

ON THE LINE

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25¢

ON THE WAR FRONT

by Ivan Kalita

As the U.S. and U.S.S.R. square off throughout the world, with their proxies out in front taking it on the chin, a new element is being introduced that may turn the global power struggle into a galactic one. That's right Flash Gordon fans, its time for war in outer space.

Notice how the space shuttle has all of a sudden become very important? Well, folks, sad to say it's not so you can visit the moon on 3 day weekends. Listen to the March 29th New York Times:

"The military use of the shuttle is going to be dominant, while civilian uses will be minor," said Dr. James Van Allen of the University of Iowa, an elder statesman of the American space exploration effort. "NASA is going to be trampled to death by the Defense Department on shuttle use, so why not be honest about it and call it a military program?" (cont p 7)

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FUR SHAPE-UP

by A Fur Worker

The March Hudson's Bay fur auction is over and people are back in the union hall looking for work or have returned to their shops. The shape-up list at this past auction had 179 names on it and competition between samplemen for racks was sometimes intense.



Union reps were at the auction regularly but you always wonder who sets the conditions at the auctions. You have to show up by 8 in the morning. Any work after 4 o'clock is overtime. All of the workers pass through, hang out and eat in the small, smoke filled back room. People at the auction were talking about the situation in Atlanta, police violence here in New York, prison conditions and the slow fur season we're in. The shape-up is a real slave market and alot of the buyers that the samplemen have to work with are unfriendly and pushy. The workers tend more and more to see the union as a kind of employment agency. (cont. p. 6)

DISTRICT 65 ROUND-UP

United Auto Workers Merger **by N. Farber**

It was all well and good to print the new charter from the UAW (almost as if the union didn't exist before) on the cover of the Distributive Worker. However, there are still a number of issues regarding the merger that were never discussed with the membership. So much for our highly-touted 'democratic' union.

On Dec. 10, 1980 a certain 'F.J.' (whoever he or she is) at UAW headquarters (misnamed 'Solidarity' House) wrote a memo titled 'District 65' with regards to the merger. It lists a number of agreements worked out regarding details of dues, structure, etc. Details, however, that as far as we know were never discussed at the ratification meetings. Even a large number of organizers are unaware of the terms of the merger.

Point 13 of the memo is the most disturbing. It says that if the UAW decides to terminate the merger, District 65 remains intact as it existed before. No problem. However, if District 65 decides to end the merger:

Then each identifiable collective bargaining unit would be permitted to vote as to whether it wished to remain affiliated with UAW or with District 65.

This means that if the membership voted to disaffiliate then the UAW could still in effect raid its shops and attempt to split the union down the middle. Is this the autonomy our leaders swore never to give up?

Even with the UAW, 65 remains an orphan child. We are considered merely an Amalgamated Local Union and yet are forced to elect our delegates to UAW International conventions on the basis of

already established UAW geographic regions. Is this but the first step to dismantling our own established regional structure?

If we are not to be swallowed up en masse by Doug Fraser & Co. we must not be afraid to ask questions and demand answers. After all, we are constantly reminded by our leaders of our militant traditions as a union, so let's be a little more militant in dealing with them. Let's not forget the wise man who said "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Art Steel **by Art Steel Workers**

We had a work stoppage at the Art Steel plant at 170th St. in the Bronx on Feb. 6. We all stopped working because we were being harassed by all those bosses from the office-Cantos, Kay and their boys.

All morning they had been standing over us, pushing us to produce more, telling us how to work, how many pieces they say the machine is supposed to make, and so on. They stand there with a watch in their hand and time us.

We said we're not going to work like this. We all stopped, every department. But the union came along and told us, "Go back to work, we'll settle this peacefully in the office." But here is how they settled it: we all got docked half an hour's pay for the work stoppage. And all the big bosses are still down here walking around just watching us. They want us to work right to the last minute.

In the near future the same actions will be taken against the employers to stop them from harassing us. We're short-handed as it is now since they sent some workers to the other plant, and you can't do but so much anyway.

(from News and Letters March 1981)

Hotel/Restaurant

Disputes and Grievances

I'm so tired...
between work +
the kids - who has
time to
ORGANIZE?



I
can't
take
it
anymore.

DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENTAL DEATH AND DISMEMBERMENT BENEFITS

Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance will be paid for any of the following losses through accidental means, on or off the job. The loss must occur within 90 days after the accident. Payment will be made regardless of any other benefits you may receive.

Loss of: \$3,000
(Paid to your beneficiary)

Both hands,
Both feet,
Sight of both eyes,
One hand and one foot,
One hand and sight of one eye, or
One foot and sight of one eye

..... \$3,000
(Paid to you)

Loss of:
One hand,
One foot, or
Sight of one eye

..... \$1,500
(Paid to you)

Voice

Death of Taxpayer

Did the taxpayer die before filing a return for 1980? If so, the taxpayer's spouse or personal representative may have to file and sign a return for the person who died. A personal representative can be an executor, administrator, or anyone who is in charge of the taxpayer's property.

IF YOU LEAVE THE
DRIVING TO THEM
THEY WILL DRIVE
YOU TO YOUR
GRAVE.....
WHAT WE NEED
IS A CHANGE -
TO TAKE CONTROL
OF OUR OWN
LIVES - TO
END
WAGE
SLAVERY +
bring down
the bosses



Vito Pitta

Just ask me...
I'm your LEADER
If you can leave your name
w/ my secretary I'll
get back to you in a
few years blah
blah blah...

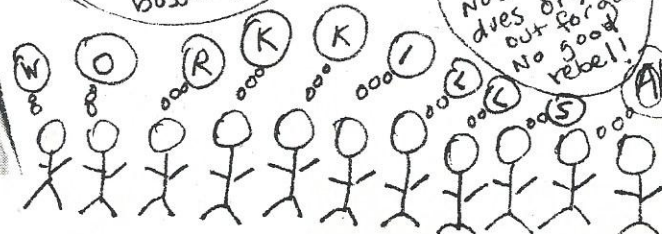
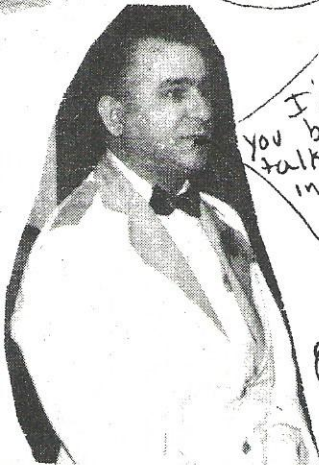
UNION
FOR WHO?
WHERE DOES
THE MONEY
GO?
WHO IS VITO PITTA
anyway?

YEAH! And
I'm sick of letting
you bureaucrats do the
talking - give us an inch
in 100 yrs + you think
it's great - I want
self management +
mutual aid -
an end to all
bosses !!!

DON'T BE
RIDICULOUS...
you need
Leadership like
ours! We know
what's best for you -
Now pay up your
dues or you
dies for good -
but for good
No good
rebel!

typical
bureaucrat

UGLY



POSTAL WORKERS: INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION

The Postal Workers Defense Committee (PWDC) was founded 2½ years ago as a group to fight for postal workers in the New York-Metro area independent of the union bureaucracy. Since then it has moved further and further away from its original position as a rank and file organization. Today it is becoming more and more integrated into the union hierarchy, though ostensibly as the 'conscience' of the bureaucracy.

This process began in 1978 when Kenny Leiner, a founding member of the PWDC, was elected vice-president in charge of the Mailhandler's section of the American Postal Worker's Union (APWU). Although fired from his job during the 1978 wildcat strike and later kicked out of office by then APWU President Emmet Andrews (see On The Line, August 1979 & May 1980) Leiner has won back his union position but is still fighting for his job. Leiner and the PWDC believed that it was possible to create an 'effective' and 'progressive' leadership, one that is really 'in touch' with the rank and file.

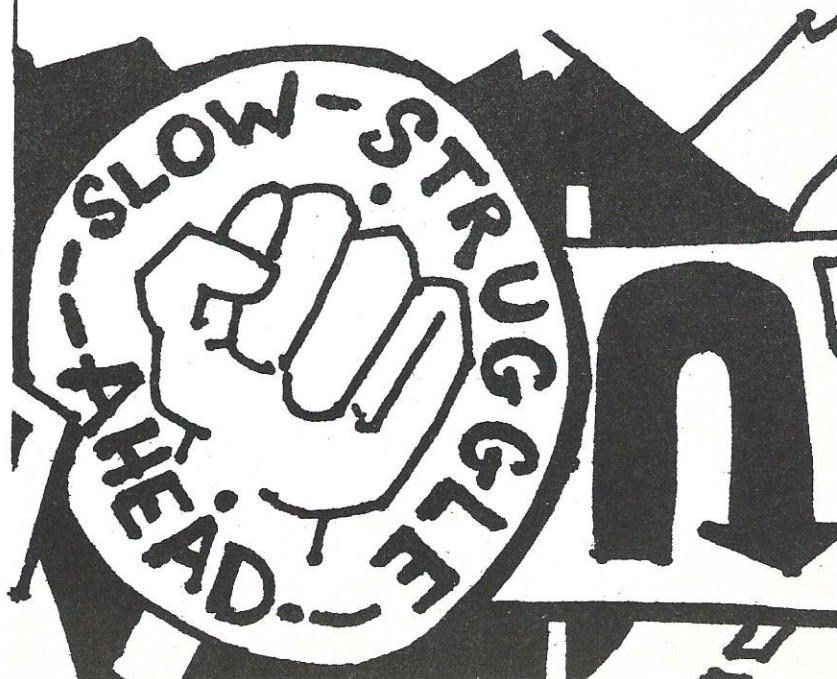
Although Leiner may be well intentioned, the history of militants being elected to the union bureaucracy is full of such cases. Where elected to such a position the militant, by the very nature of the position, is forced to 'play ball' with the bureaucracy and work against his or her own principles. The official must carry out all the policies of the union, even when they are against the interests of the rank and file.

With the stage thus set the PWDC has become more and more the loyal opposition within New York-Metro, the largest unit within the APWU. This is evidenced in the PWDC's actions, its press, its participation in Congressional hearings on health and safety following the death on the job of Jersey City postal worker Michael McDermott.

It can even be seen in the recent movie "Signed, Sealed and Delivered" a rank and file produced effort which is a must-see for those interested in the postal workers' struggle.

Total Support for Biller?

For example, during the recent APWU election, the PWDC supported Moe Biller, New York-Metro President, for General President. Although Biller has been a critic of ex-President Andrews, his opposition is actually based on personal ambition and a desire to tame the membership. While the Post Office Worker (PWDC's paper) has written that "Biller...opposed the railroad of the fired workers and the firing of Mailhandler's V.P. Leiner" (Nov. 1980), it is a known fact that Biller initially refused to back the July 1978 wildcat strike. It was also Biller who did not call a strike vote until 10 days after the wildcat was in progress, and then only due to independent rank and file pressure. Ironically, the leading group in exerting pressure for the vote was the PWDC.



TION AT A TURNING POINT

by Mike Harris

While it may be true that since then Biller has become more 'sensitive' to the needs of the membership, this is still no basis for the PWDC's uncritical support. It is clear that Biller is only talking and acting militantly because of the militancy and self-organization of the postal workers. No bureaucrat acts in the interests of the workers unless forced to. To do so requires an independently organized rank and file, not a loyal opposition whose hands are tied due to their integration into the trade union bureaucracy.

It is also ironic that even with the PWDC's support of his slate, Biller has attacked the PWDC. A letter signed by Biller and addressed to the New York-Metro membership accused the FWDC of using

the money it raised to support the fired postal workers (both material support & legal defense) to bankroll its own candidates. While this accusation is untrue it should make clear to the PWDC what they, or any other group that is a potential thorn in the leadership's side, is in store for.

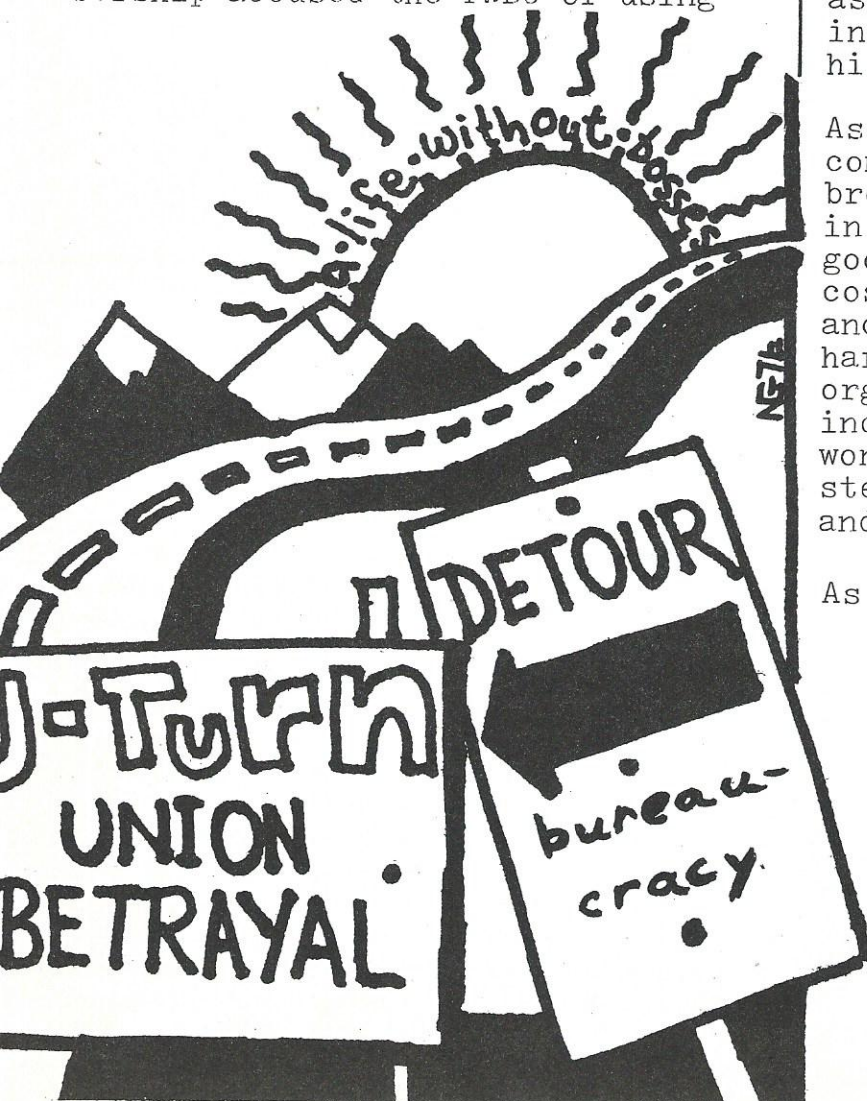
Independent PWDC -

a Strong Rank-and-File

It is painfully obvious that the present strategy of the PWDC is one that in the long run will lead them to become virtually indistinguishable from the bureaucrats. Thus the PWDC as an effective organization will be destroyed, as it will have lost all its independent strength to the union hierarchy.

As rank and file workers we are committed to our sisters and brothers in the Postal Service in their struggle for amnesty, good working conditions, uncapped cost of living adjustments (COLA), and an end to sexual and racial harassment. Only through self-organization and rank and file independence can these things be won. They are as well the first step toward class-consciousness and real workers' power.

As we wrote in our last issue: It doesn't matter in the long run how militant the union leadership may be, how many Congressional hearings will be held, or how many OSHA investigations are made. It can only be the rank and file who can change the present organization and condition of their work through direct action and solidarity on the shop floor.



FUR (cont. from page 1)

Meanwhile, new contracts have been ratified in the Joint Board divisions. Getting Martin Luther King's birthday as a paid holiday was a key issue and the rank and file in the shops spent a great deal of time discussing this. King's birthday really raises the whole question of racial dignity and pride. Winning it marks a step forward in the dyeing division. Contrast the instinctive humanism of the workers on this issue with the fanatical concern of the bosses with productivity--they really raised hell about this in negotiations--and you get a good view of the situation.

Conditions in the fur cleaning shops have deteriorated badly. The bosses are amazingly cheap--many don't provide basic work clothing and are keeping a turnover of workers while there is work in the shops--but the workers are apathetic. The union does not distribute the contract and is not doing enough educational work on health and safety issues although there is some demand for these things by the workers.

Worker Spirit Needed—

The Key to Strength

The union is generally progressive. New problems are arising, however, with which the union cannot deal. Anti-semitism is one of these. Health and safety problems are others. The union has a good sports program and a good newspaper, it



**MANAGEMENT HAS DECIDED YOU ARE ALL
... COMING DOWN WITH THE FLU !!**

sends people to demonstrations and does its best to find people jobs but the leather shops around Manhattan remain largely unorganized and the fur bosses can get away with murder. Shop-by-shop ratification of contracts, the close ties between some union reps and workers and the actual spirit of the union reflects some rank and file pressure as well as the union's militant traditions.

There is no opposition movement in the union. If the Joint Board and the Joint Council merge again, if more attention is paid to organizing and if health and safety issues are taken up much needed militance will certainly be restored. The key, as always, is the individual worker in the shop and the collective power of all the workers in the industry. The apathy, sexism and anti-semitism have got to go for all our needs to be addressed and dealt with.

War Front (*cont. from* *p. 1*)

Couple that with all the recent discussion among military experts of 'killer' satellites, proton bolts, etc. Of course our friends in the Pentagon will tell us not to worry, that a war in space would be a 'limited' one. Sound familiar?

Meanwhile the Reagan administration is urgently doing flip-flops to keep southern Africa from becoming a hot spot. It has already been forced to back down on some of its militant rhetoric in support of South Africa, it is hedging on its earlier plans to support the right-wing UNITA guerrillas in Angola, and is seeking negotiations on the future independence of Namibia. Is it Nigerian oil they're worried about, or the prospects of opening up another front while they are 'tied down' in El Salvador?

Perhaps it's time we tied them down for good.

EDUCATION *by J. S.*

The practice of reading and writing is being attacked in modern society. Increasingly the educational apparatus is concentrating on control-- in "scientific terms" known as behavior modification. The objectives and exams that define the system stress choosing the correct

response from a fixed number of options; finding the right way to follow directions and indicating the proper values of passivity and respect. Listen to the way the system is described by its former students:

It just seems like its this big plot. Because somebody has to know whats going on. Somebody has to know. It's too big scale not to know. So, I just think it's the system just using another drug to keep you down. No education will stop you. Dope will stop you. And I see that everywhere I go. It's just another way of stopping you from making it. That's the way I look at it. I feel that way about it because they are stopping us.

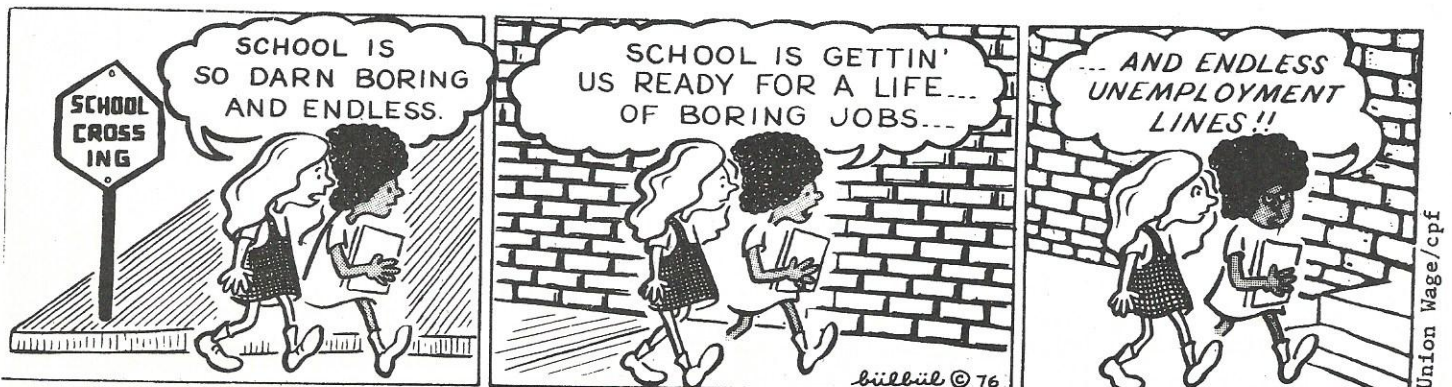
p. 14, STRAIGHT TALK #1

I got a diploma too. Could I read it? To tell you the truth I couldn't. It was just a piece of paper.

p.1, BIG APPLE JOURNAL #8

Huge sums of money are spent on control, employment training, "Adult Performance Level" programs, competency based instruction. However, the numbers of people wishing to learn to read and write continue to increase.

Literacy cannot depend on the state. It must be based on the mutual aid of the social group-- tutoring, public reading and discussion. Through claiming the tools of literacy we can define instruments of struggle.



Who We Are

We call ourselves "anarchist-syndicalists" and we have named our group the Libertarian Workers Group. We are a committee of working people and students who live in the N.Y. metropolitan area. We publish ON THE LINE because we feel that the news and experiences which come from many small battles between exploiters and exploited, powerful and powerless, must be shared if the workers are someday to win.

What We Believe

We believe that the capitalist class is unnecessary and that government (the political state and all its bureaus) is inherently oppressive. The state and the capitalist class, while not seeing eye-to-eye on everything, are built on domination and exploitation. By "stealing" from the real producers--the workers--and then selling to consumers--most of whom are workers too--the capitalist is able to make profits and keep power.

Landlords and the utility companies steal from workers in a similar way. The government insures that business goes on as usual and even runs some industries. Education is bought and sold like a commodity, and students are trained for further exploitation in factories and offices. The decisions about what will be produced, how much will be charged and how goods and services will be distributed are made in a "top-down" way in political centers by bureaucrats and capitalists.

People are taught to play a passive role in society, to take uninteresting and low-paying jobs, to vote for candidates that really have nothing to offer, to experience life through television and movies and to accept racial and sexual oppression as normal. Meanwhile, thousands of people are going to jail, becoming addicts or committing suicide.



What We Want

It is not enough, we think, to try to reform society. The exploiter-exploited relationship, protected as it is the world over by all of the governments and social institutions (churches, philanthropies, schools, etc.) must be done away with. The capitalist system, in which one person works for another's profit and then lives only to work in that framework, is full of contradictions and shortcomings.

The decisions on what will be produced and distributed, on how housing and community problems will be solved, and on how natural resources will be allocated must be made by the working class, on a local level. This must be done through democratic organizations controlled by the rank-and-file.

Education must be democratic and non-hierarchical and must be available to all. Racial and sexual barriers must be abolished. In short, the working class must emancipate itself. We think that it can only do so by building organizations in which all workers and students can participate, and from which all will benefit. The center of such organizations will be the workplace, the school, and the community.

The tactics we think are most useful are the general strike and the takeover of workplaces, schools and communities for rank-and-file control and for immediate necessary gains. Revolutionary unions and councils must be created to fight for decentralized economic planning and generalized self-management. Anarchist-syndicalism is the sum total of these objectives and offers the means by which to obtain them.

Subscriptions to ON THE LINE are \$1.00 for 6 issues. Send subs to:

On The Line
P.O. Box 692
Old Chelsea Station
N.Y., NY 10113

NEEDLE TRADES SUPPLEMENT FOR ON THE LINE

BROTHERS & SISTERS,

In this issue of ON THE LINE you'll find an article on conditions in the fur industry. As well, you'll find a column on District 65, an article on postal workers and a collage by a restaurant worker. The articles on war and education are linked to the whole problem of who controls society's resources and how goods and services are managed--workers and students or capitalists?

OTL is produced by a group of workers living in the NY area. Several of us have years of work behind us in the needle trades. We think all of the unions representing us should be changed so that needle trades workers are united and hold power through strong shop floor organizations. The unions have to be more militant. They have to maintain a vision of a decentralized socialist society. By helping to develop a working class press; pushing for racial and sexual equality, aggressively taking on the bosses and reflecting the spirit of the class in motion the unions can bridge the gap between the bread and butter issues and larger social questions.

OTL tries to carry reports from as many shops, unions and industries as we can. We do not insist that you agree with our political program in order to work with us. We are anarchists and libertarian communists. We welcome debate and discussion because we see it as the only way of building real unity between workers. Please contact us and tell us about your shop or union.

What follows is a few supplementary notes for this issue of OTL.

On April 28 the Fur Service Division and the dressing and dyeing workers in Local 88 of the Fur, Leather & Machinists (FLM) Joint Board merged. Increases in pensions were announced and elections for officers were held at the union meeting as well. Frank Barbaro received the FLM's endorsement for mayor.

Had the merger been discussed and the officers actually elected by the rank and file all would be well. Instead, Brother Foner, the union's president, gave only a few minutes to the pension benefits and to the merger. A little more time was given over to the election but no one could muster the support, strength or words to oppose the leadership's slate. Business continues as usual, although the leadership is doing some organizing and has developed some good social programs. Barbaro got 15 minutes of our time to make a speech.

The merger was not enthusiastically supported by the Meisel-Peskin workers, who make up the backbone of Local 88 and don't understand what the merger really means. A committeeman told a worker that the executive board of Local 88 was lukewarm about the merger and said that if you fight ~~too~~ hard in the union you can end up without a job.

The union has no business endorsing candidates while its mergers remain directed from above and so long as the leadership's slate is simply rubberstamped. We need a vertical union, with officers under immediate recall, shop papers, more educational work and more organizing. We need on-going anti-racist and anti-sexist work also.

What does the ILGWU leadership have to say about the recent publicity on the sweat shops? The papers keep talking about the "return of the sweat shop" and so they assume that these shops disappeared. Nonsense. In fact, it's sometimes hard to tell the difference between union shops and sweat shops at first glance.

The social-democratic leadership of the ILGWU isn't about to commit itself to the kind of occupational safety and health work which needs to be done. The logical places to begin are in the South Bronx and in Chinatown, where conditions are terrible. The ILGWU could work with established community groups or could develop rank and file organizing committees. Ask an organizer about this and you might get some sympathy but the organizers are powerless. The ILGWU is supporting American policy on El Salvador. Congrats to the ILGWU rank and filers here today.

Meanwhile, the Textile, Garment and Millenary locals of District 65--mostly warehouse, delivery and clerical workers--continue to lose members rapidly. Over one-half of the jobs have been lost in the last 10 years as NY becomes a city for the rich and the union fails to mount an effective response. The union's organizing has met with some success, though mostly in small shops. Real wages are declining due to inflation and the union's bargaining position is bad. Young workers are more and more dissatisfied and today belong only to the union because they must.

The recent affiliation of District 65 to the United Auto Workers union doesn't mean much to people in our division and the eventual entrance of the UAW into the AFL-CIO may mean even less. We need to unite with other textile, garment and millenary workers. Rumor has it that our wages and working conditions are better than those in the ILGWU. If this is so we had better start asking why.*****

We'd like to talk with other needle trades workers about the problems we're all facing. There has been some talk of industry-wide newsletters, study groups, cauc~~us~~s building and informal rap groups. What do you think? Give us a call or drop us a line.

ON THE LINE
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Tony & Steve--477-6617