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"OUR THING IS DRUM!"



The Midwest and the League
Jim Jacobs

An Interview with Ken Cockrel and Mike Hamlin of the
League for Revolutionary Workers
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THE MIDWEST & THE LEAGUE

Stretch a line on a map of America from Buffalo, New York, through Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis and finally Kansas City, then north to Des Moines, Minneapolis, then east to Milwaukee, Flint, Detroit, and Cleveland.

This is the Midwest, the industrial heartland of America. Over forty percent of the people in this area work in the basic manufacturing industries—auto, steel, machine products, rubber, electric—that are the foundation of America's economic wealth. To seize control of the political economy of the Midwest is to seize control over the political economy of imperialist America.

The establishment of the American tool box in the midwest is not accidental. Within the soil of this area lie the essential materials (coal, iron ore, limestone) for the production of steel—the basic component of any industrial society. Moreover, the Midwest possesses a fine system of rivers and lakes, making transportation of heavy, bulky items relatively inexpensive. The opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway ten years ago gave many of the industrial cities on the Great Lakes (principally Buffalo, Cleveland and Detroit) direct ties with overseas markets and guaranteed that the industrial production of middle America will continue to be imperialist in scope.

To build this industrial empire the capitalists brought waves of displaced peasants from eastern and southern Europe (Poles, Slovaks and Italians) to the Midwest to work in the mines and mills. Settling in areas of town called Hunkeyvilles, they formed the human backbone of the new industrial cities. These immigrant workers were exploited to an unprecedented degree. In the Pittsburgh steel district in 1910 the average wage for 84 hours a week in the mills was less than \$12.50 a week. Packingtown workers in Chicago took home less than \$6.30 weekly.

Midwestern workers responded to the greed and inhumanity of industrialism with the most militant and bloody struggles in labor history. Here occurred the Homestead and Pullman strikes, the 1903 Packinghouse strike, the great 1919 Steel strike, the Flint and Akron sit-downs, the Republic Steel massacre, and countless other struggles. It was in the Midwest that the CIO was forged in the mining, steel, auto and rubber industries. Despite the presence of America's most militant labor unions, oppressive working conditions continue to exist, and provide the material basis for the struggle between labor and capital.

In many respects, Detroit is the archetypal Midwestern city. Although it was originally a regional commercial center, with some manufacturing, the city's growth and prosperity coincided with that of the automobile. The auto industry began in southeastern Michigan because of its centrality to the steel and carriage-making industries. With the application of mass production techniques, principally by Henry Ford, the auto industry boomed in the early twentieth century. From 1910 to 1920 Detroit's population increased from 465,000 to 993,000. Whole cities—Hamtramck where the Dodge brothers built a plant in 1913, and Dearborn where Henry Ford began construction of the massive River Rouge complex—sprang up organized solely around auto production.

The weathervane of our modern imperialist economy has been the automobile. The automobile combines large amounts of steel, rubber, plastic, and glass, and utilizes many technologically complicated components such as the radio, air conditioner, and stereo-tape deck. With an emphasis on styling and planned obsolescence, the automobile, unlike a home, must be continually repurchased, perhaps fifteen to twenty times in a lifetime. Finally and perhaps most important, the automobile industry is

the largest consumer not only for steel, rubber, and oil industries, but also for the construction and housing (highways, urban renewal, suburbs), repair, and emerging plastics industries. More jobs are related to the auto industry than any other industry in the American economy.

The centrality of the auto industry to the American economy gives the labor-capital struggles in Detroit vast significance. A majority of the first auto workers were Polish and Italian immigrants. Working in auto plants meant long hours, constant repetitious work, and the prospect of long periods of unemployment for the majority of the workforce. This was particularly true from 1920 to 1930 as a few giants (GM and Ford) emerged while literally hundreds of small car manufacturers failed.

The automakers recognized the potential rebelliousness of their workforce and employed every possible tactic to prevent the organization of workers. Huge spy systems were established in the plants. At one time the Chrysler corporation employed four separate labor spy agencies--three to watch the workers and one to watch over the other three agencies! Ethnic rivalries were inflamed (especially Italians versus Polish) and a central blacklisting office was maintained. In the vanguard of the employer struggle to keep the unions out was Henry Ford, who used black workers in the Rouge foundry and cultivated ties with the small but growing Detroit black community in order to maintain a reserve army of black workers to break any organizing drive.

Despite these and many other actions by management, the UAW was organized beginning with the Flint sit-down strike in 1937 and ending in 1941 with the establishment of collective bargaining for 130,000 hourly employees at Ford's Rouge plant. During the strike blacks, afraid of losing their jobs, remained in the plant, but many did not work.

In the thirties and forties, large segments of the UAW were controlled by radical and communist leadership. Local 600 of the Rouge plant, the largest of the UAW locals, was for many years in the hands of the Communist Party. Many locals remained fiercely independent, obtaining better contracts than those negotiated by the international. The rise and consolidation of power on the international level by Walter Reuther smashed these radical worker insurgencies and left the UAW with a social democratic political ideology. Under Reuther's control the UAW struggled for the betterment of workers' lives, arguing that both labor and capital had a common stake in the present order. Reuther's strategy was to win major concessions from management by guaranteeing them industrial stability for continued production and profits. He viciously smashed all communist elements within the UAW and broke the power of the more traditionally independent locals. By the early 1950s there was virtually no organized opposition of any importance left in the once faction-ridden UAW. Thus in plants where wildcats and work stoppages were very common in the 1930s and 1940s, the "class struggle" today occurs every three years at contract time.

Reuther's success in maintaining industrial discipline has meant high wages and fringe benefits for auto workers. The cost of living clause (won from GM in 1948) gave workers a buffer against inflation. Supplemental unemployment benefits (won in 1955) gave lay-off protection for seniority workers. Today medical, dental and college plans are open to UAW members, along with a large pension plan. These and other victories at the bargaining table assured Reuther and his successor, Leonard Woodcock, a base of supporters among the older and retired workers.

Yet the price the UAW paid for this strategy was the inability to act upon the grievances of workers on the shop floor. Working conditions eroded through continual time study and automation, overtime was man-

datory, job safety, particularly in the older plants, deteriorated. Since most issues at the work place challenge the right of management to control production, the UAW has rarely dealt with working conditions in the contracts. Instead, union officials reach "realistic" compromises with management on an ad hoc basis—until management decides to increase profits through change of conditions on the shop floor.

The same difficulties occur with the question of racism on the job. Although a vocal champion of equal rights and integration, the UAW has never systematically taken on the hiring, transfer and upgrading policies of management to insure equal access for all. The growing disparity between UAW rhetoric and racial conditions on the job created a new challenge to the organization and ideological hegemony of the UAW leadership. The needs of the young black worker and his willingness to support organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers threaten to overturn the present UAW politics and fundamentally alter the nature of industrial relations in the auto industry.

BLACKS AND THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Black employment in the auto factories began in 1916. Most of the early black auto workers were hired by Ford to work in the Rouge foundries and steel mill. Ford was by no means a benevolent corporate giant in his hiring of blacks. While blacks could find work at the Rouge, Ford kept them from living in Dearborn, preferring to establish a suburb for blacks—which, with characteristic WASP racism, he named Inkster. He wanted blacks to break up any efforts to organize his shops. Between 1930 and 1940 the percentage of black auto workers in Michigan declined from nine to six, as the depression "opened" the jobs of black workers to many whites who needed work. By 1940, of the 269,000 workers at GM, Ford, Chrysler, Packard and the Briggs body plant, 18,000 were black (in 1940 the black population of Detroit was 149,119). Almost all blacks were either in foundry work or in the lowest paying maintenance positions as janitors and porters.

World War II brought blacks and women onto the assembly lines. As a result there were many wildcats by white workers who saw the entrance of blacks as a threat to their jobs. One particularly important racist wildcat strike occurred in June, 1943, at the Packard plant on the east side of Detroit. Only a few days later fighting erupted between blacks and whites at Park Belle Isle (not far from the plant), ending in the Detroit race riot, the largest conflict between blacks and whites until that time.

As blacks entered the plants in production jobs, the company and union reacted with dual seniority lists, assignment of jobs and the erection of other caste boundaries. In what can be viewed as a precursor of the League, in August, 1941, black laborers and foundry workers at Chrysler's Dodge main plant, where DRUM emerged in 1968, wildcatted against management and the UAW because their seniority was passed over in giving transfers to the new Chrysler Tank Arsenal in Warren. By 1948, blacks had made some significant inroads into the auto industry: Ford was twenty percent black, Chrysler twenty-two percent black, although GM, despite federal government intervention, only employed a handful of blacks in production posts.

Since World War II, blacks have streamed into the Detroit plants, and in some Chrysler factories they comprise sixty to seventy-five percent of the workforce. This influx results from two factors. First the opening of service and lower-middle class positions in Detroit gave whites an opportunity to leave the auto plants. With automation and decentralization of the automobile industry, the percentage of people employed in Detroit car

factories dropped from fifty-five in 1950 to forty-four in 1960, a loss of 97,000 auto jobs. This decrease in auto employment continued throughout the 1960s. With the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the ruling class planned to make Detroit a commercial and industrial center, thus opening a number of new employment positions in white collar fields.

Second, automation of the automobile industry created new and difficult working conditions for the remaining workers. Jobs were combined through the use of power tools and new welding equipment. The years of time study and "industrial management" paid off with a more efficient use of the worker's time. Productivity per worker rose while the number of workers decreased. The easier jobs—inspection, driver, final assembly, repair—went to white workers. As so often in the history of American labor, blacks again took the jobs that whites refused to do.

The watershed for the hiring of black workers in Detroit came after the recessions of 1957-58 and 1960-61. Since it lies at the heart of the American economy, Detroit is very hard hit in times of economic downswing. In 1957-58 official unemployment in the Detroit metropolitan area was 19.5 percent and in 1960-61 15.2 percent. During the recession the auto makers took the opportunity to eliminate many jobs through automation. One 1961 Senate report indicated that 160,000 unemployed workers in Detroit would never see their jobs again.

For the black community in Detroit the "recession" was a "depression." During the second recession of 1960-61 black unemployment was officially at 39.3 percent. From 1955 to 1963 many plants did not hire a single new black worker. Other blacks who had seniority found themselves downgraded as whites kept their posts on the assembly lines. Male workers also demanded that local leadership not protect the jobs of women workers because they were not "heads of families."

After 1963 and particularly with the rapid economic growth during the Vietnam escalation (1965-68), the auto companies were hiring, especially Chrysler, Detroit's major employer. The Chrysler plants were primarily located in the city limits, often in black neighborhoods. The 1964-68 influx of young black workers dramatically changed the UAW membership in the automobile industry. The number of black workers in the UAW is kept secret in Solidarity House (they claim there are no figures on race compiled; the League believes about forty-five percent of the UAW membership is black), but some other statistics suggest the profound change. In Chrysler thirty-five percent of the workers are under thirty years of age, fifty-one percent have less than five years seniority; thirty-three percent of the GM workers are under thirty and forty percent of the workers have less than five years in the shop; Ford's workforce included thirty percent under thirty years and forty-one percent under five years seniority. (All these figures are before the extensive layoffs last winter and spring, resulting in seven percent unemployment in Detroit). What seems clear is that in the 1960s, as Detroit emerged out of the recession, the auto makers placed the future of their production in the hands of young black workers.

DETROIT

The activities of the League are especially significant in view of the growing crisis of corporate liberalism in Detroit. For the past twenty years the Detroit metropolitan area has been dominated by a coalition of auto companies, the Rockefeller interests (working primarily through Walker Cislser, the powerful chairman of Detroit Edison), other industrial and commercial interests (Michigan Bell, Hudson's, Bendix and Burroughs), and to a lesser extent, the UAW. Through their efforts the city was organized to produce motor vehicles. Now as Detroit becomes a com-

Deep in the gloom of the fire-filled pit
Where the Dodge rolls down the line,
We challenge the doom while dying in shit
While strangled by a swine...
For hours and years with sweated tears
Trying to break our chain...

But we broke our backs and died in packs
To find our manhood slain . . .
But now we stand for DRUM's at hand
To lead our freedom fight,
And now til then we'll unite like men
For now we know our might...

And damn the plantations and the whole
Dodge nation
For DRUM has dried our tears...
And now as we die we have a different cry
For now we hold our spears!
UAW is scum...
OUR THING IS DRUM!!!

mercial center, the ruling class has plans for regional development of southeastern Michigan which will utilize the suburbs for industrial development while the downtown will remain the financial hub of the area.

To develop Detroit as part of a region, corporate liberals had to respond to the growing black population (forty-seven percent black in 1970), the exodus of whites to the suburbs and the construction of new plants outside the city. They formed the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) to outflank local political structures which might fall into black hands.

The Detroit rebellion brought chaos to these well-made plans. Auto production in the city ceased. The rebellion increased the flow of whites from the cities, and terrified local suburban officials who now want nothing to do with the city. Because the racist suburbs refused to cooperate with any organization attempting to solve the problems of Detroit, SEMCOG failed.

The combination of the rebellion plus the activities of the League has brought home to the automobile makers the new threat from the black worker. The options open to the Big Three are limited. Chrysler, for example, would be overjoyed to close down Dodge Main (which has been condemned as a firetrap since 1948); but lacking the investment capital to build new facilities, it must hold on. Ford has dismantled the Rouge operations, moving the new foundry far downriver from Detroit. Other new auto plants have been constructed in the northeast and downriver white suburban areas.

The movement of the plants to the suburbs, coupled with the increasing layoffs, has reduced the number of blacks in the auto plants. Yet, short of a long-sustained economic crisis, it is highly unlikely that whites will again re-enter the plant in large numbers. What seems more probable is that by moving plants to the suburbs, the auto makers are making it difficult for blacks to work, hoping that they will value their jobs enough to tone down their militancy.

Another tactic of the corporate liberals has been management cooperation with the union to get rid of black militants, particularly during periods of high unemployment. In the following interview Mike and Ken give examples of the forms (inside and outside the plant) of harassment of League members. Last September, by publicly firing a popular shop steward in the body shop, Chrysler tried to trap the DRUM leadership into publicly calling for a wildcat which would probably have cost them their jobs. Yet for all the blacks fired there are countless more brothers and sisters waiting to take their place—some who have already been exposed to the League at Northern High (drop-out rate fifty-seven percent) or Central High (drop-out rate fifty-one percent).

Since the metropolitan government concept is failing, the key political struggle is for control over Detroit. As in all American cities, the superstructure (schools, health services, transportation) is decaying due to a dwindling tax base. Since the rebellion, the downtown area has not been redeveloped, as whites have abandoned the shopping and entertainment centers for those in the suburbs. Wayne State University's expansion is being bitterly fought by black and Southern white groups who want to maintain their neighborhood by any means necessary. The obvious racism of the police and the courts has been under continual attack by some liberal judges and the black community. Finally, a new suburban-rural alliance in the legislature keeps Detroit from receiving sufficient state aid to solve its problems.

Given this dismal decay, the corporate liberals have chosen to decentralize the school system, placing students (sixty percent of schools are

black) under white control through pairing and bused integration. This new plan threatens to bring race war to the streets of Detroit as racist whites have launched a recall campaign and urged their high school-age children to attack black students in the schools. The uproar has caused the state legislature to reconsider school decentralization.

Finally, intensifying and unifying all these other problems is the national economic crisis which is particularly acute in the Detroit region. The sales of the Big Three are down, with Chrysler reporting a record loss of \$29.4 million for the first quarter of 1970. The impact of the auto decline on the upcoming contract talks will be significant. While the rank and file are demanding more money, and restoration of the Cost of Living clause which Reuther gave away last year, the automakers might risk a long strike, especially if sales are low. Given this pressure, the new UAW chief Woodcock might have difficulty keeping discipline within the locals. With the League and other radicals in the shops, the UAW negotiations may become explosive.

These problems facing the corporate liberal capitalists in Detroit are similar to those of other Midwestern industrial cities. The creation of the League is the black response to the objective conditions facing the working class. No doubt in other Midwestern cities there will appear other black worker groups or caucuses, and the already existing ones will form associations with the League.

THE LEAGUE

The formation and growth of the League can be viewed in three stages. As the following interview makes clear, the leadership of the League has been active in the black movement for a long time. Working through various black community groups, SNCC and local nationalist groups, the League fused Marxism-Leninism with the realities of black colonial oppression. The first stage came as people like John Watson, Ken Cockrel, Mike Hamlin, General Baker, and John Williams formed the *Inner City Voice* newspaper in 1967. Their reasons for establishing the *Voice* are indicative of the theoretical understanding that guides the League's political programs and strategies. Here is John Watson interviewed in 1968 discussing the formation of the *Voice*:

We had studied the history of the Russian Bolsheviks and found a specific pamphlet by Lenin called "Where to Begin," written in 1903, before he wrote "What is to Be Done?" where he described the role a newspaper could play. A newspaper was the focus of a permanent organization, it could provide a bridge between the peaks of activity. It creates an organization and organizes the division of labor among revolutionaries. Revolutionaries do something, not just a meeting on Sundays, making speeches and passing resolutions. It creates the kind of division of labor needed not just for the newspaper but for a revolutionary organization. . . .

We wanted to build an organization of black workers, black students both in high schools and colleges, and ultimately to create a black Marxist-Leninist Party, flowing from the newspaper. ("Black Editor: An Interview," *Radical America*, July-August 1968, p. 31).

From 1967 to 1968, the *Inner City Voice* provided Detroit's black community with news and a political perspective.

The second stage involved worker organizations in the Chrysler plants in the summer and fall of 1968. Shop "organizing" for the League meant something other than what white radicals understand it to mean. Most of the *Inner City Voice* activists had been working in plants all their lives and had close contact with young black workers. The organizational form of the RUM-DRUM, ELRUM, FRUM, UPRUM, MARUM, LARUM- was

an "extra-union caucus." This meant a group of black workers would struggle within the local union as well as outside of it in the community and shops.

The third stage, one which describes the League's present form, is the diversification of activities from plant organization to work in the community. In the past eight months the League has focused on high school and community colleges, housing and welfare issues, and building political groups which provide the basis for attempts to control the political destiny of Detroit. Organizationally the League has received funds through the *Black Manifesto* which provides organizational resources necessary to create a black publications outfit (Black Star publication), a newspaper—the *Voice*—and the beginnings of a black school system.

As the League has grown so has its support within the Detroit black community. Support is based on programs which deal with the life conditions of black people and which also broaden consciousness through struggle. The strategy of the League has been to create programmatic contexts within which support of basic reforms is possible. Only the logic of a white academic radical would claim that these struggles channel blacks into the system and thus are not revolutionary. It is precisely by dealing with the most pressing issues through struggles which broaden people's consciousness that the League wins the political trust of black people in Detroit. As Grace and James Boggs point out, one of the problems of the black movement has been an overdependence on the spontaneous eruption of the "brothers in the street" without a recognition of the need to extend revolutionary political leadership in that struggle. Essentially, this is the function the League performs. They are working toward the construction of a politically conscious black movement in the shops and communities of Detroit.

The League has important political implications for white revolutionaries. Most whites tend to think of the black movement as the Panthers, and recognize only the work of the Panthers in black communities. This denies the existence of many nationalist groups which are dominant in parts of the Midwest and South. Movement blindness to black diversity makes it difficult to explain the whole of the black liberation struggle to white Americans. It also leads to unnecessary competition among black movement groups for scarce resources in the white left community. Concrete support for black liberation means that white revolutionaries have to relate to all black revolutionary groups, and to the idea of protracted struggle embodied in the League's slogan—"Fight, Fail, Fight Again. Fail Again. Fight On to Final Victory."

Jim Jacobs, Detroit Organizing Committee

FIGHT ON TO VICTORY

AN INTERVIEW

THE LEAGUE'S ORIGINS

Leviathan: How was the League of Revolutionary Black Workers formed? What are the origins of the League?

Mike: The League began with the formation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement in May of 1968. What it represented was the coming together of various elements of the black community: those elements being the black workers, the black students and intellectuals, and the lumpen proletariat—the black street force. It happened at a time when many of us who have had histories of radical involvement in this city for some time had just begun to develop a newspaper as a means of getting ourselves together. The newspaper was called the *Inner City Voice*. But we always had an understanding that what was necessary was that we organize black workers. And though we had never had a successful entrée into the plants with the workers and we really didn't understand how to go about it, we attracted to us a group of nine workers from the plant just by virtue of us producing a newspaper and projecting certain ideas. We had certain radical ideas and a certain revolutionary line: that black workers would be the vanguard of the liberation struggle in this country. And we had a series of meetings with these workers to get to know them, for them to get to know us, and to begin to develop a common understanding of how to proceed. They came to us because of the objective conditions in the plant, conditions that they had tried to deal with in a number of ways, primarily through the formation of caucuses. And obviously these efforts had been unsuccessful. So, kind-of in desperation, they came to us as the last hope and the only alternative to the approaches that they understood that they could take. And we developed a relationship which led to the formation of DRUM. We decided to use the newsletter as a means of organizing the workers in that we could establish a means of communication among the workers throughout the plant. We wrote about incidents, events and conditions of racism, brutality, and other kinds of bad working condi-

tions, which began to build a sense of resentment among the workers and began to develop a sense of unity among them. It was a unity based on this resentment against these kinds of conditions, especially the racist practices in the plants.

On the Line

Leviathan: Mike, you said that they came to you as a last resort. I take it that they were in UAW locals. How did the UAW deal or not deal with the problems that these black workers had which left them no alternative but to turn to a more revolutionary direction?

Mike: Well, let's look at it this way. When I was younger I worked at Ford's in the stamping plant. I worked for six weeks and then the lay-off came. So I began to look for a job. You have to understand that there's a grapevine in the black community that tells you where people are being hired on a given day. And if I was circulating in the same set that I was at the time, I could probably tell you today where they're hiring people. It gets around all over the city. When you show up there, you see long lines of the same people that you saw the day before at Ford, or the day before that at Cadillac's or whatever. So there's these long lines and you go out there and stand and they hire a few people and then they send the rest of them away. Now, what happens is there may be two or three whites in that line. And once you get into the employment office, they may hire a large number of blacks and a few whites.

But then you go in and see what kind of jobs they're giving. The whites generally get the easy jobs: inspection or jobs on small stock. The blacks go in and get the heavy jobs, the hard jobs, and the dangerous jobs. The reason for that is kind of interesting. First of all, whites won't work on those kinds of jobs. That's a fact. In plants where blacks are in the majority, for example, the Ford engine plant in Dearborn, the line runs at a back-breaking pace. The same operation in another Ford engine plant, where there is a majority of white workers, the line runs, you know, at the agreed upon rate. In

the Mahwah, New Jersey Assembly plant, the line runs at 52 units an hour. And it doesn't vary because the work force is 80 per cent white. If they speed it up, the white workers are going to walk out. But they know that we are so up-tight for jobs, and there's such a large supply of reserve labor, black labor, cheap labor available for them, that they can speed it up on us as much as they want to. And if we quit, they can always bring somebody in at the new rate. So in the Mahwah plant, they run 52 units an hour. In the Ford plant here, the agreed upon rate is something like 64. But in actuality, the line goes up to 76 in certain instances, depending on whether or not the foreman is meeting his quota, or whether or not he thinks he can slip one over on the workers.

Leviathan: What's the union agreement about productivity?

Mike: At the Ford Dearborn I think it's 64. But

We also found out in certain instances, like last summer during the time of economic boom, that the guys were being rotated from plant to plant. They would hire a lot of people, keep them for 89 days since you're on probation 90 days, and the 89th day, you're discharged and you had to go to another plant. So this inflated the employment figures, and deflated unemployment figures. In actuality, what they're doing was rotating guys from plant to plant. They fire them on various charges, trumped-up charges. At Ford Rouge they would fire six hundred workers per week. You know, six hundred workers per week, I mean that's every week. And at the Dodge Main plant they were firing 300 per week. And at Eldon they were firing 300 a week. And none of these people ever got back. They didn't even bother to fight. First of all, those who have 89 days don't have any recourse: they're not in the union even though they paid the initiation fees



it doesn't mean anything because, first of all, when you're working there, you're working so hard, the line's going so fast that you're not counting. And secondly the union is not counting. The union has no power and no real concern about controlling that line. If the foreman can get away with it without the workers knowing that, then that's cool. What happens is, the workers can tell when they get really ridiculous because you're working so fast. And, like, some lines, you know, go on several floors. And sometimes a guy will be trying to run downstairs. He gets so far behind he'll be trying to run downstairs trying to catch up with the cars that he's supposed to be working on. So, that's why those departments are overwhelmingly black in almost every instance. The same applies for the foundry where work is dirty and dangerous, and a lot of workers get lung diseases. Little's done about it.

and paid dues for those three months. But they don't have full union rights. And then the other people are people who are "undesirable" people. At that time they were firing them for Afro hairdos, you know, or for any kind of sign of militancy or any kind of resistance to the harassment that was going on.

Before we came along they were constantly intimidating the workers, constantly threatening them with being fired, giving them time off and that kind of thing. They always had them in a state of intimidation, in a state of fear. And in certain instances, we have reversed that. It's now the foremen and the labor relations people who are intimidated, who are afraid to do the kind of things that they did before. And I think that's going to be the pattern throughout these plants as we continue to organize.

But, you know, the actual individual fore-

men were bold on the line: calling them names and walking up and kicking them. Up until that time there were not too many instances, excepting at the Ford Foundry, of people actually hurting or jumping on the foremen and killing 'em or anything like that. Ford has always been so bad that that foundry has a history of supervisors and union stewards getting killed and a few white workers too. They'd come up and tell some guy: "you're not catching them fast enough, speed up the line," you know; and trying to get at them that way. I mean if they're going to speed it up, at least they don't have to add insult to injury. Come up and start talking about kicking you in the behind or something if you don't keep up. So that has been changed in Dodge. It still exists at Ford . . .

These kinds of things resulted in actions like a number of wildcat strikes, which resulted in a number of people being fired. One of the wildcat strikes which involved black and white workers ended up with all of the workers going back except one of the founders of DRUM. But he continued working on the executive committee of the League.

Besides the strikes, an organization was formed called the "Concerned Unionists" which was a caucus but which was doomed to failure because the union apparatus was unresponsive. There was nothing being done about any of these abuses being heaped on the workers. So after they had gone all these routes, they didn't have any other option but to come seek an alliance with us and an involvement with us. One of the mistakes that we did *not* make was to set ourselves apart from the workers. What we did in fact was to involve ourselves and integrate ourselves with the workers.

Ken: See people don't understand that workers have been resisting for years man. Dig the whole characterization that black people give jobs man: it's a "yoke," it's a "hang," it's a "slave," you got to meet that motherfucking "mule" on Monday morning. That's what bloods talk about on the weekend, man. The whole week too! And the minute you get off that motherfucker on Friday, you living in dread and anticipation of that motherfucking Monday, man.

Newsletter, Strikes . . . DRUM

Leviathan: How did DRUM and ELRUM continue to grow?

Mike: We published a newsletter on a weekly basis, and we had a *specific* day that it came out. It was a four page mimeographed sheet that was folded. And the response, of course, was tremendous. Black workers began to develop this sense of unity and this sense of common resentment against the racist practices of the management in the plant, and the inaction on the part of the UAW. This led to a situation where after nine weeks after the formation of DRUM, the workers decided that they wanted to strike. And that is in fact what we did. At the end of nine weeks we decided to strike.

What we did was establish picket lines around the plant and the gates, that were composed of black students, elements of the street force, and black intellectuals. We did not seek to prevent any white workers from going into the plant. In fact we urged them to go in. But we were successful in keeping about seventy per cent of the black workers out. We didn't forcibly keep anyone from going in. We just picketed and protested the racism in the plant and they all related to that. The strike lasted three days and was very successful. Naturally with a significant action like this there was a great deal of educational value in that strike. Workers from all over the area, as well as out-of-state, began to relate to us which meant that we had to begin to involve ourselves with workers in other plants. That led to the creation of the second Revolutionary Union Movement and that was the Eldron Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement—ELRUM and the third which was the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement—FRUM. We had workers from those plants who began to come to DRUM meetings.

And because conditions were so bad for the guys in ELRUM, the membership in that organization rapidly grew. And again, you know, we used the same techniques that we used at Dodge in terms of the Newsletter and the same kind of writing. And again, at the end of nine weeks, this led to a desire on the part of the workers to strike. A desire which we supported and we carried out. There was a strike at ELRUM which resulted in ninety per cent of the black workers staying out since Eldon has a higher percentage of black workers than Dodge. Again, we used students, people from the street force, and workers from Dodge, to man these picket lines.

It happened that in that particular strike twenty-six workers were discharged. Many of them were not members of ELRUM but were

people that management wanted to get rid of. But we felt a degree of responsibility to all the men because what happened was that naturally management and UAW was trying to make us the villains in this case: they wanted to make us the ones responsible for those workers losing their jobs. So we tried to do what we could to support them in terms of raising funds and we tried to arrange jobs for them. A number of them got back to work some six or seven months later without back pay.

But that strike taught us a lot. We knew at that point that what we had to do was to begin to organize workers in more plants and begin to organize the black community to relate to the struggle in the plants, in the city, in the state, and eventually around the country. That led to the formation of the League. Now the reason that that was necessary was because it became clear that no one group of workers in a single plant can win a struggle for control of a plant, even a struggle for justice in a plant, in an isolated situation. The only way that these struggles can be won is through the support from workers in other plants. And through support of the black community too. So we decided after the Eldon situation to set about organizing toward that end. And immediately after that, the League was created and we began to gather resources. We went into a long stage of getting resources for that organizational thrust.

THE BLACK MANIFESTO: BLACK WORKERS ARE THE KEY

Leviathan: Could one of you guys begin to deal with the move of the League from DRUM and ELRUM to branching out into other activities and the relationship of that to the key resource—the *Black Manifesto*?

Mike: Ok. The Eldon strike only lasted one day. We had a great deal of learning to do in terms of organizing workers when we began. We concluded that it was necessary that we think in terms of organizing workers through the area and eventually throughout the country, as well as organizing the black community. This required considerable more resources than what we had in terms of, first of all, human resources. We needed more organizers. Secondly we needed facilities, or installations. We needed equipment, supplies, and more technical skills and assistance. And so from that point on, most of our efforts went into garnering these resources. And in the midst of this process we came together for the National Black Economic

Development Conference and saw, you know, an opportunity to get a considerable amount of resources. Resources not only for the League but for other relevant black organizations around the country. Unfortunately, too many of those other organizations didn't see the importance of what we were doing at the time. Therefore we did not accomplish as much as we could have. However, I can say that we have accomplished a great deal in terms of meeting these needs for resources as a result of the work around the Manifesto. We are in a much better position than we've ever been as far as resources go.

I think it's very important for people to understand the Manifesto and what it means to us in terms of a new level of struggle for revolutionaries. When we issued the Manifesto there were cries from many quarters that this was a reformist, counterrevolutionary tactic. It was our position at the time that a certain style had been set in the movement where people had to out-left the other person. In other words you had to be into a thing where you were constantly proving your revolutionary credentials. We felt that we had a history, and that we saw an opportunity to accomplish something tactical or something strategical and that we had to move on that. And the result I think is that history has absolved us in that sense.

The important thing is that we don't have any problems, any hang-ups, about moving tactically in what appears to be a reformist way in order to accomplish a given objective. And I think that some people can learn something from that because there were people who were prepared to say that the only way revolutionaries can get the kind of resources that you're asking for is through robbing banks. But it makes sense to us to take an easier path if it's open.

Ken: There's people who can't understand the League, for example, running brothers for offices in unions. You know, deaf-assed motherfuckers who can't understand the League relating to the National Black Economic Development Conference. They don't understand that the movement is real. It is concrete, man. It relates to workers every god-damned day, you know what I mean. And they are relating to stopping getting that motherfucking ass kicking you know. And like man, any question that you bring up they are not dealing with on some sort of superbullshit abstract level.

See many motherfuckers man, don't understand the complexity of modern industrial

capitalism. It means man, that if a mother-fucker wants to make a car, you can not make no kind of car man, that ain't got gears with them. You know what I mean? Now look here man. Look: Eldon Gear and Axle plant, man . . . is-the-only-gear-and-axle-plant-in-Chrysler's-entire-national-operation. Understand that? Understand that? At 6800 Lynch Road, in the City of Detroit, at the Eldon Avenue Axle Assembly Plant, there is the only motherfucking place-that-turns-out-those-motherfucking-housings. And who ever heard of a car without housings? And if you shut down Eldon, you shut down Chrysler's motherfucking automobile and truck manufacturing operation. *That's how significant the League of Revolutionary Black Workers is.* And that's how significant ELRUM is: Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement. You shut it down! Do you understand that? That's what you do!

Do you know that the Tank Arsenal which makes the majority of tanks for the U.S. Army in this country is located at Nine Mile and Mound and that ninety per cent of the workers in that particular installation are black!? You know, I mean! What do you think were rolling down the streets July 23rd, 1967, and is rolling all around Vietnam today? Look here, almost any night of the week you can go and wait on a railroad crossing in the City of Detroit and you will see a train come by that's got about 50 cars on it, of which about 30 of those cars is army jeeps. And you know where those jeeps are made? They are made at the Dodge truck plant on Nine Mile and Mound Road. And there-are-so-many-brothers-at-that-plant that it is impossible to relate to, you know. I mean it's—it's a bitch man. It's a bitch. The post office. The busdrivers, man. They're all blacks. Shit.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING: INVOLVEMENT ON ALL FRONTS

Leviathan: People who aren't familiar with the Detroit scene have an image of the League as only organizing at the point of production. Yet when you come to Detroit you see that the League is much more broadly based: you're into a whole bunch of other things. How did the League begin to relate to community organizing? What are some of the community things you're into? How do you see the relationship between community organizing and point of production organizing?

A Broader Political Definition of Workers

Ken: When we talk about the League *going into* community organizations, I don't think that's really accurate, you-know. Because like the people who are involved in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers' central staff aren't like so-called instant revolutionary cats who just grew some Afros and hung some bullets around their necks and file down the street. Everyone has a past experience of involvement with each other and a past experience of various organizational kinds that has given persons individual identities productive of political value quite apart from and really complementary to the existence of the League. Let us take John Watson, who's a member of the central staff of the League. Before the formation of the League, for example, Watson had an incredible history of involvement, man. You know, ranging from the South in Charleston, ranging from the Freedom Now Party, and what that meant. He has a whole history of involvement in UHURU as do other members of the central staff; beautiful people, you know. People that have been to Cuba, people who have met Che Guevara. People who have been busted and snatched out of classrooms because they allegedly booed the National Anthem when Detroit was trying to cop the Olympics and they had Hayes Jones [black Olympic champion, ed.] running around with a torch. The brothers were down there for a demonstration. Like over the years we've been involved in everything from Democratic campaigns for State Representatives in '66 to the Inner City Organizing Committee. Like John Watson now runs WCO [The West Central Organization, ed.] John once worked as a staff organizer for WCO prior to that. Or take Interfaith over on the North End; another community project. I worked over there as Research Director. John Williams, who's a member of the central staff worked over there as, you know, a community organizer. John Williams now heads and runs the Santa Maria schools down in the North End which is like another resource facility that we exercise some control over. I mean there's just an incredible history of involvement. It transcends even what people describe as being organizational lines and they're real bonds of contact that people are constantly having, man. These are experiences with all the persons who have been involved in any way politically in this city who are black as well as white. What I'm saying is that there's been like a history of

fairly intensive very sustained involvement by various people on all fronts. And what we see when we see the League beginning to operate now as a very deliberate and decisive revolutionary organization is really a period in which you begin to reap the fruit of a number of seeds, man, that have been planted, you know, over the years and have been carefully nurtured man, *and tended*: mistakes, errors, involvements, and so on.

The other thing on that is that when you talk about the League expanding into what is called community work is that it simply recognized, you know, a broader political definition of what persons characteristically regard as being workers. And it was also an objective understanding of the fact that workers leave the plant and have to go somewhere. They live where we live so that it begins to become eminently sensible, as well as objectively desirable, to have organizations that relate to workers within a context outside of the plant so that we can generate the kind of support that we need in order to support the struggles inside of the plant. So that you find the formation of groups such as PAC, the People's Action Committee, over in Highland Park. You find connections with an organizational structure which is called UNICON which relates out in the Cooley High area of the city. There are a host of organizational structures which are simply reflective of those realities. People in the League have identities, that, you know, like transcend in one sense their being in the League. What is happening now is that the League is coming to be understood as a discrete organization. Something is coming into existence that is referred to now as the League. None of it's been accidental. Most of it's been deliberate. There's always been this kind of activity. Even the formation of the Detroit chapter of the Black Panther Party, was formed really under the aegis of two or three members of the central staff of the League.

Mike: We did not intend to get into the community organizing aspects of what we are about today. But that was because the organizing we were doing in the plant was new. We didn't understand a lot. We learned. And what we learned after our initial involvement had taken us through two or three strikes is that a program has to address itself to the stage of struggle that you're in. And conditions were not right for us to go out and organize plants with the limited resources we had and immediately

move to as high a level of struggle as a strike represents. We had to back away from that and to think; to develop a long range perspective and to think about a protracted struggle.

That's something that Americans have a hard time dealing with. The revolution is not going to be tomorrow. Or yesterday, as Abbie Hoffman or Jerry Rubin have said. Or next week or next month. We have to think in terms of taking as long as is necessary to accomplish the objectives of over-throwing imperialism and racism. We may not see it in our lifetime, and it's hard to understand that. We do not expect to accomplish that kind of job tomorrow. But what we have to do is deal with the stage that we're in. So after we struck these plants, we determined that a plant isolated by itself could not in fact win a struggle. What we had to do was think in terms of long range planning and building of a movement that would involve black workers across the country in industry and black people throughout the community so people could support each other in time of intense struggle. So we determined that what we had to do, among other things, was to begin organizing in the community.

Serve the People

Now Detroit is a city with a history. The black community of Detroit has a history of very sophisticated political awareness. It has a history also of a number of opportunists, a number of incompetents, a number of people who have attempted to do things that projected unrealistic solutions. They got people involved and eventually frustrated. This continues today.

The point I'm trying to make on that is that if whatever you're involved in does not relate to liberation, or does not relate in some way to a program that is about destroying imperialism and that is about destroying racism, then you're not doing anything. You're not doing anything. If you're off in a corner somewhere, involved in some kind of program, some kind of activity, that activity should be related to dealing with those two things. Until they are dealt with, everything else is meaningless. It's not meaningless in the sense that you can't provide some services. But we've got to move beyond that level.

So we determined that the struggle of workers and the struggle of our people in the community, as community people, were necessary and that they should go hand in hand. We felt that the people in the plants, when they were involved in intense struggle, needed sup-

port from black people from the community. And community people should be prepared to come out there, and support them, to try to deal with the repression and other things that were gonna happen to us. We decided that the struggles in the community, the struggles over the schools and police brutality and all of the other issues, housing and so forth, which affect workers should be supported by workers. And we do that. We support them. We're part of those struggles; that's how you develop a program. And now, while our program is long term it's also, you know, based on reality.

We try to stick with reality, with what is concrete. We don't get off into the metaphysical and all that other kind of thing. We try and deal with concrete situations that our people experience. Our programs are based on that. They evolve out of these concrete situations. It's not something of us thinking up an abstract design in our mind and putting it together and going out to impose it on a situation. It's the other way around. It comes out of conditions. The program evolves from conditions and is real to people. I think that accounts for any successes that we've had, in terms of mobilizing and organizing people. I think the lack of that approach accounts for the failure of a lot of other efforts that were about trying to deal with these problems we are dealing with.

Students

Here we are in the heart, or in the body, of imperialism. You know, in the head of imperialism and we can cut it off. And I think that after all these years in this country that it's becoming clear what our historic mission is. That mission is to cut off the heart and the head of the imperialist monster and to liberate the world. And ultimately we will accomplish that through this struggle; this protracted struggle.

Like I said, most of the organizing areas that we have gotten into we were kind of dragged into reluctantly. We always had an impulse to stay with the plants and organize the plants because that's where the power was. That's where blacks have power, they are the producers, they can close down the economy. And so our impulse was to stay there. But after we recognized that we had to involve all our people in supporting those struggles in the plants, we began to look beyond factories. Plus, certain situations became so critical that we had to move in to begin to organize to avert disaster and to try to provide some kind of help and leadership. The most obvious one was the

schools.

What had happened was that the League represents a merger of a number of various elements in the black community and includes students; high school and college students and a few junior high students. Now obviously the students, the high school students, were involved in the situation in the school. And they developed a certain amount of revolutionary consciousness. They had to sit up in a classroom and listen at the bullshit that these teachers are running down. And that causes difficulty.

The reason we first got involved with students and the lumpen proletariat, the brothers from the streets, was because the workers themselves could not go out to the plant to pass out literature. If they did, they obviously would get fired. And so to protect them from that, we allowed them to remain anonymous when we first began. And we now do that in every new place that we go into.

So we had gotten more and more students involved and then they wanted to start organizing in schools. They were outraged at the conditions in the schools that they attended. And there was some study that said that students graduated from Northern High School read at a sixth grade level. And so if you have a revolutionary consciousness and you're placed in a situation like that, you can imagine what that means. They began to try to organize and repression came down on them. They were kicked out of school, the police harassed them, picked them up, beat some of them, and they beat one or two policemen. And this kept escalating because the more harsh the discipline became, the more determined they became to struggle. And they finally reached a point where they had been victimized by so much repression that their inclination was to tear the school apart. They said it just should not exist.

That got us involved into another level of trying to develop a program. The program that we developed at the time was not adequate for those students. But since our programs emerge out of concrete situations they worked at a program for a while and they began to recognize, as we are recognizing, that black students throughout the city were going to have to join together to deal with the total system of education in the city. So they began to recognize that they had to start organizing in other schools. They were walking out, constantly walking out. There was almost a walk out every day. And the other students supported it at first, but

after a while they began to stop participating because it didn't make any sense to them to continue to just walk out of school every day. They weren't getting anywhere. So they had to get together and in the process involved us.

TAKING POLITICAL POWER IN DETROIT

Leviathan: A lot of times I've heard both you guys talking about what it means to take political power in Detroit; that one of the ways to describe the League's activities is that they're building an apparatus to do so.

Ken: Right.

Leviathan: So what does it mean to take political power in Detroit?

Ken: To run it. (Everyone cracks up)

Leviathan: What does it mean materially?

Ken: What does it mean materially?

Leviathan: Yeah.

Ken: It means a lot of things materially. You see, like first of all, Detroit is experiencing the same demographic shifts and shit that are going down in the other cities. And during the last race for mayor there was some serious discussion of the possibility of the League having a candidate. And I was possibly going to be that candidate and we would relate to, like running for elective office man, and taking over the city. We are relating concretely to the '73 campaign in the city of Detroit. We're relating concretely to running the city of Detroit. We think that that's a distinct possibility and we've done an awful lot of things in terms of increasing our capacity to disseminate propaganda as well as increasing our contacts with people in the community.

You got to understand Jim that there is a fantastic amount of support and a fantastic level of awareness of the existence of persons who are part of the League on the part of the people that do not in any way identify as being in any way like politically involved. It's a thing that I guess really has to be observed more so than described. For example, like during my contempt case we were running People's Court out in Kennedy Square. I mean you would have the experience, man, of like middle class, you know, middle age, black sisters coming up to you that you've never seen before in your life man, and like, giving you a twenty dollar bill, man, and like saying: "right on." You know: "I support your work," and "I support what

you're doing" and "this is a good thing." You have the experience of doing shows like on the black radio stations. You know, call-in shows that the bloods listen to; you know, the mamas and the old sisters, they listen to that thing. And then they call back in and they run their thing on you.

The League does not take the position, and never has asserted and never will assert, that the resolution of the kinds of questions which impel us to engage in the struggle is going to come from litigation, or from participation in electoral politics. The position that we take, however, is this—that we're about the business of acquiring resources. The resources we want to acquire in Detroit is, you know, monopolistic control of the use of force. Which means of course that you're going to have to have some sort of control over the apparatus of state power which is what we're after. And we think that we can get that on a level that is like more efficient; this is a minimum of expenditure as opposed to expenditure of armed struggle which might or might not be that decisive. Understanding the realities of the situation we're in a position where we can get that realistically by winning the election. Therefore, we will do that.

Leviathan: What was this contempt case you just referred to?

In Contempt: The Judge Is A Racist, Honkey, Dog, Fool

Ken: You see, the League has been forced to exercise considerable amount of directorial responsibility, man, for other organizations. Even national organizations which are like primarily concentrated locally like the Republic of New Africa sometimes come under our responsibility. The Republic of New Africa's situation took place in Reverend Franklin's New Bethel Church where some cops were shot. People from the Republic of New Africa were charged and like we were defending, are defending, the people charged with the murder and shooting of these cops. There was a preliminary examination in this case of one of the black legionaires: Alfred Hibbit. And the judge, who was like presiding over that preliminary examination, terminated the preliminary examination without permitting us to do certain legal numbers that we are entitled to do. So we took the position that it was kind of ridiculous. And outside of the courtroom there were press people, media people from the orthodox press,

you know, TV channels and so forth, and they asked us some questions about what had happened inside. The result being that, you know, like I made a very lengthy statement, but among some of the phrases which went in the statement was the statement that the judge was a racist, honkey, dog, buffoon, pig, pirate, a thief, a bandit, a rogue, and so on, you know. This is all said in conjunction with a whole host of things: even talking about their law books and the fact that we haven't even asked these cats to do nothing except follow their law.

They seized upon that particular language and decided that they would have to do something about it and institute a contempt proceeding against me for using this language. So we got into a thing where we were gonna have this hearing. We got a lot of lawyers involved from all over the country; from San Francisco, from New York, from Atlanta, from different places; black lawyers, white lawyers and so on. We developed a defense and decided that our position would be, very simply: We apologize for nothing. Everything that we said we say again. We accept it and it's true. We're prepared to prove it. Our defense was the judge *is* a racist, honkey, dog, fool; that he's a pig, he's a pirate, he's a thief, and he's a bandit.

We went through some real changes. All the Recorders Court Judges disqualified themselves saying that they too had been caught up in the ambit of my criticisms and therefore they couldn't fairly sit. They finally got the Supreme Court in the State of Michigan to appoint a Circuit Court Judge; the Presiding Judge of the Circuit Court—a cat named Joseph Sullivan. They began to have hearings over in Circuit Court and at the conclusion of each hearing it was our position that we would have a People's Court in Kennedy Square: the site of the old City Hall, right in the heart of downtown Detroit. So every day after court we would then go to People's Court in Kennedy Square. We would run down an analysis of the legal system and what the legal system really is: which is, of course, simply a functional appendage of the rest of the state apparatus. And this went on for about five days.

But man we were getting them *in* court so they decided that they would try to solve this by settlement. They wanted to drop the case to which our position was: fine, you can drop the case. Except number one: there will, of course, be no apology; and number two: you will reduce the bond on this man from \$50,000 to \$10,000. So after five days of wailing on them

in court, they dropped the case. We made a statement that we did not repudiate anything that we said and that we would always say the same thing when we confront this kind of thing. They cut the brother's bond down to \$10,000 and that was raised by some members of the white left. We subsequently tried his case and got him off. So now the state bar has announced that they're going to try to move for disbarment or reprimand or suspension of me. But that's pending. We've had to defend a lot of brothers on the Central Staff. Different brothers have been subjected to all kinds of little legal harassments. We've been essentially successful in that we have not lost anyone. We don't have anyone in jail. We have everyone out on the street, and we're weathering those attacks.

Leviathan: We talked about political power in Detroit. How do you relate that to struggles you're engaged in?

Mike: Well, as Ken said earlier, workers are a part of the community; they are voters in the community. What we're doing is programming struggles in the community into the plants. The struggle in the community at this stage is over the question of community control. We think this will perform an educational function which will lead to the kind of mobilization necessary to in fact accomplish the objective of taking power. Now, we anticipate that the struggle around the question of community control will be very intense and very bitter. That's the most volatile issue in the Black community in Detroit at this point. And naturally we expect the workers in the plants to relate to that struggle and support that struggle on whatever level that they are able to. If it became intense and bitter enough and we were sufficiently organized in the plants, we could conceive of the situation where the kind of support that the workers could give to their struggle in the community would be a strike in support. I don't know if we will be in that position by 1973, but we'll be working toward that.

SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION: ORGANIZING A CITY-WIDE CADRE

Ken: Look, this is the scene: the Michigan State legislature passed a bill, Public Act 244 in 1969, which orders the Board of Education to create between seven and eleven regions or sub-districts which will have their own so-called governing boards or regional boards. The regional boards will also send members to an

expanded central Board of Education. And that's what the Board of Education has been ordered to do. This is like the response to the clamour which exists in Black communities around the question of community control of schools. Now the position of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers is clearly, of course, that community control of like anything is *not* the solution, you understand, to our problems. I mean the same goes for people who talk about community control of the police, or Black control of the Black community and all the rest.

What decentralization clearly represents for us is simply a context within which it becomes possible to do a number of things. One: some organizing of persons within the context of structural apparatus that begins to relate politically and electorally. They're going to get practice. We can also organize people within the context of these regions. The critical thing around the question of decentralization, of course, is organizing political cadre and structuring political apparatus on the city-wide basis. And if we want to structure them within the context of high school constellations or around the concept of regional boards and sending people to the central board, that's fine; we'll do that. Our essential interest is relating to people within political structure and having them begin to respond to a certain amount of organizational discipline. This explains our interest in decentralization. It clearly, of course, relates to any subsequent so-called electoral activity up to and, of course, including, the '73 mayoralty and councilmanic elections. So, that's the way we relate to decentralization.

WHY HASN'T THE LEAGUE GONE NATIONAL?

Leviathan: I have a question that has to be asked because everybody is asking about it. Why hasn't the League gone national?

We're Not on a Media Trip

Ken: I take the position that the league *has* gone national, that the correct way to go national is to become very strong where you are. Make yourself a force that has to be dealt with and you're going to be recognized nationally. The League *is* a national organization. But I don't know really what persons regard as being an index. People have all kinds of notions of the kind of activity that they associate with, like black revolutionary organizations. The

League does not take the position that it, of necessity, has to be trumpeted in the pages of *Ramparts* and some other periodicals. The League takes a position that the way that we go national is for persons to become sufficiently impressed with our practice that they're forced to accord some attention to us. That is to the extent that we are interested in their attention and we are not really interested in that. Y'see, operationally, there are a number of national like hook-ups of which of course the League's simply one. The League does, in fact, even a considerable amount of running around the country.

Our First Priority Is Base Building

Leviathan: But getting beyond the media issue, Ken, There are ideas about organizing nationally without concern for the media. It's an organizing perspective that sees chapters in this, this, and this city. Since you haven't done that it seems you have a different idea about organizing. I think that's the kind of question people are trying to get at.

Mike: I think that the problem is that we want to be successful in terms of our sense of a long protracted struggle. And we're not in a hurry to establish a national network just for the sake of doing that. It has to do with our ability to provide the services necessary to do that.

It's difficult for us to deal with the plants locally. I mean it's impossible for us to deal with all of the plants locally, and there are huge concentrations of black workers in any number of plants in this area. There are, for example, 26 Chrysler plants in the Detroit area alone. And certainly if we are not in a position to deal with all of them, you know, we can't possibly deal with anything on a significant level out-of-state. It's a question of resources, human and otherwise. One of the reasons that people fall into this pitfall is that they don't have a sense of protracted struggle. They want to get to it right away. They want to create a national organization right away. And this is just not going to happen if you neglect and ignore the base where you originate. And that's our first priority: building and establishing a base from which to operate.

RELATING TO WHITES

Leviathan: Let's talk about organizational relationships. What do you see as the relationships between black and white organizers?

Whites Don't Act Like a Proletariat

Mike: In terms of this country it's very difficult to deal with that question because of racism. But I think it's on whites to some extent to resolve that problem because it depends on how they are going to function. They have to figure out whether or not they are going to be prepared to act like, you know, a proletariat. That means their interest as workers as opposed to acting in their interests as supporters of this system and as racists. Whites in America don't act like workers. They don't act like a proletariat. They act like racists. And that is why I think that blacks have to continue to have black organizations independent of whites. In terms of the future it depends on whether or not whites can make that transition of giving up, you know, the privileges that they have; give up the material basis for their racism. Whites in this country have an especially difficult problem because of racism. There seems to be built into the educational system, and through all those other control mechanisms, a means of—if there's such a term—of deproletarianizing whites through this racism. Whites in this country do not behave like proletariats of other countries. They don't see their enemy—which is imperialism—as the enemy. They're not fighting imperialism like the proletariats of other countries. What they do is they benefit from the exploitation of the proletariat in other countries. They accept this, and it comes in the form of a privilege. There are certain privileges that you get in this society for being white: there's a white skin privilege. There's a material basis for whites, in this country, *not* to act like the proletariat: not to fight against U.S. imperialism; not to fight to overthrow capitalism.

Leviathan: What would it mean concretely for white workers to give up their privilege?

Mike: Well, you see, black and white workers work side by side on the line. And it's clear to black workers you know, that the enemy is the boss; is management in the plant. But it's not always clear to the white worker that his enemy is management. He might perceive blacks on the line as a threat to him. And that is generally what happens. They know that they have a degree of mobility as a result of the racism in this system. And they have a degree of privilege as a result of our being there and our being in a subjugated position. So his interest really is not in destroying the system; in fighting management, or the boss. His interest is in maintaining

that situation that provides him with the privileges that he has because of his white skin. He has to be willing to give all of that up and to fight management.

The Movement Is Afraid Of White People

Leviathan: You say that one of the problems with whites is that they refuse to act like workers. What does that mean concretely for the movement; not only in terms of organization but with respect to how people move? What would be their perspective? What would they do?

Ken: They would cease to be afraid of white people for one thing. The thing that's really been fascinating man, is like cats specialize in watching the black movement. Bloods of necessity must take cognizance of anything that is out there that might produce some sort of consequences. And so that means that we have to make some observations; but we do not specialize in monitoring the white movement.

The remarkable thing about what passes for the white left here is that the cats who have the least together, in quotes, ideological rap have the most to do with white people. And the cats who really are down in terms of their raps man, and in terms of their analyses, and in terms of how they can run down their thing, ain't got a motherfucking thing to do with no white people. They seem to be, in fact, *afraid* of white people. I'm not talking about the abortive stabs that have been made in the direction of, like, relating to the greasers, the bikers, the Rising Up Angries, the Turko Patriots, Rainbowers, kind of experience. These are like fairly miniscule things. There has never been, and there isn't today any apparent desire or effort to do anything of a serious kind in terms of mass organizing of whites locally, regionally or nationally around a revolutionary political program. And to the extent that there are persons who say they are concerned with extending their influence over white people they are always into a right opportunist kind of approach to doing this. You know, like Sam Brown kinds of episodic, Moratorium kinds of experiences, or the Mobe. But the question why do white people who say that they're on the left not want to relate to white people who are not on the left in any kind of continuous context? You know, like cats got all these tight raps down: "Electoral politics is Bogue," so therefore they ain't got to relate to no white people that way. Since they ain't got to relate

to no white people, it seems all it can do is produce a kind of nice little cabal of a few cats on the left. You know, these cats are white and you spend your time engaging in some incredibly, like, impressionistic kinds of goddamned discussions, man, about things which are fine, and which are important. And we don't want to minimize the significance, man, of individual psyches being bruised by contacts with other members of the left. But it doesn't ever seem to externalize itself with any kind of comprehensive construct of a revolutionary kind. And the question has to be why that is. I don't know why that is.

I know that there's a considerable amount of fear. There might in fact even be an objective basis for it man: I know them *white cats* are

Because it is easier to be always relating to or supporting the black movement; when in fact the best way you can support the black movement is to do something about creating a more desirable set of objective conditions. That means white people are going to have to be moved in certain ways. And those who can most efficiently move them are presumably whites.

Maybe they can't. But I never hear white leftists say that they have given up on whites; with, of course, the exception of the classic Weatherman line. You know: everybody's honkey except Charles Manson (Laughter).

Mike: I would suggest that this can be attributed to a lack of long-term perspective. It's



very stomped down. You know. But like someone's going to have to relate to them, and obviously it's not going to be black people. I mean, I think that white people have made that fairly clear. And who is going to create a more desirable set of objective conditions that makes it rational to talk about fusion between black and white? But instead of white leftists getting together and trying to decide upon prospective constituencies, and prospective approaches, they abandon these things. They go through incredible shifts in positions of organizations from, don't look at parking meters, anti-ideology, participatory democracy, Port Huron statements, all the way up and on to the PL and Spartacist types who still run around doing other kinds of numbers and prostituting and misrepresenting the League and all the rest. Others run around claiming Panthers; being sycophantic in relation to them. Being extremely uncritical because of some sort of incredible, like, reverse racism, man, that's just absolutely sick.

Whites seem to be into a kind of self-abnegation and relinquishment of personal and political responsibility. Why? Because it's easy.

also a desire on the part of people to want to be where the action is. That is another thing that's characteristic, I think, of the white left. As soon as there's something in motion, there's a stampede in that direction. And regardless of, you know, the substantive politics of the motion, that's where you will find them. Everybody wants to be where the action is. But they don't look at things substantively. What is the theory and practice of the organization that you're relating to? That speaks to your *own* theory and practice.

Preoccupation and Impressionism

Leviathan: What kind of criticism do you have of the white movement's response to black liberation?

Ken: There is an unwillingness to act independently and a desire for a merger with what is regarded as being the black liberation struggle for which there is no basis on the part of persons who are always champions of the merger. I just don't see the basis for it. I don't see why persons find it so difficult to accept and

understand. You know, I mean there seems to be, in what is called the white movement, a fantastic preoccupation with essentially impressionistic questions.

Let me tell you how this shit is going down. There are motherfuckers who are going up into the stock exchange and throwing money down, you know, and burning it up; which is a hip thing; an anti-imperialistic thing. But you see, when you analyze the shit, the man don't care nothing about you throwing no bread at his ass. That's *his* thing to steal bread! How come you ain't out there stopping this shit that *generates* this thing he calls bread.

See, a lot of motherfuckers don't understand man, that we live in a pig-assed country. For example, some people have a jive-ass physiocratic economic analysis, man. Early shit, you know, neo-Adam Smith, the Chicago School, University of Chicago School of Economic Bullshit. You know: academic cats. But dig this man: my thing is that like a lot of people don't understand, man, that they got, like, a gross national product in excess of 850 billion dollars. And how much currency is out there?! You know what I'm talking about?! There's just enough currency for you motherfuckers to do those little light things, you know: buy pieces, fuck around, go in and cop a new mini.

His real thing is represented by what? You know what his real money is? Bullets. Explosives. Bombs. Chemical and biological and radiological warfare. He's more interested in epidemiologists and meteorologists and shit to find out what would be the consequences of unleashing bubonic plague under certain climatic conditions. You know what I'm talking about man? He's into an ecological thing. You know, the organism in relation to the environment, man. And if I can't run it, I will take it all off. That's money! That 's money! and *that* should be taken off because this fool can fuck the whole motherfucking world! Shit! Black plague or some shit like that. You know, which is really white plague.

And then there's those white, left-wing motherfuckers who spend all their time sitting in their political party offices and tell you what it is to be a worker, or how important the workers are and the workers are the motherfucking thing. Dig what one cat was putting down. He came up to me during the rebellion, the July 67 rebellion, and runs down, man: "Remarkable victories were achieved by the white workers during the July rebellion!" And he cited as evidence, man dig this, he cited as

evidence the fact that *white workers did not leave their machines and go out and kill a brother!* I mean the fact that there were workers who were sufficiently welded to their motherfucking lathes and shit, you know, is evidence of the fact that white workers made a "remarkable" motherfucking "advance" during the July rebellion. The level of discourse that comes out of some of these so-called political motherfuckers who are out there is unbelievable!

Another example is this whole line of discussion that centers around the question of male chauvinism. It seems like it ought to be very clear to people that that is only productive of one concrete result man: that is that you're dividing the proletariat, and compelling them to divert their attention from being about the business of being in with the objective enemy. And the kind of attention and energy that is expended on such questions is a source of, we won't say bafflement. It is a source of something that begins to approximate amazement, man. You know, when you look at what it 's like out there, what needs to be done; then you see the kind of energy and attention that is directed to a consideration of that question. Failing to recognize what the objective result is of expending energy that way. And you know, like, we have to look here now and see these kind of things. You know, we have to look out here and see all the organizational shambles which have been produced by serious and agonizing efforts getting some sort of a resolution of the problem of male chauvinism. It seems to be really fucking with what is called the white left. It's hard to understand. Given the objective reality of life in this country, with what's going on in the world. And given the urgency of the situation it's kind of, like hard to understand how persons can divert so much energy to characterizing the question in such an incomplete way. And the incompleteness of the question results in a lot of energy being, we would say, counterproductively dissipated.

Leviathan: What is the role of black sisters in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers?

Mike: Their role is no different than anyone else in the organization: they are viewed as revolutionary comrades. They assume as much responsibility as the men. They occupy positions of decision-making in various League activities. In the plants there are a large number of sisters involved in all levels of the organization.

In Black Star Publications, two of the four people responsible for building that entity—Mabel Turner and Helen Jones—are women. In the last union elections at Dodge Main, Betty Griffen ran for Trustee on the DRUM slate. There is a Women's Committee in the League that is presently planning an elementary school for black youth. This committee is comprised of sisters who are cadre and who happen to relate to this particular area of education. They are not independent from the organization. Even that committee has male members working on the project. Functionally, you could say it is not a women's committee anymore. People relate to the League on the basis of their practice, not their sex.

Leviathan: Could you amplify on your views concerning the possibility of women splitting the white movement?

Mike: The problem we have with women's liberation is that there is a lot of talk and discussion, but little practice. We maintain that issues can be clarified and solutions found when there is on-going work.

Between revolutionary comrades there are some things you have to take for granted. If you can't, then they are not revolutionary comrades. A person who is a male supremacist is not only guilty of male chauvinism but he is not a revolutionary.

Leviathan: Do you see male chauvinism as a problem?

Mike: Male chauvinism is not a problem among revolutionaries; but it is one of the many problems in the movement.

Let me say that one of the problems I have with the white left is that it seems to spend the majority of its time in deliberation on questions like this, and there's very little practice. Our position is you don't learn everything through theoretical discussions. You especially don't resolve theoretical differences through discussion. We have differences with a lot of black organizations but we don't spend time sitting down arguing with them about, you know, the merits of our position vis-a-vis theirs. Our position is that these differences will be resolved in practice. And that's usually the case. And history will absolve us.

Having had a long acquaintance with the white left I've seen a lot going on. And I have seen it constantly relate to every tendency that comes along as a new thing. This goes back to SDS and its anti-ideology position, and, you know, on through subsequent positions and

now there's this hangup with the Weatherman tactics and the question of Women's Liberation. It's manifestations of the same kind of thing. In terms of people who've been in the movement for years, and who've gone from one tendency to the next, it's time that you came to some kind of clear ideological position. And you know like our position has been the same for years and it will continue to be the same five years from now, ten years from now. We think it's correct and if it's right it's going to be correct, you know, five years from now. And unfortunately those people who have gone through those different tendencies don't seem to have learned anything. As soon as some new fad or new tendency comes along, everybody gets caught up in it and then they have got to take off on that and get at the forefront of it. That is one of the major problems I've seen in the white movement and to some extent in certain organizations in the black movement. I would hope that at some time in the future there will be a white organization that will provide an organizational structure which whites can relate to that has a sound ideological position and is stable.

Niggermation

Leviathan: I've heard League people talk about "Niggermation." Does it have anything to do with recessions?

Mike: No. But the bourgeois response to the fact that 650,000 production workers in auto in 1947 produced 4.5 million cars and now 650,000 workers are producing 10 million cars is what? Automation. That's right. But that is not the case. I mean in *no way* is automation responsible for that increase.

What is responsible for that increased output is what we would call "niggermation." And what it means is that they will speed up on a particular job. If a guy can't make it, or refuses to work at that rate: fire him. Then they'll bring a new guy off the street and tell him the rate that they have established via the speed up is the actual rate of that job. And the union goes along with this. It has been going along with this for many years. The result is that production has been going up higher and higher on these jobs. And in certain instances we've seen situations where they've replaced three men at one time with one. It's very common for them to replace two men with one. Make one man do the work of two or three. And that's how that increase in production has come

about; not through automation.

To automate these plants to produce at that level would be too costly for them. Remember that at Ford, labor costs them 58 dollars per unit on a Falcon. Fifty-eight dollars per unit is much cheaper than spending all that money in buying machines necessary to fully automate that plant. That's an awful lot of money they have to invest in capital investment. And it's not worth it. They're holding back technological changes for years because it would cost too much. We support automation, full automation. I mean if we controlled the plant, we'd automate them as fully as we could because we think all that kind of work should be eliminated. But the reason they don't want to automate the foundry is that it would be too costly. I also think it's a bargaining issue for the UAW, although I don't want to imply that the UAW and these automobile companies do any serious bargaining. They don't.

INTERNATIONALISM

Leviathan: How do you bring your international perspective to the workers in the plants?

Mike: Well, I think it's not difficult for workers to understand that there is a system of imperialism, and that in fact those people who are fighting that system are fighting the same enemy that we are fighting. The struggle that we are involved in is one of the struggles of other people who are fighting that imperialist apparatus. We identify with the struggles of other peoples in other countries who are fighting U.S. imperialism.

Ken: Since the inception of DRUM, and indeed the original formulation of certain League demands, clearly set forth an understanding of the fact that we're dealing with essentially the same imperialist monster. The fact is that any kind of economic decision that is taken in this country, the bed-rock fundament of the capitalistic exploitative system in the world, has consequences which go down throughout the world. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers is *real* when it says: goddamn it, we understand everything about this motherfucking country. We understand everything about this motherfucking country! We are prepared to demonstrate that.

We *demonstrated* that by relating to people at that critical motherfucking point of vulnerability in this system: the point of production. There ain't nothing going to get in our mother-

fucking way. We understand the interrelatedness of every aspect of this motherfucking man's system. We're not fascinated by pigs—black men or white men—who come in and wear black robes and say they are judges. We understand all this shit. They ain't nothing but cops. And we understand what function the cops perform. We understand that all these motherfuckers are appendages; that everything flows from that.

Everything flows from production: international finance capital, the penetration and acquisition of markets. Everything flows from that. We understand everything else in this society is hung onto that: motherfuckers in nonproducing, nonexistent industry. Motherfuckers who deal with paper.

There's a cat who would stand up and say to you he's in mining. And he sits in an office, man, on the 19th floor, or the 199th floor, in some motherfucking building on Wall Street. And he's in mining!

And he has paper: certificates which are embroidered and shit. You know, stock, bonds, debentures, obligations. He's in mining!

And he's sitting up in Wall Street and his fingernails ain't been dirty in his motherfucking life. He went to Phillips, Andover, or Exeter. He went to Harvard. He went to Yale. He went to the Wharton School of Business. And he's in mining?

And he got people fucking with shit in Bolivia. He fucking with shit in Chile. He's Kennecott; he's Anaconda; he's United Fruit. He's in mining!!

He's in what.

Just motherfucker's crazy. Manganese, Bauxite. Copper. Zinc. Tin. South Africa. Rhodesia. He ain't never in his life produced shit. Investment bankers. Stock brokers. Insurance men. Just motherfuckers who don't do nothing.

What do they do?

The workers are feeding every motherfucker in this country. It's that simple. The workers run this motherfucker. You know what I'm talking about!

It's amazing man. We live in a society that says you must be insured. But you know if you are injured or if you got to go to the hospital, the motherfuckers will let you die in an ambulance until you find a Blue Cross card. They ain't producing shit! He's in insurance!

The motherfucker who comes to me and say he's in insurance: I'll kill his ass! He's a parasitic, motherfucking leech; taking a straw and sticking it into the motherfucking vital life

forces of workers, and sucking everything out and giving nothing.

And then they give you little bullshit amounts of money for working: wages and so forth. And then they steal *all* that shit back from you in terms of the way he's got his other things set up. His whole credit gimmick society, man. Consumer credit. "Buy shit. Buy shit. Buy shit on credit." He gives you a little bit of shit to cool your ass out, and he steals *all* that shit back with shit called interest: the price of money, you know. Money costs interest. And there's still people who deal in money and relate to it on the level of, say, currency, you know. You know what I mean!

And the motherfuckers who deal with intangibles are the motherfuckers who are rewarded in this society. The more abstract and intangible your shit is, the more rewards you get.

What are the stocks? A stock certificate is ownership in something that's real. *Ownership!* He owns and controls, and therefore receives, you know, the benefit from. That's what they call profit. You know, it's fantastic. It's absolutely fantastic. We see that.

We see that this whole society, man, exists, and rests upon workers. And this whole motherfucking society controlled by this ruling

clique is parasitic, vulturistic, and cannibalistic, and is sucking and destroying, man, the life of motherfucking workers. And we have to stop it because it's evil. Because it's interrelated with everything that goes on in the rest of the world.

What are the reserve currencies in the world? Dollars and the Pound Sterling. And the Pound ain't shit. International Monetary Fund. The Breton Woods agreements. Standard Drawing Rights: SDR. Another form of international currency. We understand, in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the significance of the closing of the London money market. We understand why it was not necessary for Germany to devalue the Mark. We understand the significance of the Gnomes of Zurich hooking up. The international financiers. We understand all of that shit. We're not stupid people.

And we're not people who are out here operating off of some sort of, you know, jive black nationalism: "We-can't-come-to-grips-with-or-comprehend-the-incredibly-intricate-complexity-of-this-man's-society." That's bullshit! And he knows it. And that's why he wants to destroy us. And that's what makes us so proud. Because we know if the motherfucker ignores you, you're bullshit. Who wants to destroy the SWP! Who really wants to destroy PL!



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