

# Marine Workers' Rank and File Revolts

## AN APPEAL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE MARINE WORKERS INDUSTRIAL UNION

For some time conditions in the Marine Workers Industrial Union have been very bad. They are going from bad to worse all the time. It is necessary to look into these conditions, to find out what's been happening and why it's been happening—and to find a way out of the crisis in which our union finds itself. It is the duty of every member of our union to face the facts squarely and to make proposals for improving the situation and really building our organization into a genuine militant union.

It is in this fight that we present the following criticisms, suggestions, and recommendations. We hope that the fellow-workers will see it this way and will rally to our support, back up this appeal and fight for the proposals we are making.

### OUR AIM

1. Our aim is to build one powerful industrial union uniting all the marine transport workers in the country.

2. Any worker in the marine transport industry regardless of race, creed, color or political opinion, should be eligible for membership in our union.

3. The purpose of the union must be to fight for the bettering of the conditions of the marine workers, to raise wages, shorten hours, improve living conditions, fight against the speed-up, for bigger gangs on the docks and bigger crews on the ships and lighter draughts on the docks for longshoremen, for better food, etc.

4. We are against the whole capitalist system which is responsible for the misery of the workers in all industries. We are unalterably opposed to all imperialist wars. We believe in the international solidarity and militant action of the marine workers to insure better conditions, to fight against imperialist wars, and for the defense of the Soviet Union, today the only workers Republic in the world. We are for a workers Republic in the United States.

5. At this time the most serious problem facing the marine workers is unemployment. There are more than 250,000 marine workers (longshoremen, harbor workers, etc.) jobless and hungry. The economic crisis and the speed-up system are continually increasing the army of unemployed by leaps and bounds. That is why all our activities in building up our union must today center around the fight against unemployment. While fighting for unemployment insurance we must not forget that we must get immediately for ourselves food and shelter—actual instant relief.

### TACTICS

6. We must mobilize the workers first of all for the struggle for our immediate needs, for the improvement of our working and living conditions. Only in this way can we get the greatest number of workers into the fight against the bosses. In rallying workers to struggle we must resort to education, organization of our ranks, strikes, organization for the unemployed, organization of the unorganized, and similar tactics to build our union.

7. We must work to build a powerful Left wing movement in all other organizations of the marine workers, thus making possible their unification into one industrial union in the industry. In the craft and conservative unions there are thousands of workers whom we must win over to our program for militant industrial unionism.

If the marine workers are to wage a successful struggle against the ship owners, we must have unity in our ranks. The sectarian policy now being pursued by the Marine Workers Industrial Union only results in segregating the class conscious workers from the masses of less advanced workers, leaving them to be used by the reactionary officials of the conservative unions against a revolutionary class struggle program.

The rank and file members of the International Seamen's Union must be won over to a class struggle program for their union and for waging a relentless struggle against the reactionary leadership (Furuseh, Olander) and to replace them by class-conscious workers from the rank and file.

The workers' opposition in the International Longshoremen's Association must be supported in their fight to oust the reactionary leaders (Joe Ryan) from their union and an educational campaign must be carried on within their ranks to win them over for the cause of the revolutionary class struggle.

The membership of the Associated Marine Workers who are already in rebellion

against their reactionary leadership (Captain Maer) must be won over to our cause and a vigorous campaign must be made to unite these key men with workers on the ships and the docks in one great and powerful industrial union so that a more effective fight can be made against the ship-owners for our immediate demands and to hasten the day of complete emancipation for the working class.

8. Name calling and abuse are not the methods for winning over workers to our class struggle. Only by patient hard work in the fight for the every-day needs of the working men can we win their confidence and bring them around to our viewpoint.

9. All strikes must be prepared in advance and properly organized. The workers should first be convinced to strike. Strikes, in order to be genuine, must come through a demand of the workers themselves and not mechanically declared or forced upon the workers.

10. A union in order to be alive must consist of active members. Everything must be done to develop self-confidence

to appeal to the unemployed. Although revolutionary, a program incorporating more concrete demands is necessary if the unemployed army is to be marshalled for the class struggle. . . .

We herewith present the following facts from the life and experiences of our union which entirely substantiate our criticism and which prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that only by following the constructive program we have outlined can our union become a real mass union and fight effectively for the interests of the marine workers.

### BACKGROUND OF THE WRONG POLICIES OF THE BUREAUCRACY

Starting out as a club, functioning as a propaganda group in existing marine workers organizations, we failed to carry out the original program of the R. I. L. U.

This failure to build strong Left wing groups in the existing organizations was due primarily to the opposition of the leadership of our union to such a policy as first proposed by the R. I. L. U. This resistance to the original policy of the R. I. L. U. to build Left wing groups in

leaders of this union and to replace them with class conscious workers from the rank and file. Mink's only answer to the opposition was:

"The quicker you comrades are expelled from them phoney unions, the quicker we'll build the League and the better I like it." . . .

### INCOMPETENCE AND IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE BUREAUCRACY

The opposition had put forward the program of spreading out in the port of Greater New York and opening up halls in other ports as rapidly as possible. Under the pressure of the opposition composed of comrades Morgan, Golden, Anderson, Shelligan, Horn, Russell, Fanning, Peltzer, Aaronson, Haigney, McGrath, and others, the leadership was forced to consent to the opening up of a hall in Baltimore. Accordingly comrade Morgan, Port Delegate for New York, equipped comrade Peltzer with a credential and supplies. Comrade Peltzer under very great difficulties and after making many sacrifices succeeded in carrying on propaganda and work for some months without receiving any financial assistance from the T. U. U. L. Despite the opposition of the leadership, comrade Morgan and Aaronson were sent by the rank and file to help comrade Peltzer in the organization work in Baltimore. After having been ousted from Anchorage Seamen's Institute) and having been set upon by the B. & O. bulls, and prevented from boarding the ships it was decided that comrade Morgan should proceed to New York and force the leadership to consent to open a hall as a base for operations, as a rallying center for organizational work.

After comrade Morgan made his report to the League meeting, the members decided in defiance of the leadership over the protest of the bureaucracy, to open a hall in Baltimore. But when the hall was finally opened the rank and file members who carried on the work without any financial assistance from the leadership were recalled. Then Hines was chosen by the bureaucracy to replace the active rank and file workers. . . . Though receiving a subsidy for seven months Hines departed from Baltimore and left nothing but an empty hall on which the rent was due. Whatever progress had been made was completely destroyed by the bureaucrats who instructed Hines to take over the New York Club as soon as he returned from Baltimore.

### THE BUREAUCRATS HOLD MASSES IN CONTEMPT

The leadership of our union has nothing but contempt for the great mass of marine workers. This bureaucracy has not shown any real interest in the actual struggle of the marine workers, and has thrown away many good chances which these struggles afforded us for building up the Marine Workers Industrial Union. This contempt for the marine worker masses is shown in part by the following facts:

The leadership failed to take advantage of the opportunity to make contact with members of the Associated Marine Workers before the expiration of their agreement with the Tugboat Owners. This lack of interest shown by the bureaucrats in the struggle of these workers against their reactionary officials and the bosses really lost these workers for the cause of militant unionism.

The leadership neglected for two and a half months after the convention which launched the union, to issue any membership books or publish the "Marine Workers' Voice," our most effective means with which to acquaint the workers with what happened at the Convention. . . .

After the launching of the Union the rank and file made considerable progress among the longshoremen of Baltimore. We held a meeting in front of the I. L. A. halls. But the bureaucracy pursuing a disruptive line of tactics destroyed all our work—destroyed everything which was accomplished. Comrade Harvey acting more like a disrupter than a union organizer antagonized the longshoremen instead of trying to win them over to the cause of militant unionism. This criminal action destroyed all the progress that we had made. It broke up all the contacts which we had made with the rank and file members of the International Longshoremen's Association.

The same contemptuous attitude towards the workers was shown by Mink in New Orleans. The silly and childlike action of comrade Mink in showing off in braggadocic manner donation checks to workers whom we were just drawing in as new members of our union in New Orleans

## The Origin of the Document

The document which appears on these pages is the result of a struggle that has been going on for some time within the Marine Workers Industrial Union, and the Party fraction within it. The document itself is only a re-statement and elaboration of one presented by Party members to the marine workers fraction, which Mink, Johnstone and the rest of the Party and T. U. U. L. bureaucrats dealt within their characteristically contemptuous manner. The Stalinists have been pursuing a course in all the unions controlled by them which has put one after another of them on the rocks. The situation in the Textile Workers Union, the Miners' Union, the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, are only repetitions in other spheres of the crisis now rending the Marine Workers Industrial Union. The bunglers and worse who direct the destinies of these organizations, virtually all of which began with splendid prospects for growth and influence, have conducted such a policy of arbitrariness, mechanical control, alienation of Left Wing militants not members of one Party faction, bureaucracy, and radically false policies, that they have left a trail of ruin wherever they have stepped in. Testifying to the immense vitality of the "new union" movement, however, is the rank and file revolt expressed in this document. Out of the 17 signers who are the most active spirits in the M. W. I. U., 14 (all those marked with stars) are members of the Party. The Minks, Hineses and Harveys are now planning to expel these militants not only from the Party, but from the Union as well! At all costs this must be prevented. Such tactics can be safely left to Lewis, Sigman and Co. Let the workers discuss the situation objectively. They are capable of deciding and deciding correctly. They have no need at all for the Minks, Johnstones and Fosters to do their thinking for them, especially when "their thinking" is but a mental echo of their masters in the central apparatus of the Comintern and the R. I. L. U.

and initiative among the rank and file. Without genuine democracy in the union there can be no real live union. Bureaucracy has no place in a real union and only destroys all possibilities for building up the union, for making every member a conscious responsible, active member.

11. The leadership of our union cannot be won and should not be sought by mechanical, artificial, bureaucratic methods. Sound leadership can be won only through gaining the confidence of the workers by tireless activities and sacrifices in the everyday struggle. Leadership based on clique control, on favoritism, on stifling opinion or strangulating all the rights of the rank and file can only hurt our union.

### BANKRUPTCY OF THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP AND ITS POLICIES

We indict the present leadership for its policies on the following grounds:

1. The present leadership pursues an adventurist, sectarian, utopian, unrealistic program.

2. Transforming the Marine Workers Industrial Union into an impotent sect instead of building a mass organization, a genuine union.

3. Following wrong and irresponsible organization methods.

4. Entirely neglecting and dropping all work for the building of a powerful Left wing movement in the craft and conservative unions. Substituting for such important work name calling and merely denouncing as social fascists, etc., all those who are today not in the Marine Workers Industrial Union.

5. A criminal bungling of strikes, following policies of pure adventurism; using the worst bureaucratic methods, actually sabotaging strikes and here and there even resorting to methods which are dangerously provocative.

6. The leadership has foisted upon the union a terribly bureaucratic regime and wiped out all semblance of democracy, of rank and file control in the Marine Workers Industrial Union.

7. The program for the unemployed, formulated by the T. U. U. L. and adopted by the unemployed convention at Chicago, July 4th, has proven to be too abstract

the existence marine workers organizations resulted in the unconscious sabotage of the slogan "A Seaman's Club in Every Port." . . .

Upon the returning of the T. U. E. L. representative, (comrade Mink) from Moscow, he made his report with the recommendation that a new industrial union of the marine workers be formed, but comrade Foster suggested a transitional step. During the transitional stage, "The Marine Workers Progressive League" was organized. The League members were to carry our program of class-struggle into the conservative unions and wage a fight against the reactionary leaders, and to popularize the slogan of amalgamation. Comrade Foster also laid particular stress on those points of our policy which dealt with work in the existing unions, and that this work should be intensified.

Despite the fact that "The International Seamen's Club" had a considerable membership, the name of Mink was never submitted to the club members before he was sent to the R. I. L. U. Conference by the T. U. E. L. In a like manner, Foster gave the club members the "decision" that Comrade Mink was to be head of all Marine organizational activities for the T. U. E. L. This so-called "decision" was a piece of highhanded, bureaucratic conning of Foster upon which the club members were not even allowed to discuss. Who made the decision? Where did it come from? Why was it made? Why weren't the members considered or consulted?

Our activity in the existing marine workers organizations was discouraged by the leadership which told the membership of the League that membership in the existing marine workers organization was not necessary. Not only did the leadership say that it was unnecessary to belong to and carry on work in the existing unions but it even ordered all those who were members of these unions to withdraw from membership. The opposition objected to this wrong arbitrary move of the bureaucracy on the ground that the Left wing group in the Marine Firemen's Union International Seamen's Union) was in a favorable position to oust the reactionary