of “deindustrialization,” but the truth is that the U.S. remained a major industrial powerhouse throughout the whole Neoliberal period. That said, a good deal of industrial jobs were outsourced overseas. Others were shifted to states and regions with lower wages and without much history of union activity (especially the U.S. South). Others were eliminated through the rising organic composition of capital.

These are just a few among many significant changes that happened in the U.S. economy over the past half-century. For example, the rise of computer technology which allowed for a massive expansion of the clearing house system and the related rise of what is sometimes simplistically labeled as “financialization” also occurred in this period. A detailed analysis of all of these changes is beyond the scope of this interview.

However, with the shift in the pattern of industrial production and an increasing reliance on imports, in the U.S. economy as a whole, the logistics industry grew significantly. In urban centers, particularly in the North, logistics jobs and service-sector jobs have grown in the vacuum left by the flight of industry from these cities.

Thus a large portion of the urban, unskilled proletariat is now employed in both the logistics industry and small-scale commercial establishments.

The workers in these sectors face very difficult conditions, as is well known. But they also, especially logistics workers, play a crucial role in the economy. This is particularly true for workers at Amazon. That said, the recent efforts to organize Amazon workers have struggled in part because of the difficult objective and subjective conditions at Amazon, and in part because of the misleadership of the reactionary union leaders in the Teamsters. It should be noted that the Teamsters leadership is particularly inept. In 2024, when many other unions led by reactionaries grew, the Teamsters shrank significantly—by 16,000 members. In comparison, SEIU grew by over 100,000 members, Unite Here grew by 31,000, and United Food and Commercial Service Workers (UFCW) grew by 18,000. So there is a particularly notable incompetence and disorganization in the Teamsters leadership.

That said, our view is also that the conditions at Amazon are not the most favorable for organizing at present. Some comrades in MCU have written a forthcoming article analyzing the defeat of the independent CAUSE union drive at the Amazon facility in Garner, North Carolina and the broader organizing efforts at Amazon. Here are two excerpts from this forthcoming article:

Amazon, in its current state, will not be defeated except through a bitter struggle which brings the great logistics giant to its knees and compels the company to negotiate with its workers. As daunting as this prospect is, our class has won this type of monumental victory in the past, and even much bigger victories. We must seriously and collectively study this history, to identify the lessons which can guide us to future victories. Those who are interested in taking on massive capitalist giants like Amazon need to take a much longer-term strategic view than that of isolated campaigns at single warehouses. As we will show, the organization of mass-production industries required something greater than the sheer will of a few dedicated organizers or funding from leading bureaucrats. These victories were possible in part due to objective developments – especially the spontaneous upsurge of the working class in those industries – but also due to subjective developments prepared years in advance of the great victories of the 1930s and 40s. Namely, the dissemination of Marxism among the working class, the boring-from-within of militants in reactionary unions, and the construction of a real leading Communist Party³ – all of which made possible the triumphs of organization in the mass-production industries of the 20th century.

And

As long as the proletarian class has existed, it has spontaneously resisted its exploitation in all types of struggles, including massive and explosively militant ones. This trend will undoubtedly continue – the US working class has been laid low for decades now, but the capitalists can never destroy its ability and will to resist as long as wage-labor

3 [footnote from the original document] We must be absolutely firm here—a Communist Party is not simply a moderately-large group of communists who grant themselves the title. A Communist Party, a Party of the Leninist type is, to quote the Comintern; “part of the working class, namely, the most advanced, most class-conscious, and hence most revolutionary part...The Communist Party is differentiated from the working class as a whole by the fact that it has a clear view of the entire historical path of the working class in its totality and endeavours, at every bend in this road, to defend the interests not of separate groups or trades, but of the working class as a whole.” This Party is constructed through the conscious act of communists fusing with the working class, and struggling to put Marxism at the head of the working class movement, particularly by winning over the advanced workers. Under capitalism, this Party lays the ground for, and ultimately leads, the overthrow of the capitalist class through revolution.

exists. Our job as communists is not, strictly speaking, to generate these upsurges which are inevitable parts of capitalist society. Nor is it to wait around for their emergence, and tail behind them while glorifying the “self-activity” of the working class. Instead we must link up with, provide leadership to, and work to advance the spontaneous struggles of the working class, and put them on a more solid, class-conscious basis.

Concretely, this means that communists should not burn through what little forces they have in futile attempts to organize Amazon, while the objective basis for organization among the workers remains scant. Rather, communists should focus on two key tasks. First and foremost, lay the ground for building a Communist Party by solidifying our organizational forms, and strengthening our theoretical understanding of the contemporary problems facing the working class movement, as well as the lessons afforded by its history to date. Secondly, by uniting with and supporting the most-advanced sections of the presently existing union movement, which is to say those sections which are taking up proletarian positions on key questions. In the Teamsters, this means supporting Teamsters Mobilize – which has taken a strong proletarian stand on the issue of class-collaboration in their union.⁴ Only by supporting, developing and widening the influence of this and other left-wing forces in the union, can the broad masses of Teamsters be won over to principles like class-independence, working-class unity and ultimately proletarian revolution. On that basis, the Teamsters, with all its resources, can take up the task of organizing Amazon, if and when the objective circumstances permit it.

We must unite with the most-advanced sections of the working class, we must put revolutionary theory in their hands as a guide to action, and on that basis we must build a disciplined, dedicated organization – a genuine Communist Party. Only with this all-sided, far-sighted political leadership will Amazon, and every other industrial colossus be organized. Only thus can the working-class wake from its deep slumber, and lead the way towards a new society.

All of this being said, and despite all of their limitations, these new unionizing efforts at Amazon and elsewhere have been notable for a number of reasons. First, they point to a growing wave of efforts—admittedly still weak and confused in a number of key respects—to organize unorganized workers. They also point to the growing interest in the unorganized sections of the working class (which is still the vast majority in the U.S.) in the class struggle, even if still in an embryonic form.

What’s more, these unionizing efforts are taking place in sectors with a disproportionate concentration of immigrant workers. These include not just immigrants with citizenship or green-cards but also those with various new legal statuses that give them some protection above being undocumented, but which are often tied closely to their employment. Others have a legal status that can be revoked at any time for a whole section of workers from a given country, like the Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The U.S. is an extremely diverse country with a proletariat from all over the world. Therefore, if there is some success in these unionizing efforts it could not only impact other immigrant workers (and solidarity between native-born and immigrant workers is essential for the proletarian movement in any imperialist country) but also the proletarian movement in other countries.

⁴ [footnote from the original document] Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), by contrast, has more or less completely liquidated its criticisms (which were always lackluster and actively steered away from the kind of honest, proletarian appraisals of the state, the legal regime, bourgeois politicians, etc. that develop proletarian consciousness) of the Teamsters bureaucracy and been absorbed as a faction within it.

Many immigrant workers in the U.S. have strong ties to their home country. They often send money home in the form of remittances and hope to one day return home to their countries. These ties reflect the international nature of the proletariat as a class and can be powerful links for building up proletarian internationalism. Historically, immigrant workers have also contributed significantly to the U.S. labor movement by bringing the lessons from the class struggle from their home countries to the U.S.

To promote proletarian internationalism, it is essential for communists to learn from the efforts of Marx and Engels in the 1st International. For example, in situations where the capitalists import foreign workers as strike breakers—a practice which remains common to this day—Marx and Engels were able to overcome potential chauvinism among the workers and promote strong internationalist bonds. In our article on *Neomercantilism*, we wrote about Marx’s remarks in his 1871 interview with R. Landor:

In this reply Marx clarifies a number of important points. First, that the strike movement is supported by opposition to the importation of foreign workers. Second, that this is carried out not only in the country where the strike is taking place, but also (if possible), in the country from which the bourgeoisie hopes to import workers. In this way, the fraternal bonds between the workers of different countries are strengthened. This is particularly important since, in its essence, the proletariat is an international class, and the working class movement of each country is but a detachment of the world proletarian revolution, even if workers of a given country must, first and foremost, settle the score with “their own” bourgeoisie. Promoting this proletarian internationalist perspective is essential today if Marxists are to combat the neo-nativist populist ideologies the U.S. bourgeoisie is increasingly promoting.

Finally, Marx also clarifies the end goal of the working class struggle is the transformation of society. He leaves implicit in this interview that he means the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and ultimately the establishment of a classless, communist society. But without clarity on this point, the ultimate aim of the working class struggle, it is all too easy for workers to be tricked by one bourgeois charlatan or another who aims to divert the struggle of the proletariat into the dead end of xenophobia and chauvinism. This is typified by Trump’s right-wing populism which focuses the anger of the masses broadly, and the proletariat in particular, on a particular section of the bourgeoisie and the state, and thereby convincing them to support him and the bourgeoisie who have lined up behind him.

All of this being said, given our limited forces and the issues with the existing union movement, our conclusion is that it does not presently make sense to concentrate our forces on organizing the unorganized.

The strength and importance of the labor movement in the USA are often underestimated. The labor movement has a rich history of struggles. Can you provide your historical assessment?

This is a very complicated question and one which cannot be thoroughly answered in one interview. Despite some shortcomings, Philip Foner’s series *The History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, which spans 11 volumes and only goes to 1932, provides a good overview of the history of the working class movement in this country. Foner is quite sympathetic to the work of the Communist Party USA and he firmly sides with the proletariat in their struggles. If readers wish to get a fairly comprehensive overview of the labor movement in the U.S. and its proud history of struggle, I recommend that they start with this series.

That said, I will share a few particular important examples of the heroism and determination of the working class in this country.

The first is the Great Railway Strike of 1877. This history is sadly often forgotten today, a result of the collective amnesia of our shared history of struggle which the bourgeoisie has promoted. This strike was part of the struggle for the eight-hour workday and was directly inspired by the Paris Commune. In fact, during the strike, communists in the Workingmen's Party (WP) in St. Louis established what became known as the St. Louis Commune. For almost a week, the communists and workers ran the city, before the commune was defeated by reaction.

But let me explain the larger situation before diving into the St. Louis Commune. First, after the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, many workers and revolutionaries immigrated to the U.S. In the Midwest in particular there was a huge concentration of German immigrants. This influx of immigrant workers helped to radicalize the U.S. working class, as the German workers shared with them the revolutionary ideas and experiences of the European working class movement. However, even after the Civil War eliminated slavery, the working class movement in the U.S. still had not formed any significant number of unions. When the economic panic of 1873 developed into the Long Depression (which lasted longer than the Great Depression and saw wages fall by 45% or more), workers faced desperate conditions and had few capable organizations of their own which would fight for their interests.

It should be noted that, in the wake of the Civil War, the U.S. bourgeoisie pursued an intensely deflationary policy. This was, in part, to satisfy the demands from the London Bankers, from whom they were borrowing vast sums of money to aid in financing the industrialization of the country in general and the proliferation of the railroad system in particular. This, in addition to the depression, played a significant role in driving down wages in this period. What's more, the deflation decimated small farmers, who saw the sale prices of their crops collapse. Many lost their farms and migrated to the cities in search of work. All of this increased competition among the workers and gave the capitalists the ability to drive wages even lower.

And yet, in this period of depression and increased competition, the workers across the country rose in huge numbers, showing that the proletariat, while determined by bourgeois society, also exceeds its determination by bourgeois society and is capable of far more than being just another class in capitalism. In the summer of 1877, the strike was sparked by the B&O Railroad president cutting wages by 10% and increasing dividends to shareholders by the same amount (other railroads, even when making a profit, cut wages even further, up to as much as 50%). However, the strike was not contained to one single railroad company.

As the strike began, workers in West Virginia and then Baltimore struck and blocked the railroads. The local militias were called in to break the strike, but the workers surrounded them and drove them off. The scabs refused to work. The whole system the bourgeoisie had in place to control the workers was not working as intended. The military was sent in by the Federal government, first the national guard, then, after the National

Guard was defeated by the strikers in Baltimore, the active troops and Marines. This pattern would be repeated in cities all across the country. The strikes spread like wildfire across the U.S., with over 100,000 workers joining in, despite the lack of unions to organize the strikes.

On July 21, the strike reached St. Louis. That day, the Workingmen's Party in St. Louis held a series of meetings and adopted the following resolution:

Whereas, The United States government has allied itself on the side of capital and against labor; therefore,

Resolved, That we, the workingmen's party of the United States, heartily sympathize with the employees of all the railroads in the country who are attempting to secure just and equitable reward for their labor.

Resolved, That we will stand by them in this most righteous struggle of labor against robbery and oppression, through good and evil report, to the end of the struggle.

It should be noted that around 20% of the whole membership of the Party was in St. Louis. This was an extremely diverse Party. In St. Louis alone there were four different language sections (German, French, English, and Bohemian). The next day, 10,000 workers rallied in downtown St. Louis under the leadership of the Workingmen's Party, which then elected an executive committee to lead what became the first general strike in U.S. history. Initially the rally was planned around a series of important reform demands, including jobs for the unemployed, an end to child labor, and an eight-hour workday. However, these demands quickly grew into calls for an end to capitalism and the nationalization of industry.

The strike quickly spread across the whole city, with striking workers going around to other factories to call on the workers there to join in. The workers stopped the train traffic through the city. The steamboat workers and wharf workers (St. Louis is located on the Mississippi River) joined in. Many of these workers were black and solidarity between the white and black workers was strong throughout the general strike, as the system of racial division promoted by the ruling class began to break down in the face of working class power. For a few days, no business in the whole city ran without the consent of the Workingmen's Party.

But the leadership of the WP had not studied the lessons of the Paris Commune, and they did not understand the force that reaction would bring to bear against them, nor the tasks that the proletariat must carry out if it wishes to overthrow the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Recognizing the threat posed by the St. Louis Commune, one bourgeois paper, *The Missouri Republican*, stated "The Internationalists have taken control of the strike, same as the communists who took control of Paris." The ruling class quickly armed a 10,000 person militia, aptly named "Citizens Organization for the Protection of Property." This militia worked with state and federal troops to round up the strike leaders and arrest them. While the crushing of the St. Louis Commune was relatively bloodless, its defeat demoralized the working class movement in the city and around the country, especially as it coincided with the defeat of many of the other railway strikes that summer.

That said, the defeat of the St. Louis Commune was hardly the end of the working class movement in the U.S. generally or the fight for the eight-hour workday in particular. It stands to this day as a shining example of proletarian internationalism and of the courageous spirit of the U.S. working class. It also was a harbinger of things to come, insofar as the initial striking workers did not discriminate against black workers, but instead worked hand in hand with them to run the city. Thus the first general strike in the U.S. was also a sign of the relentless struggle that the proletariat would wage, in the wake of the Civil War, against racism. This struggle would be taken up by the Industrial Workers of the World, then the CPUSA, then, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Panthers and the Revolutionary Communist Party. Communists today in the U.S. continue this essential work.

Another example, which I will discuss more briefly is the miners' struggles in the U.S. The miners have historically fought some of the most militant and bloody battles in the U.S. For about fifty years between 1890 and 1939 the coal miners in the Appalachian mountains, but also in Colorado and other states, fought intermittent armed battles against the capitalists, their hired guns, and even government militias and troops. One of the most famous of these is the nearly decade long conflict (from 1931-39) in Harlan County, Kentucky. The coal miners there fought a ceaseless struggle against the coal barons and their government.

Back in 1912, Florence Reed, whose father was a striking miner at the time, wrote the now internationally famous song "Which Side are You On?" She was twelve years old at the time. When, in 1931, her husband, also a coal miner, joined the strikes in Harlan County, she updated the lyrics for that struggle.

Just over 40 years later, when, in 1973, the coal miners in Harlan County went on strike again, Florence Reed was there, still singing her song and supporting their struggle. All of this was captured in the incredible documentary, *Harlan County USA*. In this documentary on the struggle in the 1970s, the leading role of the women workers in the struggle is on full display. In particular, Lois Scott, one of the women miners, displays incredible courage and heroism over and over again throughout the struggle. These miners' struggles thus testify not only to the courage and militancy of the U.S. working class in general, but to the role of the women workers in particular, who have a long and important history in the U.S. movement. This history of course did not begin with the miners' struggles in Harlan County, nor did it end with them.

The popular songs, which play throughout the documentary also demonstrate the enormous creative potential of the working class. Nearly every major event in the struggle was put to lyrics and thus popularized through the use of songs.

It should also be noted that the importance of these struggles lives on today. In the UPS contract struggle in the summer of 2023, some women workers at UPS, with some other musicians, made a new version of "Which Side are You On?" which became something of an anthem for the workers opposing the sell-out contract concocted behind closed doors by the corrupt union leadership, UPS executives, and the Biden Administration.

Lastly, I will mention briefly a prison revolt in the U.S. known as the Attica Uprising. This occurred in September, 1971, just a month after imprisoned Black Panther leader George Jackson was murdered by prison guards. In an extremely overcrowded prison in upstate New York, over a thousand prisoners rose up and took control of most of the Attica prison. This uprising was organized by the Panthers' prison section which had several hundred members in Attica alone. These imprisoned Panthers (many of whom joined the Party while in prison) had been reading Lenin, Mao, and other communist revolutionaries as part of their political education. For years before the uprising, the Panthers, as well as some other groups, had been doing political education work among the prisoners to teach them of their class interest in revolution.

And while the Panthers played a significant role in the Attica Uprising, it was far from just an uprising of black prisoners. Prisoners of all different backgrounds joined in and, even before the uprising, were beginning to develop proletarian class consciousness. For example, one of the white prisoners Samuel Melville, in a letter he sent a month before the uprising, wrote "when you come right down to it, of course, there's only one revolutionary change as far as the prison system is concerned. But until the day comes, when enough of our brothers and sisters realize what that one revolutionary change is, we must always be certain our demands will exceed what the pigs are able to grant." This level of political consciousness did not come about spontaneously. It was the result of the concerted effort of communists to educate the prisoners on the true nature of capitalist society in the U.S.

Shortly before the uprising the prisoners sent demands to the New York state prison commissioner that, in addition to reforming prison living conditions and ending the political persecution of prisoners, the prison authorities recognized the prisoners' rights *as workers* to form labor unions, to receive proper wages, and more. These demands were, unsurprisingly, rejected by the prison authorities. The prisoners thus felt they had no choice but to stage an uprising.

When they rose up at Attica, they were explicit that they did not seek to simply reform the prison system. Rather, they called for the overthrow of the U.S. government and for the liberation of oppressed peoples in the country. The prisoners requested that Bobby Seale, then Chairman of the Black Panther Party, negotiate with the New York Governor on their behalf, and requested that Mao negotiate with then-U.S. president Nixon.

During the uprising the ruling class did all that they could to discredit the prisoners. They constantly tried to emphasize that the whole uprising was a conspiracy of "a few revolutionaries" or "hard-core Maoist militants." While the presence of revolutionaries was decisive in guiding the uprising, they were only successful insofar as they were able to win the confidence of the broader section of prisoners, who had not only come to see that there was no legal channel to address their basic demands, but were also increasingly aware that a revolution was ultimately needed to overcome the prison system as well as the broader issues in the society. This was expressed particularly sharply by a series of demands that the prisoners put forward during the uprising,

once they became locked in a standoff with the state. Among these demands was that the prisoners be transported “out of confinement, to a Non-Imperialistic country.” Many of the prisoners hoped this would be socialist China, which was in the midst of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution at the time, and in which the famous black revolutionary Robert Williams then lived.

Despite the incredible political clarity and heroism that the prisoners displayed, they were ultimately crushed in an exceedingly brutal fashion. The state sent in police, armed with unjacketed shells banned by the Geneva Convention, to massacre both the prisoners and the guards they held as hostages. 39 people were killed, hundreds injured, and countless others were brutally tortured after the police retook the prison. This setback was tied, in part, to the political degeneration ongoing in the Black Panther Party’s leadership which had just experienced a major split earlier in 1971.

Thus, the Attica Uprising shows both the political potential of the work of revolutionaries among prisoners and the working class more broadly, but it also testifies that setbacks can easily occur when revolutionary organizations degenerate and are unable to provide leadership to these struggles.

What role should militants of the revolutionary left play within the unions in the USA?

We have outlined our views in a number of articles. These conclusions are still somewhat provisional and we will doubtless have to refine them as we gain more experience in the unions. First, I should note that the role of militants in the unions is contingent upon the particular situation. Marxists have different tasks in the working class movement depending on the development of the working class movement itself as well as the state of communist organizations.

In the U.S., our situation is somewhat akin to the early Russian Marxists in the 1880s. Of course there are numerous differences—the most obvious being that we live in a bourgeois democratic republic instead of a semi-feudal absolutist monarchy—but the general similarities are important to note. First, there are a series of revisionist and semi-Marxist trends that are popular among the nominally revolutionary left. These trends, while more diverse in nature than in Russia in the 1880s, act as something of a similar impediment to the development of both the working class movement and the propagation of Marxism. Second is that the working class movement is still weak in the U.S. and a lot of work is needed to be done to win the workers over to Marxism.

Our view is that at present our primary task is to grow and develop as a pre-Party organization, a secondary component part of which is to deepen our ties to the working class movement and carry out agitation within it. We have done this, through, where possible, playing a role in some of the key economic struggles of the proletariat (such as the Vote No campaign for the UPS contract struggle). However, a good deal of our work has been on carrying out agitation from a proletarian perspective among the workers. This, in turn, will help lay the ground to run workers study circles on Marxism akin to those that the early Russian Marxists ran.

Since you have translated one of our documents (*Some General Theses on Communist Work in the Trade Unions*) into French, it is important to note that in a more recent document, *Growing as a Pre-Party Organization and the Development of MCU's Political Line*, we corrected some of the partially mistaken conclusions we had come to in the earlier document. It can be helpful to quote at length from the later document:

There are numerous correct aspects to this analysis, including the need to develop our pre-party organization, to work in the unions with an eye towards building a larger left-wing opposition, and to lay the foundation for the Party. However, there are also some significant shortcomings. First, we placed the task of laying the groundwork for the Party on the same footing as laying the groundwork for an organized left opposition in the unions. While we acknowledged that developing a TUEL-like organization would “take considerably growing and strengthening our ranks of professional revolutionaries,” we did not understand, at that time, that we would need to further grow and develop as a pre-Party organization to even begin to lay the foundation for an organized left-wing opposition in the unions.

This confusion caused us to devote a significant amount of time to trying to build up this foundation with various individuals (both union workers and Marxists) before we had the objective capacity to do so in a meaningful sense. This meant that we wasted time trying to build up something that was objectively not feasible to develop at the time. We therefore diverted comrades from other key tasks—such as developing a systematic approach to recruitment or launching our organization’s social media presence to promote our line and our work—to instead focus on laying the foundation for an organizational form (an organized left-wing opposition in the unions) which we were not sufficiently developed to create.

Our efforts to lay the foundation for a left-wing opposition in the unions followed in the wake of our work in the UPS Contract struggle in the Summer of 2023. During this struggle, we had built up many contacts across the labor union movement and among the broader Marxist milieu in the U.S. We hoped to work with them to establish regular meetings that would involve both the study of Marxism and the sharing of practical-organizing experience in the unions, to eventually form some sort of united front organization for work in the labor unions.⁵

In our work in this grouping—which eventually became known as the Labor Militants Study (LMS), once it became clear that we would largely just be doing a joint study with others—we had four broad goals:

5 [footnote from the original document] In the document that we shared with participants in this group, we explicitly framed the joint efforts as laying the foundation for a future TUEL-type organization:

“The idea for this group arose out of conversations between members of the Maoist Communist Union (MCU) and various militants in the labor union movement we met this past summer, during the struggle to vote down the sellout UPS contract. This contract fight clarified once again just how disorganized and scattered the revolutionary-minded militants in the unions currently are. It likewise demonstrated the desperate need to form an organized left-wing opposition to both the reactionary union officials who sell-out to the capitalists and their opportunist, supposedly “socialist” cheerleaders, an opposition that unapologetically aims to transform the labor unions into organizations truly operating in the “broad interest of the working class’ complete emancipation” (as Marx put it in 1866). We take great inspiration from the Communist Party of USA (CPUSA)’s work to this end in the 1920s and 1930s, in particular their work in the Trade Union Education League (TUEL) which for some years served as a fairly effective revolutionary wing of the trade unions.

“Such an organized opposition that cuts across the labor union movement cannot be created in one stroke. However, we hope to begin laying a foundation for this by bringing together militants with an interest in studying labor history and Marxism (no prior knowledge required, just interest) and learning from each other’s practical organizing experiences. Through this, we can develop a stronger shared framework for how to build up a modern-day analog to the TUEL and turn our unions into real weapons in the working-class’ struggle to free itself from capitalist class rule.”

1. Carry out a study of:
 - a. Marxist theory on the working-class struggle to achieve political power and emancipate itself from capitalist rule, and the role of labor unions in that struggle.
 - b. Historical lessons from the past attempts of Marxists in the US to organize in the labor unions against employers and sellout union officials, such as the work of the CPUSA in the TUEL.
2. Learn from the organizing campaigns participants are involved in, and as far as possible facilitate cooperation amongst participants on these campaigns.
3. Begin forging a more refined and concrete program for the trade unions that can become the program of a TUEL-type organization for our present conditions.
4. Draw more like-minded people who are involved or looking to get involved in the working-class movement and lay the foundation for a solid organization of revolutionary minded militants that reaches across unions.

These goals were far too broad, and we did not have sufficient cadre or contacts to carry these out well. While we had around 60 people interested in this effort (outside of our cadre), they were from a variety of political backgrounds and levels of development. For example, initial participants ranged from militant workers who had basically no familiarity with Marxism (but who had years of experience fighting against the capitalists and reactionary union leaders) to fairly developed Marxists who were very interested in learning about our line and joining MCU.

Given their different levels of political and theoretical development, it was not feasible to develop all these contacts well in a single study, let alone also bring them all together in practical organizing efforts (especially since they were dispersed around the country, many in locations without any MCU cadre or branches).

Drawing many contacts into large-scale practical organizing efforts in the unions is, of course, feasible in the longer term. However, fairly specific and distinct types of studies are needed for respectively winning over semi-Marxists to become cadre and developing the class consciousness of intermediate workers. These two tasks cannot be fused into one, and they certainly cannot be also fused with the task of uniting left-wing forces in the unions around a joint program of struggle against the capitalists and reactionary union officialdom.⁶

While these mistakes flowed, in part, from our relative dearth of forces—which prevented us from carrying out simultaneously these three separate tasks—this was not the ultimate source of our mistakes. Rather, it was the incorrect aspect of our political line that put the development of MCU on par with laying the foundation for an organized left-wing opposition in the unions.⁷ The former task is our principal task at present, while the latter is a sec-

6 [footnote from the original document] In addition to these mistakes there were a series of other mistakes we made in LMS, from poor planning to disorganized followup with contacts, and more. These mistakes were more easily avoidable, and were not the result of the mistaken aspects of our political line at the time. Therefore, they are not the subject of this document. Had they been avoided or even rectified earlier on in this effort, some of the larger mistakes in our line could have come into focus sooner. That being said, it only took us a relatively short amount of time to realize the full extent of the underlying mistakes in line. What's more, we have had fairly extensive discussion and internal summation of these second-order mistakes in the lead up to and during our Conference and have internally summed up the individual and collective errors that led to these more easily avoidable shortcomings in LMS.

7 [footnote from the original document] This was, in part, a vestige of our old line of “going everywhere and doing everything.” Even though we had overcome this line, we still did not sufficiently appreciate the importance of concentrating the bulk of our efforts on growing MCU, nor did we fully realize just how much work this task entails.

ondary task, which we can only make some smaller progress towards at present while we grow and develop as an organization.⁸

Despite these mistakes, in the LMS and other efforts in this period we did focus significant time and energy on growing and developing MCU. Given this partially correct orientation, we also had numerous successes, both in LMS and in our work more broadly in this period. For example, a number of participants from LMS were won over to our line and went on to become cadre. Other participants (including some of the workers from the UPS struggle) developed an understanding of some of the basics of Marxism through LMS and have become stronger supporters of MCU and stronger participants in the working class movement. Our mistakes and shortcomings notwithstanding, these are significant successes. They are the result of the correct aspect of our line in this period, which emphasized the importance of developing MCU.

Hopefully this helps to clarify some of how our views have developed since the publication of our *Theses* document in the fall of 2023. Two of our cadre who were involved in the UPS Vote No campaign also wrote an article, *On Communist Work in the Working Class Movement*, in July 2024, which outlines methodically our developed views on the tasks of communists in the working class movement.

8 [footnote from the original document] In fact, growing and developing MCU—which includes expanding our contacts among the left-wing and militants of the labor union movement—is the best way at present that we can build towards the formation of a TUEL-like organization. Only as a significantly larger and more developed pre-Party organization would we be able to play any significant role in the formation of any sort of militant minority organization.