

As We Go Marching

As we march together for jobs, justice and peace, it is also a time to reflect on where labor has been and where it is heading. It is 100 years since organized labor marched on Labor Day, and while years of struggle have rid us of the worse abuses of that time, many problems remain the same. We still face economic insecurity, our work is still tedious and humiliating, we are still divided by race and nationality, and most aspects of our daily lives are under the control of bosses and bureaucrats.

Yet with all this, our union leaders for the most part remain passive, saving their militancy for public events like this, while our day-to-day struggles in our workplaces are led down blind alleys. How far a cry this is from the best fighting traditions of American labor -- the Industrial Workers of the World in the early part of the century, the early CIO movement of the 1930's, and so many other fine examples. They fought for interracial and international solidarity. They practiced direct democratic control by the rank and file. And they relied on their own strength. This is what we should be paying tribute to today, and carrying on that tradition every day on and off the job.

We should stop for a moment and consider the PATCO tragedy, how our so-called leaders sat back and watched the controllers' struggle. We should and could have shut down the country, if need be, to stop this. But as rank and filers we have been forced into passivity by years of bureaucratic red tape and manipulations and the lack of resources to mobilize on our own. We must build independent organizations that will allow us to do this regardless of the leaders' inaction.

So what are Kirkland and company telling us now? Instead of using the momentum and energy generated by last year's Solidarity Day rally to rebuild the backbone of the labor movement, we are told that Solidarity Day II will be at the polls in November. Yet we have seen how the politicians the unions have helped to elect time and time again only turn out to serve their own and the bosses' interests. With a militant, independent organization which can make demands and fight for them, it will not matter who is elected, for we will command respect through our strength. Without it no self-styled savior of the working class who runs for anything will remain a savior for long.

We should look to Poland for examples. For over a year before martial law, the working people of Poland showed what a determined and united working class can do when it fights for itself. Even today, after nine months of military rule, Jaruzelski and the ruling elite are terrified of the movement and seek to repress it at every turn. Consider for a moment how scared our American Jaruzelski, Reagan, would be of an American counterpart to the Polish struggle. East and West, bosses are bosses and workers are workers.

Today we are caught in the grip of a terrible economic crisis, and we march against unemployment and for jobs. Our union leaders tell us this is because of Reagan's misguided economic policy. This may be so, but then why has this problem recurred time and time again throughout the last century all over the world? We say that the problem is rooted in the system of profit, power, and private and state ownership of industry called Capitalism in the West and Communism in the East.

(over)

An independent, fighting workers' movement, based on the principles of unity, solidarity and direct democracy, here and throughout the world, would be a first step toward ending this irrational and inhuman system that denies the interests of our class in favor of the interests of a ruling minority. It would be a first step toward the creation of a truly human economy, where decisions that affect our lives would be made democratically by all concerned. It would mean an end to bosses and bureaucrats of all stripes, an end to all forms of oppression and exploitation and the beginning of a free and happy life for working people everywhere.

This kind of movement will not come about overnight. It must be built step by step, and with great struggle. As anarchist workers, fighters for freedom and equality for our class, we believe that it is worth it. The time to begin is now -- in the factories, the offices, the schools, in our neighborhoods and in the streets today. We call on all of you as working people to join us in this effort.

September 6, 1982

LIBERTARIAN WORKERS' GROUP

P.O. Box 692

Old Chelsea Station

New York, New York 10113