

tion.” It is both “the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of capitalism, and the successor of the capitalist social structure itself.”

What You Can Do

Now you know why the SLP criticizes today’s unions, and you may now suspect

why today’s unions hate and misrepresent what the SLP stands for. However, what the unions think about the SLP and the SIU program is not important because it does not change the facts. What is important is that you learn more about the SLP and the SIU program for yourself. Start by mailing the coupon today.

A Socialist Labor Party Statement—

What’s Wrong With The Labor Unions?

What’s wrong with the unions? Why are they in retreat when the need for labor solidarity is so clear and so great? Why can’t they bring workers together to resist the ravages of job-killing technology, falling wages, increased exploitation and spreading poverty?

These questions need answers—the right answers—because they are of vital importance to every worker in America. Yet, discussions on unions and unionism often produce more heat and acrimony than fact and logic. This shows how much confusion there is on the union question. It also shows that the unions have failed to prove to workers that they have what it takes to defend their interests.

The Principle of Unionism

Every schoolchild knows that there is strength in unity and that disunity brings only weakness and confusion, demoralization and defeat. The union principle is sound, yet the unions fail to unite the workers. They fail even to protect the small and shrinking numbers who belong to them and pay their dues. It should be obvious to everyone that something is wrong. What may not be obvious, however, is what that something is.

That’s why workers need to give serious thought to the union question. Indeed, it is supremely important that they do so because the future welfare of the workers of America (and ultimately the workers of the world) depends upon workers having clear and accurate information on the nature and character of to-

day’s unions and on the correct principles of union organization.

The Socialist Labor Party is vitally concerned with every aspect of the union question. That’s because the SLP (founded 1890) has been America’s strongest advocate of genuine working-class unionism for more than a century. However, the SLP also maintains that the present unions—all of them—are not working-class unions.

Why Unions Fail

The SLP maintains that today’s unions are dedicated to principles that run counter to the best interests of the workers. That’s why they fail to unite the workers and why they become obstacles to workers’ efforts to defend themselves against ruthless exploitation. They call themselves unions, but they are not based on the principle of working-class unity. They divide workers instead of uniting them.

These SLP charges against the unions are based on sound and logical reasons. If you understand why the union question is important, it is also important for you to know what these SLP charges are. And it is equally important for you to know how workers can build a real union.

What History Shows

It is a historic fact that the unions were born out of a hard, bitter and often violent struggle between capital and labor. The focal point of this struggle was the division of labor’s product into wages and profits. As long as the capitalists could deal directly with individual workers, the

SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY, P.O. Box 218, Mtn. View, CA 94042-0218
Web site: www.slp.org • e-mail: socialists@slp.org

- Please send me free literature on socialism.
- I enclose \$2.00 for a six-month subscription to *The People*, official monthly journal of the Socialist Labor Party.
- I enclose \$1.00. Please send me a copy of the 48-page pamphlet, *The Burning Question of Trades Unionism*, by Daniel De Leon.

Name *(please print)* _____

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ WWWLU-98

workers were virtually helpless. That's why workers united into unions.

Capitalist exploitation of workers did not stop when some workers formed unions. The struggle over the division of labor's product continues to this day. The unions only made it possible for workers to resist in groups. At first, the capitalist owners of the means of production—the factories, mills, mines, railroads, and the tools and machines needed to run them—tried to destroy the unions. Compelled by the profit motive and competition from their capitalist rivals, they tried to keep wages low and to get ever more production out of the workers. The workers, on the other hand, driven both by sheer necessity and by normal ambition to rise above a state of constant want, resisted and sought to force wages up. It was like dividing an apple in two parts. If one part was larger the other had to be smaller—and this was the case whether the capitalist “apple” was big, as in boom times, or small, as in periods of depression. Accordingly, the struggle over labor's product is not simply a struggle between individual workers and their employers. It is a struggle between the working class and the capitalist class—a class struggle that is inherent in and inseparable from the capital-labor relationship.

Many of today's unions, when first organized, paid lip service to the class struggle. The American Federation of Labor, which today as the AFL-CIO functions as an unabashed prop of capitalism, once said in its constitution: “A struggle is going on in all the nations of the civilized world, a struggle between the capitalist and laborer, which grows in intensity from year to year, and will work disastrous results to the toiling millions if they are not combined for mutual protection....”

This was a clear recognition of the conflict of interests between labor and capital.

Yet, the AFL-CIO and all kindred unions accept capitalism as a permanent system. Instead of concentrating on building a classless society in which exploitation, unemployment and poverty would be abolished, they limit their aspirations to a vague “fair day's wage for a fair day's work.”

The rest has followed logically. Under capitalism, labor—or labor power—is a commodity, a mere “means” of production that capitalists buy in the labor market the same as they buy raw materials in the raw materials market. By accepting the capitalist system as a finality, today's unions also accept the idea that workers must accept this commodity status forever.

Union Corruption

Corruption has followed inevitably. Most union leaders started out as sincere and honest people, but the harsh realities of capitalism quickly disillusioned them. The more hopeless the plight of the rank and file appeared, the more the union leaders turned to feathering their own nests. Careerists and opportunists rose to the top, exploiting the workers' instinct for solidarity to promote their own bureaucratic interests as labor merchants of the capitalist class of labor exploiters. In strike after strike, the unions have sacrificed and bartered away the workers' interests in exchange for such things as the “union shop” and the dues “checkoff” that practically make the capitalist employer a union official and dues collector. And they seal these deals with labor contracts that tie workers' hands and that capitalists often break.

This is corruption of the worst kind. It perverts the historic mission of unionism. Yet, despite their betrayals of the workers' interests, virtually everyone who pretends to have the workers' interests at heart—including the “Communists,” the “Socialist” reformers, and the “friend of labor” liber-

als—upholds the present unions.

The SLP takes a different stand on today's unions. It shows that they have corrupted the purpose of unionism, and that their leaders are nothing more than lieutenants of the capitalist class who run the unions in the interests of the capitalist class.

By contrast, the SLP emphasizes the fact of the class struggle. Consequently, it holds that workers need a new kind of union, a union that accepts the fact and implications of the class struggle and aims to unite the whole working class. We have a name for this new type of unionism. We call it Socialist Industrial Unionism.

What Real Unions Would Do

Socialist Industrial Unionism aims to achieve solidarity of labor. However, before workers can achieve genuine solidarity they must rise above job consciousness and become classconscious. They must learn that their own interests as individuals are linked together with those of every other worker. Then and not until then can they organize themselves as a class, employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, office worker and factory worker. Divided, they are exploited, abused and deprived of the potential for using their collective strength. United, they will no longer be an easy class to rule. On the contrary, the exploiters and their labor lieutenants will learn that their ruling days are numbered.

In form or structure the SIU will conform to the structure of industry. Each industry and service will have an industrial union, and all these industrial unions will be integrally united into one big union, with a common purpose and a common goal.

All officers of these genuine working-class unions will be elected by the rank and file, and all will be subject to immediate recall whenever a simple majority of the members so decide. In short, all power

in the SIU will be in the only safe place for power to be—with the rank and file of the classconscious workers.

Socialist Industrial Unionism will end the shameful practice, so prevalent today, of “unions” scabbing on, and breaking the strikes of, other unions. By organizing all workers, the SIU will live up to the motto that “an injury to one is an injury to all” and give real meaning to worker solidarity. The SIU will enable workers to fully use their organized strength in waging the day-to-day struggle.

However, while waging the day-to-day struggle with unity and militant vigor, the SIU will never lose sight of the real goal, namely, a reconstruction of society that will socialize the industries, give the people who do the work a democratic mastery of their tools and products, and guarantee that every individual will have the opportunity to develop their talents and exercise their skills. To this end, the SIU will proclaim the need for the organization of a political party of the working class.

This program for the political and economic organization of the working class provides the best chance for a peaceful change from capitalism to socialism. Through their overwhelming majority, the workers will assert their right to own and operate collectively the means of social production. The next step will be to abolish the political state of class rule. Through their union, workers will have the requisite might for backing up their action and assuming control of the socialized industries. The reins of administration will then be assumed by a new Congress, a Congress of workers' representatives, elected from the industries and services.

As Daniel De Leon, the great American Marxist, summed it up: “Industrial unionism is the Socialist Republic in the making; and the goal once reached, the industrial union is the Socialist Republic in opera-