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Party Front or United Front: the
Broad Left Trade Union Strategy
for the 1980s Proletarian Tasks Tendency
(former RWL minority)

Some comments on building the
League Paul

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PARTY FRONT OR UNITED FRONT

THE BROAD LEFT TRADE UNION STRATEGY FOR THE 1980s

At present the working class and more concretely the trade unions in the United States are in a broad, even disorderly retreat. The smashing of PATCO has been followed by unprecedented concessions and wage cuts among the big auto, trucking and municipal unions, not to mention many smaller contracts. The retreat in the unions has been complemented by the attacks on the working class from the Reagan budget cuts, the defeat of ERA, etc...The defeat of Argentina, Solidarnosc, and the PLO internationally also strengthens the offensive of the capitalist bloodsuckers.

Behind the retreat are the body blows of the economic collapse. Unemployment has knocked the wind out of the working class. The pessimism of the LOR report on Italy to the April TILC conference could also apply to the United States.

Many comrades are afraid to discuss the reasons for the collapse of the Bay Area Labour Party Committee, the massive loss in active members in the Teamster Workers for a Fighting Union, and the effects of the lay-offs of most cadres of the River Rouge plant. Some comrades think that these set-backs can be overcome by simple super-activism of cadres. This is a head-in-the-sand attitude. Unemployment will continue at the above-6% recession level for many months if not for years to come. Employers will have the ability to hire ten scabs to replace every union striker as they are currently doing during the St. Louis Coca-Cola company strike and Airport Limo Drivers strike.

The attempt to build party-front-type radical trade union caucuses is questionable in good economic times: it is close to suicidal in times of retreat. Our strategy for now must be to build broad Left opposition tendencies around the slogan: "Stop the Retreat - Organise the Unorganised". These demands should generally be made of the bureaucrats without immediately calling for their ousters.

The possibility of a rapid turn-around on the political level lies beneath the surface. It is reflected in the huge Solidarity Day March (September 1981), the Nuclear Freeze demonstrations (Europe and America), the Italian General Strike and British NHS strikes of September 1982. We must today prepare intelligently for these mass upsurges of tomorrow. We must realise that this is 1930 or 1932 and not 1934 or 1937 when radical organising and sit-down strikes were the order of the day.

Unfortunately, the kind of trade union caucuses we have attempted to build in Michigan, California and Missouri (but not in New York) have been more or less watered-down versions of the Spartacist-Workers League party front formation. Attempts have been made to artificially introduce programmes into these committees that don't reflect the level of class struggle of the workers in these local unions or shops. Often demands such as illegal sympathy strikes to support other unions or resolutions in favour of Gay Pride Week are introduced to impress party