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Two Steel Contracts



By the Gary, Indiana Writers' Workshop
and Staughton Lynd

AGREEMENT

between

RANK - AND - FILE, USWA

THE CALUMET COMMUNITY

and

UNITED STATES STEEL CORPORATION

INLAND STEEL COMPANY

BETHLEHEM STEEL CORPORATION

REPUBLIC STEEL CORPORATION

ET CETERA

August 1, 1971

(The two items which follow relate to the recently-concluded contract negotiations in the steel industry. The first is an imaginary contract, based in part on the demands of existing rank-and-file caucuses. It was published in May by the Writers' Workshop in Gary. The second is an appraisal of the contract that was actually negotiated. It is by Staughton Lynd, a member of the Writers' Workshop, and largely drawn from interviews with steelworkers in the Gary area.)

INTRODUCTION

What should be in the new steel contract? This pamphlet is an answer in the form of an imaginary agreement.

Basically, we're on the side of the union. The chief negotiator for the steel industry is a man named R. Heath Larry who is the Vice Chairman of the Board for US Steel and gets \$225,000 a year. Starting hourly wages in steel mills are still under \$3, which comes to about \$6,000 a year. That's all the reason anyone should need for choosing the side of the union.

But when we say we're on the side of the union, we mean the union rank and file.

The union bureaucracy is out of touch with the feelings of the rank and file in the mills. The first part of the following contract (Articles 1-6) is based on the demands of rank-and-file steelworkers. Most of the articles in this part of the contract have been demanded by one or more of the following groups:

District 29 (Michigan-Toledo Region) Convention, March 1970
Local 65 (US Steel South Works, South Chicago)
Concerned Steelworkers, Local 65
Cost of Living Ticket, Local 1033 (Republic Steel, South Chicago)
Rank And File Caucus, Local 1010 (Inland Steel, Chicago, Indiana)
Trade And Crafts, Local 1010
Local 1014 (US Steel Gary Works)
Local 1066 (Sheet and Tin Mill, US Steel Gary Works)
Local 6787 (Bethlehem Steel, Burns Harbor, Indiana)
Rank and File Team (Youngstown, Ohio)
National Steelworkers Rank And File Committee

We have used footnotes to show which articles were proposed by each of these groups.

Some of the things in this part of the contract are taken from the contracts of other groups of workers in the Calumet Region. For instance, the UAW local at the Budd plant in Gary is free to strike over local grievances after a national contract has been signed.

The second part of the contract (Articles 7-12) deals with community problems. It proposes solutions to problems like the mills' pollution of air and water, the high prices and taxes which eat up increases in wages, and the way industries threaten to leave when the community demands that they stop polluting or pay their fair share of taxes.

This part of the contract is based on experiences such as the strike at the DuPont plant in East Chicago last year. One of the demands of the union was that the company stop polluting the Calumet River and let the union have a say in the company's decisions about pollution abatement. (The Wall Street Journal, April 19, 1971, states that the

Du Pont union was one of only two in the country which went on strike in 1970 "in part over pollution controls".)

A community group called the Citizens League to Upgrade the Environment backed up the strikers. Finally the company signed a pollution abatement agreement with the CLUE which the union has helped to enforce through its grievance machinery.

We'd like to see the same kind of alliance between rank-and-file steelworkers and community organizations.

If there is a strike this summer, community organizations can help by demanding that:

1. For the duration of the strike there should be a moratorium on the collection of debts and taxes, no evictions or foreclosures, and no shut-offs of gas or electric service.

2. The right to mass picketing and other First Amendment rights should be upheld.

3. Unemployment compensation should be available to workers on strike, as in some other states.

In the long run, rank-and-file steelworkers and community groups working with them could dream bigger dreams. The other day, Ken Tucker, secretary of the Du Pont union and president of the Calumet Community Congress, suggested that the CCC buy Inland Steel Harbor Works for the figure which Inland Steel reports to the North Township tax assessor as the value of its mill. Tucker said that the first thing the CCC would do if it owned the mill was to grant the demands of the union rank and file. Then there would be no need for a steel strike, he went on.

We think that's not a bad idea. We think the steel mills should be run democratically. That means, it seems to us, that the people who make decisions ought to be elected by the people whom the decisions affect. Why should J. David Carr be superintendent of US Steel Gary Works just because he is the son-in-law of Edwin Gott, Chairman of the Board of US Steel? Why shouldn't the members of Local 1014 and Local 1066, along with the people of Gary, elect the superintendent of Gary Works?

Look at it this way: Abraham Lincoln said that a house divided could not stand, that the nation could not exist permanently half slave and half free. But when most of us go to work we take orders from people whom we have no say in choosing, as if we were still in school or in the army. Some day that may seem as silly as letting our government be run by George III.

This is an imaginary contract. But it doesn't have to stay imaginary.

May 1971

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ARTICLE 1. DRAFTING AND APPROVING THE CONTRACT

Section 1. Contract demands. Contract demands shall be presented at local union meetings before the opening of negotiations.

Section 2. Strike vote. A strike is the ultimate weapon of the union and requires a conscious decision to endure sacrifice on the part of the membership. The membership has a democratic right to make that decision. Therefore, no strike shall be called unless first authorized by a majority of members, present and voting, at local union meetings called especially for the purpose of conducting a strike vote.

Section 3. Ratification of the contract. The membership has a right to know all the provisions of a new contract and to decide on the acceptability of any new agreement. Therefore, no new contract may be signed unless approved by a majority of the members present and voting at local union meetings called especially for the purpose of considering the approval of the new agreement.

Section 4. Local working conditions. Signing a national agreement does not in itself resolve local disputes. The membership of each local union retain at all times the right to bargain over local conditions and to enforce their demands with strike action if necessary, in the manner described in Article 2.

Section 5. Duration. The duration of this contract shall be one year.*

* The language of Sections 1-3 is taken from convention resolutions adopted by Local 1014. The demand for rank-and-file ratification goes back at least to Donald Rarick's Organization for Membership Rights in 1960, and is very widespread. As for Section 5, the National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee suggests a two-year contract, but a one-year contract seems to us most democratic.

ARTICLE 2. ADJUSTMENT OF GRIEVANCES

Section 1. Right to strike on local issues. The present grievance procedure has resulted in a jam-up of unresolved grievances. (According to the Gary Post-Tribune, May 6, 1971, Local 1066 alone had 1,007 grievances pending at the beginning of the year.) Moreover, the majority of grievances appealed to arbitration have been decided in the company's favor. From now on there shall be a 30-day limit on collective bargaining to settle local grievances, and after 30 days from the time the grievance was filed the local union may strike if it wishes.

Section 2. More grievance representatives. Stalling on grievances must be ended, and supervisors must be authorized and encouraged to settle grievances when and where they arise. To help settle grievances rapidly there shall be one grievance representative for every 25 workers, elected by the workers concerned. These representatives shall have the right to leave their work at any time to carry on legitimate union business.*

* The demand for the right to strike over local issues is also very widespread. Among the groups which advocate it are Local 65, Local 1014, Local 6787, the Cost of Living Ticket of Local 1033, the Rank and File Caucus of Local 1010, the District 29 Convention of March 1970, and the National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee. Local 6787 has resolved that no contract be signed unless it includes "the right to strike on grievances and health and safety if 21 days of collective bargaining fails to produce a satisfactory settlement" (Post-Tribune, May 6, 1971). Section 2 is taken from the demand of the National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee to "strengthen the power and unity of the union on the job (by) a powerful steward system (one steward for every 25 workers) with real muscle to defend job security, enforce safety, and curb arbitrary company disciplines."

ARTICLE 3. WAGES

Section 1. Substantial wage increase. The steel companies have raised their prices 6-7% this year to make up for high costs in 1970, and threaten to raise them again if steelworkers win a wage increase in the new contract. Steelworkers, too, need a wage increase of close to \$1 an hour to make up for increases in the cost of living since the present three-year contract went into effect, as well as a substantial wage increase for the future. There shall be an across-the-board wage increase of \$2 an hour.

Section 2. Cost of Living Clause. Wage increases are of little value if eaten up by price increases. This is what has happened during the past three years. As in the can industry, there shall be an increase of one cent an hour for each increase of .4 of 1% in the Consumer Price

Index of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Cost of living increases are to be unlimited, and computed every three months.*

*Needless to say the desire for a substantial wage increase is unanimous. The \$2 an hour figure has been put forward by Local 6787, the National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee, and the Rank and File Team. Clearly rank-and-file groups think that the \$1.10 an hour increase in the can industry contract is inadequate.

ARTICLE 4. HOURS

Section 1. Normal work pattern. Technical improvements combined with automation make possible a shorter work week. A shorter work week will also provide jobs for as many persons as possible during a period of high unemployment. Therefore the normal work pattern shall be either five consecutive days of six hours or four consecutive days of seven and a half hours. Local bargaining shall determine which of these two patterns is preferred. In either case the normal work week will be 30 hours. During the transition from the 40-hour week to the 30-hour week there shall be no decrease in average weekly wages.

Section 2. Overtime. Time and a half shall be paid for any days or hours which deviate from a worker's normal work pattern, regardless of the reason. All overtime shall be voluntary.*

*Groups proposing "40 for 30" include Rarick's Organization for Membership Rights in 1960, Concerned Steelworkers, and Locals 65 and 1014. The Cost of Living Ticket at Local 1033 supports both parts of Section 2.

ARTICLE 5. VACATIONS AND PENSIONS

Section 1. Vacations. In addition to vacation time provided under the present agreement, every member shall have the right to 30 days leave of absence on request with the option to extend the leave to 60 days once every three years. All vacations shall be scheduled between May and October unless an individual requests otherwise.

Section 2. Pensions. After 25 years of work every worker shall be eligible for retirement regardless of age at \$500 a month. Pensions shall increase as the cost of living increases, in the manner provided in Article 3, Section 2.*

*Although there are differences as to how many years should qualify a worker for a pension, and how much the monthly sum paid should be, most rank-and-file programs propose improvements in both respects. The Rank And File Team, among others, insists that the cost of living clause apply to pensions as well as wages.

ARTICLE 6. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Section 1. Extra pay. There shall be extra pay for dirty, hard, unsafe, and unhealthy jobs, such as in coke plants, in basic oxygen furnaces, and in foundries.

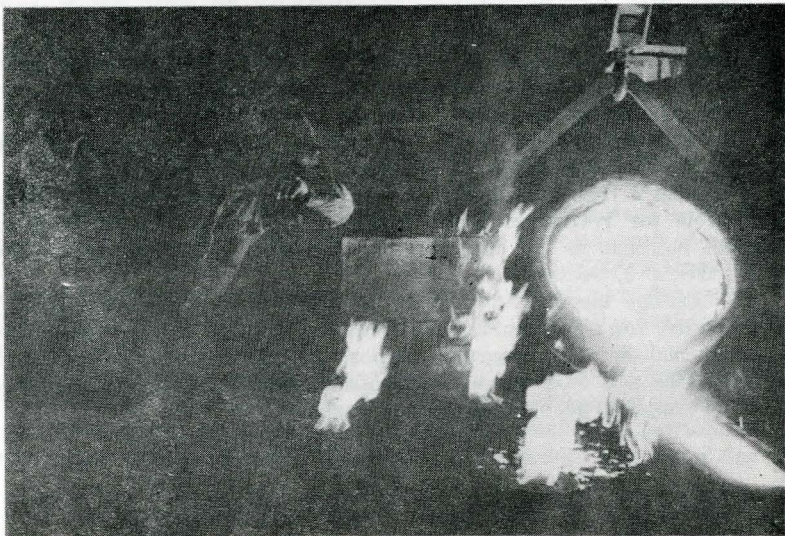
Section 2. Right to refuse work considered unsafe or unhealthy. Any worker or group of workers may refuse to do work considered unsafe or unhealthy. It is not necessary that the person or group be personally injured by the work in question if in his, her, or their judgment the work is damaging to others in the mill or the community. When this article is invoked there shall be no loss of earnings, and no loss of the right to return to the job once the dispute is resolved.*

* Section 1 is from the "big six demands" of National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee. The program of the Cost of Living Ticket of Local 1033 states, in regard to Section 2: "Employees shall not lose time when they invoke Article Twelve of the Contract over unsafe or unhealthful conditions."

ARTICLE 7. PLANT MANAGEMENT

Section 1. The company does not have the exclusive right to manage the business and plants and to direct the working forces. This right is limited by this agreement and by the general welfare.

Section 2. Freedom of expression. The management shall make no regulation restricting the rights protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. These rights include but are not limited to the right to distribute literature, the right to post notices, the right



to petition for redress of grievances, the right to assemble peacefully.

Section 3. Discipline. A worker must have union representation whenever summoned by a supervisor to discuss alleged misconduct or possible disciplinary action. Under no circumstances shall strike action in itself be cause for dismissal. The right to refuse obedience to injustice is an inherent and inalienable natural right, which the law and industrial management must recognize.

Section 4. Discrimination. Discrimination against any person in hiring, promotion, work assignment, or otherwise, for reason of race, sex, age, dress, national origin, religious or political belief, act, or affiliation, or any behavior off the job, shall be grounds for immediate dismissal of the supervisory personnel responsible.

Section 5. Election of supervisors. All supervisory personnel up to and including the department heads shall be elected by the workers concerned. Elections shall take place at the same times as elections to local union office. Supervisory personnel thus elected shall report to their constituents in writing and in person at least once every six months, and shall be subject to recall at any time.

ARTICLE 8. PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Section 1. Like individuals, industry has the responsibility to pass on the environment to our children in a condition as good as or better than that in which we received it. This responsibility exists even when state and federal laws are inadequate.

Section 2. Land use and development. The steel companies of the Calumet Region must restore to the people of the community a portion of the lakefront adequate for recreational purposes. The details of this process shall be negotiated between the companies, the union, and the community, in connection with the provision of adequate, safe, rapid transportation to and from the mills, and adequate parking space at the mills.

Section 3. Waste emissions. The right to life is the most basic of all rights, and the complete elimination of air and water pollution naturally concerns both workers in the mills and community residents who live near them. In addition to the right to refuse work considered unsafe or unhealthy (Article 6, Section 2), workers shall have the right to request immediate testing by union representatives of air or water believed to exceed agreed-on levels of pollution. Representatives of the proper community authorities shall have the right to immediate access to the mills for the purpose of testing and inspection authorized by law. When air or water is found by either union or community representatives to exceed agreed-on levels of pollution, the facility shall be closed down until the condition is corrected. If management refuses to take the necessary corrective measures, the community

shall undertake them and make the cost a first charge upon company profits.

ARTICLE 9. PLANT LOCATION

Section 1. Location of new plants. The location of new plants should be decided on better grounds than the availability of low wages and local tax breaks. Union and community representatives, local and national, shall participate in decisions about the location of new plants. They shall take into account the need for additional jobs in the area, plans to utilize natural resources consistent with our best knowledge of conservation, and the overall economic plans of the region and the nation.

Section 2. The decision to leave. A company should not be able to use a community's labor, pollute a community's air, and (in the case of the Calumet Region) destroy a community's lakefront and beaches and then leave for its own reasons of profit and loss. After a certain number of years in a community, a company becomes an integral part of the life of the community. In some degree it comes to belong to that community in a more immediate way than to distant stockholders or to company officers who live outside the area affected by the mills' land use and pollution. Therefore, should any question of a plant's leaving the community arise, no final decision will be made without agreement both by the local union and by representatives of the community. The union and the community also reserve the right to require a company to close should its operation be considered harmful to general welfare, because of the products it makes or because of consistent violation of health or safety, or the excessive exploitation of human or natural resources.

ARTICLE 10. TAXES

Section 1. All income of the company is produced by labor. The union has as much interest in the portion of that income paid by the company to the community in the form of taxes for the provision of schools and other public services as in wages paid by the company to workers as individuals.

Section 2. Equal assessment. If the companies in a community fail to pay their full share of local property taxes, their workers must make up the difference. Therefore, whether the company is paying its fair share of local taxes shall be a legitimate subject for bargaining, and the union shall have the right to inspect company as well as public records pertaining to tax questions.

Section 3. Peace and conversion fund. The industry, the union, and the community recognize the common purpose of ending all production

for war purposes, if this can be done without undue economic hardship. To bring this about, an agreed-on portion of the industry's earnings shall be set aside in a special Peace And Conversion Fund (PACF), jointly administered by the companies, the union, and the community. This fund shall provide employment for those who may be temporarily laid off in the process of conversion to peace-related production. Priority shall be given to projects which enhance the value of the community, such as improving public transportation systems, building overpasses over railroad crossings, and developing recreational areas and facilities.

ARTICLE 11. PRICES

Section 1. Higher prices and taxes are eating up increases in wages. Moreover, substantial wage increases and more equitable business property taxes, if achieved, are usually passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices which are a burden for all working people. For these reasons it is essential that the community and the union interest themselves in business decisions about prices, and when necessary regulate those decisions in the general welfare.

Section 2. Wage reopener. The cost of living clause in this contract (Article 3, Section 2) acts as a deterrent against price increases in the steel industry, and indirectly against general price increases. As an addition deterrent, the union shall be free to reopen collective bargaining with respect to wages within 30 days of any increase in the prices of steel products.

ARTICLE 12. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Section 1. Those who work in the mills and live in the area which surrounds them have intimate knowledge of the problems and needs of the steel industry, and are greatly affected by that industry's development. They should participate in all major policy decisions concerning the industry. Community ownership is one way of making sure that this participation is real.

Section 2. Absentee ownership and unearned income. Today 1.6% of the population own 80% of the corporate stock and 90% of the corporate bonds held personally in the United States. These large holdings yield unearned income to persons who make no direct contribution to the industry. They also place control of industry in the hands of persons who do not work in the mills or live near them and who are not elected. During the next 10 years all stock holdings in excess of \$1,000 shall be transferred to representatives of the local union and local community.

Section 3. National community control fund. So as to make possible at least partial compensation for the property transferred to union and community ownership under Section 2 there shall be federally financed

and chartered a National Community Control Fund (NCCF). The NCCF would purchase existing corporations and corporate divisions, or the stocks and bonds thereof, and sell them to union and community organizations where the corporations are located. Payment shall be made at reduced prices and/or financed by the NCCF with long-term, low-interest loans.

Section 4. Democratic decision-making. Industrial facilities owned by the union and/or community should be administered democratically. Decision-makers should be elected, their decisions should be preceded by public hearings, and the most basic decisions should be referred by referendum to the union rank and file and the community at large.

EPILOGUE

Staughton Lynd

Late in the evening of August 1, 1971 the United Steelworkers of America and the nine largest steel corporations announced that they had negotiated a new three-year contract.

The previous contract expired at midnight July 31. At the request of Secretary of Labor Hodgson international union president I. W. Abel obtained approval for a 24-hour extension of the negotiations from the 600 local union presidents assembled in Washington to give guidance to the USWA negotiators. It appears from testimony of participants that a majority of the local presidents may have opposed the extension, but, in the style traditional at gatherings of the steelworkers' union, Abel announced the results of a voice vote as favorable to himself and then adjourned the meeting.

Between midnight July 31 and midnight August 1 an expected strike was transformed into a new contract. The local union presidents, many of whom had booed Abel when he requested an extension of negotiations the night before, unanimously and apparently enthusiastically ratified the new agreement.

In the USWA, nothing further is required to make a contract legal. The individual member of the union has no opportunity to vote directly on contract provisions either before or after the conclusion of a new agreement. If a local union president refuses to sign the contract (as John Sargent, president of the 18,000-member local union at Inland Steel, did in 1965), the contract is put into effect anyway.

What does the new contract mean? Was it a victory or a defeat? To what extent did it satisfy demands of rank-and-file steelworkers? The simplest way to answer these questions is to say that the content of the contract faithfully reflected the undemocratic way it was drawn up in the first place.

During the week of July 18 the international union encouraged its locals to conduct "strike votes". In the Calumet area most locals set up polling places where members voted for or against a strike without first meeting together to discuss the issues. Local 1014 at US Steel Gary Works, the largest mill in the area, held a strike vote meeting attended by at least 400 of the local's 18,000 members. Whether they voted at a polling place or in a meeting, rank-and-file steelworkers regarded the procedure as a farce. No report was given to them as to the progress of contract negotiations. In effect they were asked to give the international union's negotiators a blank check to call a strike if the negotiators decided that a strike was necessary.

A worker at Inland Steel stated: "The other day as I was walking into the mill we received a flyer that stated that tonight (July 22) we were supposed to have a strike vote. One of the puzzling things is that we know the international union is the one that's going to call the strike and we can't really understand what good the strike vote is going to do when we don't know the issues. We don't know what the local has settled on, we don't know what the international has settled on. We just know what the argument is: We know what we want but we don't know what the company has offered us. But yet they want us to vote for a strike."

A worker at Gary works described the strike vote meeting of Local 1014: "From the beginning it seemed a very chaotic meeting. Things didn't make sense. It seemed to me that that was done on purpose. That the meeting was carefully planned so that things wouldn't come out into the open, but there would be a strike vote. There were all those people there and sooner or later they had to do something. They would get sick and tired of being there. Sooner or later there'd be a strike vote."

The way that happened, this young steelworker went on, "was that the president (of the local) opened the meeting by saying that he was going to give everyone the results of the negotiations that had been going on about the steel contract. And everyone said: 'Yeah, yeah, we want to hear that stuff.' There was an atmosphere of hostility toward the union leadership. The president would say something and people would yell. They'd yell that they wanted to hear about the negotiations and there'd be a hostile tone. Person after person after person would be yelling."

The people at the meeting tried to get the local president to tell them about negotiations. He responded by reading the text of the proposals which the union had submitted to the companies. "Number 1. Terms of the Agreement. (He says, talking tough.) Number 2. Scope of the Agreement. And so on." What the president read was merely a string of unintelligible hereafters and whereases. "The guys start talking with each other and there's nothing happening. He reads all of them and there's nothing there. And he says: 'Now you know what it's about. I don't think anyone in this union is satisfied with this. So what we're here to do tonight is decide whether or not we're going to strike.'"

Still the rank-and-file members tried to find out what they would be striking for: "Guys are yelling, and there are hands up. People are yelling 'Call on some of the brothers.' 'What's going on here?'"

Finally the president began to call on people whose hands were up. After a delay because the only floor microphone was not turned on, the first man recognized began to speak:

"He says: 'I don't know what all this stuff is about scope. I don't know whether to vote to strike or not to strike. And I want to decide according to what the company's offering and what we're demanding and what we want to get. I want to know things: I mean, I need more money, I want to get more money. Are we going to get more money? That's what I want to know.' And everyone goes: 'Yay, yay.' Then someone else gets up and says: 'Me and a lot of the men want to know about pensions. All the stuff you said about the company and everything, Mr. President: Brother, there's nothing about pensions in there.' Then another guy stands up and says: 'Everyone thinks we ought to get a cost-of-living clause. Are we going to get it, or aren't we going to get it? I want to decide whether to vote for a strike, but I don't know what I'm voting on, because I don't know: Are we going to get it, or are we not going to get it?' A whole lot of guys get up and say this stuff."

No one knew how to vote because no one knew what they were voting on. And as the meeting dragged along the mood began to grow that there was nothing which could be accomplished there, so why not get the vote over and go home? The president began to call on ex-union officials and staff men for the international.

"Most of these guys start out by insulting the people at the meeting. They say: 'I'm very disappointed that this group of people who've been coming to labor meetings for a while doesn't seem to understand how the collective bargaining process works. There's things you can do and there's things you can't do. I don't understand why you guys don't seem to understand all this.' And there was a lot of quiet there. People were disturbed and thinking maybe they were being stupid. One (international representative) got up and said: 'Brothers. Sometimes it's hard to call you brothers.' And then he explains how everyone's dumb and they're asking for the impossible."

A dogged rank-and-file member responded: "The only way it makes sense to me to do this is, once there's a contract you tell us what the contract is and we'll vote whether we like it or not. If we don't like it we'll go out on strike. If we like it, we won't go out on strike." And everyone says: "Yeah, yeah. We'll ratify the contract if it's a good contract. If it isn't, we won't. That's how we'll decide."

"And then another one of these union guys will stand up and in a very patient voice, as though everyone else there were pretty dumb, he explains how there are these rules and the rules say 'It's written right down' that we can't ratify the contract. 'No one seems to understand that we don't have the right to ratify the contract.'"

Before long those who tried to keep asking questions began to become scapegoats for the general frustration, in place of the local union president who had been isolated to begin with. The strike vote was taken by standing in place so that stubborn dissenters felt pressured to "make it unanimous".

Most of this young man's fellow workers in the merchant mill had voted by staying away from the meeting. "Nobody knew about it, and nobody was particularly interested. Everybody said: 'Whether we strike or whether we don't strike, they're going to do what they want to anyway.' Meaning both the union and the company."

In the end, "they" signed a contract without having a strike. Down to the last moment the tens of thousands of union members whose lives would be affected by this decision could only wait passively, like any other television viewer or newspaper reader, to see what would be done to them.

The evening of July 31 men gathered at the halls of the two largest locals in the area, 1010 (Inland) and 1014 (US Steel Gary Works). The officials of the two local unions convened meetings which repeated in miniature the pattern of the strike vote meeting of Local 1014. A third young steelworker described what happened at Local 1010:

"I got to the meeting late. It was crowded. There was an auditorium seating about 200 people, with another 50 or 75 standing in the back. Two men were seated on an elevated stage in the front and apparently were running the meeting. There seemed to be talk as soon as I walked in that some men wanted to go out at that time. This was quickly rejected by the man who was running the meeting, who I later learned was the vice president of Local 1010."

The men running the meeting kept saying there were encouraging reports from Washington, although what was encouraging they could not specify. "The meeting finally ended when one guy was talking from the floor, and three guys had their hands raised, and Hernandez, who was running the meeting, just gaveled the meeting to an end. As we all shuffled out I heard the fellow in back of me say: 'Well, I'll just watch the eleven o'clock news tonight. We won't find out anything here.'"

The new contract meets at least in part rank-and-file demands for a large wage increase, improved pensions, and reinstatement of the unlimited cost-of-living clause (surrendered in the negotiations which ended the last strike in the steel industry in 1959).

The new contract achieves almost nothing by way of rank-and-file control over conditions of work. There are minor changes in the grievance and arbitration procedure intended to make it work more rapidly. For instance, the first and second steps of the grievance process will no longer require written complaints. But not one word is said about the local right to strike, nor about the right to stop work considered by the worker to be unsafe or unhealthy.

Thus the new steel contract conforms perfectly to Andre Gorz's

characterization of the trade union movement; it provides large quantitative benefits to the individual worker, but no qualitative increase in the collective power of workers over the production process.

Indeed the contract may represent a significant step backward in respect to workers' control. It includes a provision for establishing a joint advisory Committee on Productivity in every steel mill. Union representatives on this committee are to include the president of the local union and the chairman of the local union's grievance committee, together with two other union members. Four comparable officers of the company will serve on the committee. The committee's function (in the words of the summary the USWA distributed to its members) "shall be to advise with plant management concerning ways and means of: (a) Improving productivity. (b) Promote orderly and peaceful relations with employees and achieve uninterrupted operations in the plant. (My italics. SL) (c) Promote the use of domestic steel. This reflects the union's concern regarding imported steel. (d) Achieve the desired prosperity and progress of the company and its employees. (e) Review matters of special concern consistent with the purposes of the Committee and provisions of the collective bargaining agreement."

Steelworkers skeptical of past contracts initially announced by the international union as "the best contract ever" naturally ask of the new contract: What did we give up for all those money benefits? The provision for productivity committees is the obvious answer. The union's own summary of the purposes of these committees says in so many words that they are intended to speed up production and prevent work stoppages.

This fear seemed the more realistic when conclusion of the contract negotiations was immediately followed by huge layoffs. In the Calumet area as of the date of this writing (August 7) the following layoffs have been announced: US Steel Gary Works, 18,900 (70%) of its 27,000 employees; Inland Steel, 8,000 (34%) of its 24,500 employees; Republic Steel, 7,500 employees; Bethlehem Steel, 1,400 employees. Companies refuse to say how long the layoffs will last.



In steel centers less accessible to water transportation, such as Youngstown, Ohio, whole mills have been shut down and may never be reopened. Here the fear is different: that as local mills gradually resume production, fewer men will do it, and some men will never be called back. As one young steelworker puts it: "I kept asking myself what we gave up. Suddenly I realized. It was our jobs."

Company and union sources reinforce this fear. The Wall Street Journal's assessment of the contract (August 3) stated that one result would be "a long-term reduction...in the industry's employment.... 'You're going to see one hell of a reduction in manpower over a period of time,' predicts one man in the industry." Victor Riesel quoted USWA secretary-treasurer Walter Burke, speaking to the steel conference which ratified the contract: "We have got to do everything possible to make certain this industry operates efficiently...." (Gary Post-Trib, August 5)

The same evening that Riesel's column appeared in the local paper, a group of young and old steelworkers assembled at the storefront of the Gary Writers' Workshop to talk over the new contract. Disagreeing about many things, all agreed in predicting a long-term reduction in the work force at local mills under cover of the productivity clause in the new contract. This appraisal will close with extracts from that discussion.

There was consensus among young workers that in most departments of the mills the pace of work is slow enough that the companies could, in fact, easily eliminate many jobs.

S: "One of the things that struck me strongest when I came into the mill was something I didn't expect at all. I expected that people were really going to be breaking their backs, that they just couldn't stand it because they were working so hard. It's just incredible how far the opposite is true. Many days I've worked two hours out of eight. No one is surprised by that at all. You walk up and down the aisle in the part of the mill where I work, and all over the place you see guys sitting around doing nothing. You can't read a newspaper. You can't seem to be enjoying yourself."

J: "I've worked in every part of the mill and every part is somewhat similar to what he said."

M: "Even though I've never worked for the mills, I've worked in every mill from the North Side of Chicago to Bailly Town because of my own field of construction. I've been in most of the departments at one time or another. It's just a grind waiting for the day to end."

H: "One way it's broken down is along production and maintenance lines. What you have in all the mills — my experience is in rolling mills — you have about an equal number of production and maintenance people. The maintenance crew, you got welders and millwrights and boilermakers and pipefitters, and all like that. If you're working the day turn, which is the easiest turn for maintenance, you just have to

do routine maintenance, you walk around and you can take it easy. If you're on production, the only time you're there is when the mill's rolling, you've got to work there eight hours a day and work the whole time. A lot of times you don't have a lunch break and a lot of times it's real hard work. I think it's different if you're on maintenance in the night turn. They have real small crews, they have responsibility to take care of the whole thing. And so they're working their ass off."

The generally slow pace of the mills, these workers argued, is "the result of a lot of organization". Not through the union, but through spontaneous collective direct action on the shop floor, steelworkers have controlled the speed of production.

S: "I would like to give an example. Where I work, when summer people came in immediately there was a big problem. Production was doubled or tripled before anyone knew what was happening. What that meant was that you had to go around and talk to all these guys and explain to them that you weren't supposed to make all that steel. There is a lot of co-operation in people slowing down. The general attitude is "screw the company", like Joe says. I've noticed that one time when people work hard and do conscientious work is cleaning up. They may spend 45 minutes at it. Part of the reason that they work so hard at that is that they know it's not doing the company any good but it's going to help the next guy on the next turn. If one craneman does too much work, people will move up their cranes on both sides of him so he can't do anything. Or the maintenance man will come by and say: 'You want some time off? I'll break your machine for you. Just tell me how much time you want.'"

N: "One more thing about the intensity of work. My observation is that it's more or less the way people described it. But I haven't heard people in the mill make any kind of reference to how easy it is. Maybe where Steve works, where it's mostly young people who are out of the Army or see themselves passing through for a year, it's that way. But where I am, I guess if you pushed someone up against the wall they'd have to admit that it's easier than an auto plant, for example. I know myself, I don't mind admitting how easy it is; but if my wife or somebody else starts to make a joke about it, I get mad."

Working in a steel mill seems hard, everyone agreed, because the general conditions of work are so unpleasant. Heat, dirty shower water, noise, dull colors... and danger.

J: "You often hear references to how safe it is to work in a steel mill. The company is always putting out big propaganda. I have a safety meeting every week. Nothing ever gets accomplished. I worked in the rail mill, in the soaking pits, last year. And I had one job where I had to go down and change thermal couples. There were many times it was so hot in this spot it took your breath away. Yet you were expected to do this job. And we complained about this job, because it was in an area about three feet high; you had to squat; there was no lighting; and

there was dust piled on the floor so thick that when you walked you'd gag on it. I complained about it for the year I worked on it and guys had been complaining for four or five years before that. Nothing was ever done until a couple of months ago when a guy went down there and started to change the thermal couple and a big blast of flame came out of a hole and he got third-degree burns and ended up in the hospital. Then it was blamed on him. You find this all the time. When something goes wrong with safety, nine times out of ten they find a way to blame it on the individual (He was violating some rule.) rather than putting out the money to make conditions safe. I'm pretty sure, that's one thing that's general throughout the mills. What they say is, the safety rules are written in blood."

E: "I've never worked in production, but I've worked around the mills as an ironworker. And I think the same thing applies there. A little technical thing is impossible to do because it's not up to the men who are actually doing the work. That thermal couple could undoubtedly have been routed out in the open where it could have been done with safety and inspected often."

H: "One accident that happened in our department is a good example of how things go in the mills. A young guy who had just started went up on a crane with a millwright to do some work. It was late at night, and there was no lighting at all. One of the safety rules is that any time you go up on a crane you have to use a safety belt. This young guy tied his belt to a shaft which turns when the power is on. He couldn't see what he was doing. And when the crane started up he was killed. What they said at the safety meeting was that this guy tied his safety line to the wrong place. The fact of the matter was that there weren't any guard rails, there wasn't any other place to tie it. That's the second person killed on the cranes in our department within two years."

The new contract, then, threatens to do away with the moderate pace of work which (in the perception of this group of steelworkers) "makes up" at present for other things, such as unnecessary danger. They fear that organization on the shop floor cannot counter the company's power to call men back to work gradually and make them work harder as they resume their jobs.

The young workers especially have no faith that the union can help them:

H: "Ninety per cent of the people in the mill, just common ordinary guys, will say that they think the union is bullshit — that they're just a bunch of corrupt assholes who steal money; also that their union dues are higher than their incentive and stuff like that. They know the score. It's not just the younger guys, but everybody in there. You can hardly find anybody who supports the union. As a matter of fact, if you say you went to a union meeting they'll say 'That guy wants to be a foreman.' They won't talk to you. I mean that's really true. It's my experience. Out of a few hundred maybe one or two guys will go to a union meeting,

and everybody thinks they just want to become officers of the local. Everybody agrees on that."

"On the other hand," this man continued, "people are very defeatist in a lot of ways. Steelworkers have been through a whole lot. Every day, going through that whole experience, just having it pounded into you that there's nothing you can do. Over and over, year after year. Older guys especially have just gotten so fed up they give in, try to get by any way they can. I guess it's a lot like if you've been in jail for a long time and you kind of give up and look for any way to survive. People find individual solutions. They say, I have such and such hiding places, I can get away with such and such with a particular guard. The millwright that I worked with one time, one day he sat down and said: 'I was on turn work as a millwright for 18 years. Now I'm just going to take it easy until I pension out. I'm not going to do anything and collect some of the back pay that they owe me.' Everybody's trying to figure out their own little way to get out of it. I think that's good in a lot of ways. But it makes it hard to get together, and stick together, and really change things."

S: "My experience agrees in some ways and not in others. I agree about what people think of the union. Sometimes people will say, when they've been bad-mouthing the union: 'You know, I believe in the labor movement.' People aren't interested in forming a rank-and-file caucus to take over the union, and that's probably smart, because they've seen that happen a lot of times and nothing seems to come of it. But in a lot of areas they aren't defeatist. A good example is that where I work the crane men got together a couple of times and the whole mill went on a slow-down, sit-down strike. One time a black crane man wasn't given the job he should have been. A white guy was given the job. Black guys went around and talked to the white guys, who agreed that they were right. Another time they slowed down the cranes for a long time about lousy incentive pay and stuff. Those guys will say: 'You're so stupid that you went to a union meeting?' But that doesn't mean that they're defeatist."

N: "One thing people say around the mill is: 'There are two things that will serve to make a good union man into an ass. One is to become a foreman, the other to become a union griever.' I've heard a lot of people say that. It's not that bad people make the union bad. It's that the union makes good people into bad."

At this point in the discussion a young man came in who had been at the Local 1010 (Inland) meeting where the contents of the contract were supposed to be reported to all the union members. "What happened?" everyone asked.

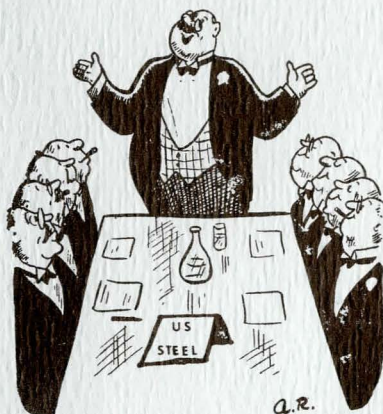
J: "It's still going on. They've got some guys up there explaining about the incentives and doing a lot of arithmetic. There were about 300 people there to start, and there's about a third of that now. They're going through a lot of technical, boring stuff. They're reading a lot.

They say: 'This is in front of you, but we want to read the whole shmeer.' And so they read for 15 minutes, and 30 people leave."

Then Jim read the clause about productivity committees, from a summary of the contract handed out at the meeting. "From what people were saying," he added, "they've had these joint plant committees in the past, but they were of the opinion that this was one which would meet regularly."

If the companies take advantage of the productivity committees and the layoffs to cut their work force and speed up the pace of work, then resistance at the point of production will increase. Job action and shop floor militancy might then become sufficiently widespread to offer a real alternative to the union.

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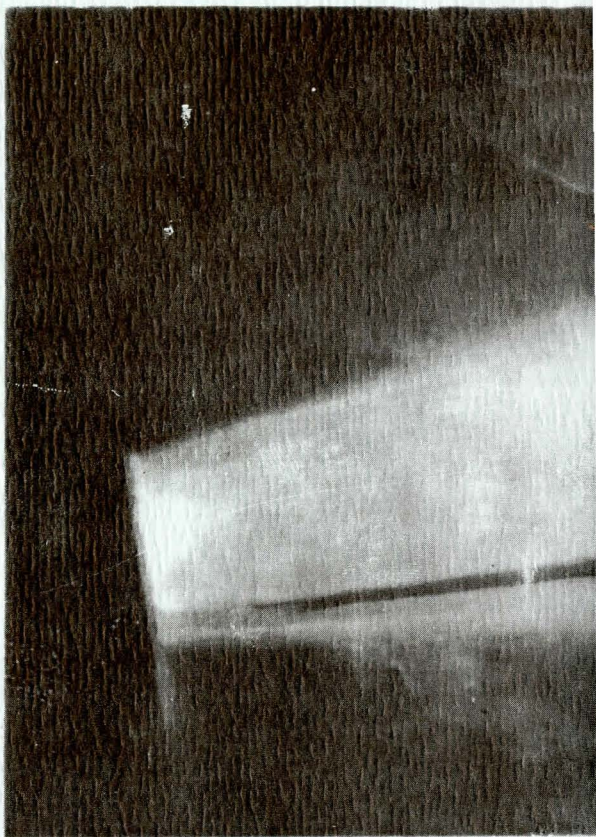
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