

WORKING PAPER

IMPERIALISM AND OPPORTUNISM IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT: The Labor Aristocracy in the United States

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WORKING PAPER FOR LINE OF MARCH LABOR COMMISSION CONFERENCE

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IMPERIALISM AND OPPORTUNISM IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT: The Labor Aristocracy in the United States

INTRODUCTION:

The labor movement in the U.S. is currently developing in the midst of a sharpening crisis of U.S. imperialism. This crisis stems from the contradictions of capitalist production, contradictions which can only be resolved by a socialist revolution. These contradictions have given rise to, while at the same time are aggravated by, the expansion of socialism throughout the world and victories of national liberation movements. The U.S. bourgeoisie is responding to this crisis with a two-fold program. First, they are stepping up preparations for war to stem the tide of socialism and national liberation movements. Second, they are asserting a program of racially defined and orchestrated social austerity for the U.S. working class. To be successful in implementing this program of war and racial austerity, the bourgeoisie must garner support from other classes, the petit bourgeoisie and sections of the working class, by appealing to their national and racial interests.

The working class movement in the U.S. is not in a position to respond to this offensive by capital at this time. The existing political organizations of the working class movement, mainly the trade unions, are leading the response to this offensive with an opportunist political line. If the worker's movement is going to make any substantial gains in this coming period, it must isolate and break with the opportunism which currently holds a firm grip over labor. The leadership of the struggle to break with opportunism can only come from those forces who have a firm understanding of the dynamics of the class struggle, that is the marxist-leninist movement. Yet, the communist movement is itself ill-equipped to provide this leadership. One of the weaknesses of the communist movement is an incorrect understanding of the nature and material basis of the opportunism which currently leads the labor movement. Without a scientific, that is historical materialist, understanding of opportunism, the marxist-leninist movement can not play a historically significant role in the class struggle, will fall into the error of either tailing the reformist leadership of the labor movement, or be forced to stand aside and merely comment in an irresponsible manner on the problems that opportunism presents to the labor movement.

The strategy, tactics, etc., of the communist movement must be based on a sound theoretical foundation of the nature and material base for opportunism. Opportunism, as a political and ideological world view, subordinates the long term interests of the proletariat for the narrow interests of a particular sector or strata of the working class.

Opportunism has a backward influence on the worker's movement because it diverts the working class from its historic task and narrows the political motion to the self interest of a particular strata of the proletariat. On this there is much agreement in the communist movement. But once we attempt to get beyond simply recognizing the backward influences of opportunism, and approach the question of its material and social base, widely divergent views abound in the communist movement. Very little attention has been paid to develop an analysis which can account for the complete dominance of opportunism in the labor movement for the past 30 or so years. The problem lies in an incorrect analysis of the material basis for opportunism.

For example, the modern revisionists hold that the material basis for opportunism lies within the nature of the work processes of craft or skilled workers. According to this analysis, the general economic laws of capitalism should undermine this social base, as capitalist production tends to reduce skilled labor to simple labor. Consequently, the CPUSA states that opportunism is an unstable political force in the workers' movement, as its material basis is constantly undermined. Yet, when we look at the history of the workers' movement in the post World War II period, a period when in fact skilled work was being reduced to simple labor, opportunism not only existed, but actually flourished in a hegemonic political position within the labor movement. The CPUSA underestimates the grip that opportunism has over the labor movement, makes calls to unite the whole working class without undertaking the necessary struggle to expose, isolate and polarize the labor movement away from the class collaborationists. This has reduced the CPUSA to a mere tail of the reformist labor movement.

Our anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist trend has not fared much better. Although no distinct line exists in our movement which attempts to take into account the dominance of opportunism, a number of spontaneous lines do exist, similar to the line of the CPUSA though not as sophisticated.

Some forces in our movement hold that the material base for opportunism lies within the huge trade union bureaucracy. This view states that the high wages, job security and status which the labor bureaucrats have attained distorts their world view such that they only operate on the basis of their narrow self interest to maintain their position of relative privilege. Although it is true that many labor leaders hold positions of relative wealth and power in the labor movement, this doesn't answer the question as to why these labor leaders continue to have a substantial support among the mass of workers, or even more important why the mass of workers continue to agree with the opportunist line which leads

their organizations. Aside from this, this view completely divorces the political lines of the trade union leadership from the actual dynamics of the class struggle. For instance, what is the material basis for the trade union bureaucracy itself, or are we reducing our analysis to a set of bad ideas which the labor misleaders somehow have developed on the basis of their private individual interests? Does the line create the bureaucracy or the bureaucracy the line? Opportunism is not simply cooperation with specific employers. It is wholesale support and assistance to the bourgeoisie. Here we want to note in passing a "left" deviation in regards to this question. This view holds that opportunism has so infected the working class that it is no longer a revolutionary class. (And therefore look to students, etc) Groups like PFOC and others hold a line such as this. In this context, the CPUSA has some correct critique of an infantile tendency which held sway in the "new left." But here the CP also uses these infantile "left" theories to justify their own rightist approach which essentially dismisses opportunism in the labor movement as an insignificant force.

What then is the material basis for opportunism? It is imperialism itself. Imperialism, the moribund stage of capitalist production, the system which has intensified exploitation and oppression on a world scale and given rise to the era of proletarian revolution and national liberation, is also the system which gives rise to a coherent political and ideological trend in the proletarian movement -- opportunism.

The imperialist system creates the conditions such that the proletariat in the oppressor nations have a material stake in the maintenance of imperialism itself. In addition, and probably most important, imperialist exploitation also creates the conditions for the development of a strata of workers who consciously support and assist the expansion of imperialist rule, and all of the political initiatives of the bourgeoisie. This strata, called the upper strata of the working class, the labor aristocracy, has an objective, material interest in promotion of imperialist rule. In the present period, this strata is the potential social base for support of the bourgeoisie's program of war and racist social austerity -- this is the social base for a "white," "patriotic" consensus to develop within the proletariat.

Once the communist movement recognizes that imperialism is the material basis for opportunism, then and only then can our movement take up the struggle to break the influence and grip of opportunism over the labor movement. Once we recognize that imperialism is the material basis for opportunism, we also have to recognize that as a political trend it is a permanent feature of the class struggle, that the labor movement must be polarized such that the objective economic polarization which exists gets reflected politically.

Imperialism creates the material conditons for an opportunist trend in the labor movement, whose head-quarters is in the labor aristocracy. This is accomplished through the ability of imperialism to bribe a section of the working class. This aristocracy of labor may change its composition or its numbers, it can be reduced to a small section of the working class movement or actually include great numbers of organized workers. The size and influence of the labor aristocracy is subject to the overally dynamics of imperialism, where periods of relative stability and rapid expansion produce more favorable conditions for an expanded labor aristocracy while conditons of crisis constrict the material basis for such an upper strata to exist. The dynamics of imperialism create the conditions, but we must avoid economic determinism in our analysis, for opportunism is not simply an economic status, but is a political line. In this sense, the political dynamics of the labor movement are extremely important in determining whether relatively better situated workers will fall prey to opportunist lines. The counter to this narrowing of the political line of the labor movement to that of self interest of certain strata is the struggle within the labor movement, led by the most class conscious forces, the communists, to forge a left wing. \*

To be concrete, the source of the hegemony of opportunism in the labor movement over the past 30 or so years was the result of two dynamics. First, and probably the most important, was that U.S. imperialism was in a period of stability and rapid expansion. This led to the creation of an expanded labor aristocracy which included not simply the craft workers (who were declining in relative numbers) but also a great many workers in the mass production industry, organized into industrial unions. The opportunists gained their influential position through the combined efforts of the bourgeoisie, the capitalist state, and the stable sections of the labor aristocracy to purge the labor movement of any left influences at all. This left the workers' movement in the hands of opportunism, a line which reflected to a great degree their actual material conditons in this period.

The CPUSA in this period refused to recognize the expanded character of the labor aristocracy and the grip of opportunism over the labor movement. Consequently, when the mass movements of the late 50s and 60s erupted, the CPUSA adopted a stance in both the black liberation and anti-war movements to restrict the political level and militancy of these movements to that which was acceptable to the liberal reformists in the labor movement. This meant that the CPUSA, concilliating opportunism in the labor movement, also abandoned its responsibilities to lead these mass movements with a line and program which could have pushed forward the whole of the class struggle. Instead, in those sections of these movements which were most advanced politically, the CPUSA was not to be found. They were off tailing reformists.

In the present period, the stage of imperialist stability is over and a deepening crisis of U.S. imperialism is shaping the contours of the class struggle. The previously expanded labor aristocracy is shrinking, the protected status of many workers is being stripped away. What then are we to make of the initiatives of the AFL-CIO in response to Reagan's social austerity program. Does this reflect a change in the political orientation of opportunism, while its main content remains, or is it a break with opportunism? The crisis of imperialism has not changed the essential laws which govern imperialist rule, including the existence of opportunism. The labor aristocracy will go through many changes, yet as long as imperialism exists, so does the material basis for opportunism. The popular motion we currently see coming out of the more reactionary sections of organized labor appear on the one hand to be a new orientation for struggle. These initiatives being taken by Lane Kirkland are, however, efforts to restore the conditions which permitted reformism to flourish. This means regaining the protected status of the labor aristocracy under these conditions of imperialist crisis, all of which is fertile ground for the bourgeoisie to forge its "white," "patriotic" consensus among a section of the organized labor movement. This motion that we are witnessing now should serve as a reminder that even opportunism must struggle, at times extremely militantly, to gain its position of relative privilege. The material basis which imperialism affords to create a labor aristocracy, can only be realized if the upper strata fights for that position, a fight which is conducted along the narrow interests of this aristocratic strata of the working class.

In this situation, the tasks of communists are to locate the essential aspects of the opportunist lines, its material basis and polarize the labor movement politically to reflect the objective polarity which exists economically. This is no simple task, but requires years of struggle, the development of an influential left pole rooted in the lower layers of the labor movement, and can only be accomplished on the basis of a firm, scientific analysis of this relationship between imperialism, opportunism, and the labor aristocracy.

The following sections will detail the broad political perspective outlined above. First we will recapture the profound achievements of Lenin in analyzing the relationship between opportunism and imperialism. Here we want to note that although our conclusion is that imperialism itself is the basis for opportunism, we must remember that imperialism also is the material basis for the creation of the only thoroughly revolutionary class of modern capitalist society, the international proletariat. Recognizing that opportunism is a permanent feature of the proletarian movement does not in the least belittle the revolutionary role of the proletariat.

From the theoretical framework developed in the next section, we will draw out the analysis of the post World War II period, concretizing this theoretical framework to our analysis of the dynamics of the class struggle in the present period. This will be accomplished through first developing an overview of the general motion of imperialism, noting the exceptionally long period of stability and expansion. From there we will outline the basic political line of opportunism, including its social base, the labor aristocracy, in different sections of the workers' movement. In addition, we will mention the changes in the class struggle which the current crisis of imperialism is bringing about.

In making our analysis of the concrete conditions of imperialism and opportunism in the labor movement, we caution comrades not to fall prey to petit bourgeois prejudices and moralism about the working class. While the working class is truly the only thoroughly revolutionary class in the U.S., to realize this revolutionary potential requires the leadership of a Marxist-Leninist party. The leadership of the communist movement comes about from a scientific understanding of the class struggle, one which can soberly assess the class struggle, the forces involved, and the strategy and tactics necessary to realize this historic task. If we back away from this task, we leave the workers' movement in the hands of opportunism.

## SECTION I -- THE THEORY OF IMPERIALISM AND LABOR OPPORTUNISM

The first fact that confronts communists in the trade union arena is the strength and persistence of class collaborationism to be found there. For the entire twentieth century, opportunism in the labor movement has erected a formidable obstacle to the growth of revolutionary politics. It is this situation that places the problem of opportunism at the center of the trade union question--communists must grapple with and understand opportunism as a permanent feature in the era of imperialism, its features and its material basis. This is the object of this working paper.

Any discussion of the phenomena of opportunism in the labor movement in the US must begin with a theoretical recapitulation. Virtually all of the relevant categories--superprofits, the "bribe", the labor aristocracy--have been so thoroughly distorted and abused in recent years that we must take the time to return to the original works of Marx, Engels and Lenin to reconstruct the theoretical framework necessary to any such analysis.

Consequently, in the following section we will trace the theory of the material basis of opportunism from the standpoint of Lenin's analysis of imperialism and the dissolution of the Second International. In so doing, we will re-examine, as Lenin did, the works of Marx and Engels on the subject. Then we will reproduce the line of reasoning that Lenin pursued in his treatment of the question and examine the particular relation between the labor aristocracy as the social base of opportunism, and the overall stratification of capitalist society. From this viewpoint we will examine the phenomena of post-World War II imperialism in the next section.

When the smoke cleared from the first volleys of World War I, the Second "socialist" International was no more. For Lenin and the rest of the left wing of the International that hadn't given way to national chauvinism, there was an immediate task of analyzing the fragments and from them, to rebuild the international proletarian movement on a solid ideological, political and theoretical basis. Lenin began with the foundation laid by Marx and Engels in the analysis of opportunism in the English labor movement of the 19th century. This foundation, in the analysis of the Second International, was combined with two independent and relatively distinct analyses: Lenin's analysis of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism and his further analysis of the national question in the era of imperialism. Out of this broader theoretical framework emerges what constitutes a general theory of the relationship of imperialism to the manifestations of opportunism in the labor movement. Within this theory, the labor aristocracy plays a pivotal role as the principal social base of opportunism.

In the task of rebuilding the international proletarian movement there remained right-wing and centrist forces that would conciliate and attempt to unite with the opportunist trend of national chauvinism and class collaboration. It was critical for Lenin and the left wing to define the precise character of opportunism in the working class movement, its connection with imperialism and its social roots in the labor



aristocracy. This was the theoretical basis that explained the necessity of splitting the working class movement to form the Communist Third International based on the strategic character of the workers movement.

This point is addressed by Lenin in his polemic with Kautsky and the centrists who complained that the Comintern split the working class. Lenin answered that the movement was already split--ideologically, politically and economically. The labor aristocracy represents the economic connection between the imperialist bourgeoisie and the opportunists in the labor movement. This economic connection virtually insures that opportunism will be a relatively permanent feature in the era of imperialism. "And from this," Lenin writes, "we concluded that a split with the social chauvinists was inevitable" and "that certain groups of workers have already drifted away to opportunism and to the imperialist bourgeoisie." (CW 23:110) And further, "that, economically, the desertion of a stratum of the labour aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact; and this economic fact, this shift in class relations, will find political form, in one shape or another, without any particular "difficulty" (CW 23:116) and therefore "there is not the slightest reason for thinking that these parties (the bourgeois labor parties) will disappear before the social revolution." (CW 23:118)

In elaborating this theory, Lenin went on to demonstrate how the level of the development of the forces and relations of production in the current era translate via economic, political and ideological mechanisms (imperialist super-profits and the labor aristocracy) into an actual political line of social chauvinism in particular and class collaborationism in general. The logic of the argument is concisely expressed in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism:

The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the numerous branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries, etc., makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, and win them over to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or a given nation against all the others. The intensification of antagonisms between imperialist nations for the division of the world increases this striving. And so there is created that bond between imperialism and opportunism which revealed itself first and most clearly in England, owing to the fact that certain features of imperialist development were observable there much earlier than in other countries. (CW 22:301)

#### A. Lenin's Approach to the Problem

The sudden and nearly complete collapse of the strongest and largest Social-Democratic parties provoked Lenin to re-examine the theories of opportunism in the labor movement. Up to that point most explanations of opportunism in the workers movement targetted either the dominance of bourgeois ideology as a factor that limited workers movements to trade unionist politics, or alien class elements drawn into the expanding proletariat, either from the large petit bourgeoisie or as intellectuals attracted to the revolutionary movement. These alien elements served as a base for corruption, backward ideas and reformism in the

workers movements. However, Lenin fully expected the working class as a whole to be fertile ground for revolutionary ideas as long as revolutionaries approached their work as truly conscious elements.

However, the collapse of the Second International uncovered an obvious degeneration of the organized working class movement that went beyond these explanations. Consequently Lenin sought the possible material (economic) base for an entire section of the proletariat to ally itself with the bourgeoisie.

This approach led Lenin to re-examine the most conspicuous previous case of reformism in the labor movement--the English workers movement--in order to explain the degeneration of the European Social-Democratic parties. Thus, he doesn't stop with the assertion that the working class movement is irreconcilably split in 1914, but traces the origins of the split back through 60 years of labor movement history. He shows the connection between the development of the split from a "mood" to a "trend" to a "stratum of the labor aristocracy and petit-bourgeoisie" and the overall development and class differentiation of world capitalism.

#### A1. Summing up Marx and Engels

In their writings, Marx and Engels frequently derided the English proletariat as becoming "more and more bourgeois" during the period of England's industrial and colonial monopoly in the second half of the 19th century. On the surface, this was a seeming contradiction since England's working class was, at the time, by far the most organized. Opportunism in the English working class nonetheless continually sabotaged the revolutionary role of the First International in England by reducing it to an adjunct of the domestic economic struggle.

From the analysis of this period of English working class history, Lenin sought the theoretical framework for analyzing the triumph of opportunism in 1914.

During the latter half of the 19th century, 1848-1890, England was an exceptional capitalist country. It held vast colonial possessions, enjoyed hegemony over the world market, led the world in industrial production and its bourgeoisie reaped immense profits. In essence, during this period, England was virtually unchallenged as the world's manufacturing center and looked to all other countries either as markets for its manufactured goods or as suppliers of its necessary raw materials and food. This pre-eminent position provided England with a high degree of industrial "prosperity" (relative to previous periods in England and conditions in other capitalist countries). Despite regular interruption by periodic capitalist crisis, there was a general upward trend in England over the course of decades that permitted economic and political concessions to the English working class in exchange for its loyalty to the policies of English imperialism. This resulted in what Engels called the "temporary victory of opportunism in the English labour movement."

Economically, the condition of the English working class generally improved during this period but the concessions were unevenly distributed and primarily accrued to the "privileged, protected minority of the workers". The "normal" workings of capitalism--especially the formation of a large reserve army of labor--undermined the improvements for the great mass of workers. However, a "permanent improvement" could be recognized for two sectors of the workforce: the factory hands (who primarily benefited from specific political measures, e.g., length of the

working day) and the trades unions (largely craftsmen) which Engels described as

. . .the organizations of those trades in which the labor of grown-up men predominates. Here the competition neither of women and children nor of machinery has so far weakened their organized strength. The engineers, the carpenters and joiners, the bricklayers, are each of them a power, to that extent that, as in the case of bricklayers and bricklayers laborers, they can ever successfully resist the introduction of machinery. That their condition has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt, and the best proof of this is in the fact that for more than fifteen years no only have their employers been with them, but they with their employers, upon exceedingly good terms. They form an aristocracy among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final. . .They are model working men. . .they are very nice people indeed nowadays to deal with, for any sensible capitalist in particular and for the whole capitalist class in general.

(Preface, Condition of the Working Class in England)

Politically, the strength of the English capitalists made it a prudent policy to form alliances with key strata of the rapidly growing proletariat. For example, on the issue of trade union legality, "Trades unions, hitherto considered inventions of the devil himself, were now petted and patronized and perfectly legitimate institutions, as useful means of spreading sound economical doctrines among the workers." After the ~~crashing~~ of the radical Chartist movement in 1847 and 1848 the leadership and upper strata of the working class were pacified. As a result, the most politically active sectors of the working class supported England's colonial policy and the bourgeoisie's political parties. They participated in the oppression of the Irish, and upheld exclusionary policies striving for "respectability" in the trade union movement.

Despite its relative stability as a political force, the English labor aristocracy and its strength was still considered a "temporary" phenomenon. As England's monopolies began to decline, Engels held, the workers would be deprived of their relative privileges. The English capitalists, in order to compete with the rising industrial powers of Germany and the United States, would be compelled to increase their exploitation of the workers--in effect cashing in the policies of reform for more brutal forms of rule. Engels noted the erosion of England's international position--signalled by the stagnation beginning in 1876--and the corresponding erosion in the condition of all strata of English workers. Favorable conditions were developing for the resurrection of the socialist movement on the basis of the "hitherto stagnant lowest strata."

The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying out of Owenism, there has been no socialism in England. With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working class

will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally--the privileged and leading minority not excepted--on a level with its fellow workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be socialism again in England.

(Preface, Condition of the Working Class in England)

In fact, Engels' prediction was partially realized in his own lifetime by the turn to the left of the working class movement in the 1890s. Besides a general re-emergence of various political trends, there was a rise of a "New Unionism" among the unskilled masses of workers, previously unorganized and inactive. In addition, this period witnessed the formation of the trade union political groups that would later form the British Labour Party. All of these examples, while significant, were handicapped by the long legacy of reformism and the persistence of England's colonial monopoly.

## A2. Lenin's Contribution to the Question

Lenin's point of departure in his analysis of opportunism in the Second International is Engels' analysis of England, which he sums up as follows:

. . .why does England's monopoly explain the (temporary) victory of opportunism in England? Because monopoly yields superprofits, i.e., a surplus of profits over and above the capitalist profits that are normal and customary all over the world. The capitalists can devote a part (and not a small one at that!) of these superprofits to bribe their own workers, to create something like an alliance (recall the celebrated 'alliances' described by the Webbs of England trade unions and employers) between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists against the other countries. (CW 23:114)

But Lenin goes beyond Engels: his theoretical innovation is to apply Engels' analysis of England to all the Great Powers of the imperialist era. Based on the analysis of the political economy of imperialism as a new distinct stage of capitalism, Lenin asserts that the material basis for opportunism in the labor movement had undergone a qualitative change with the rise of imperialism. The development of monopoly in a number of countries created conditions in them similar to the situation in 19th century England. Further, several other capitalist countries had acquired extensive colonial holdings. Therefore, the bourgeoisies of several major capitalist countries--France, the US, Germany, England--have the economic capacity to bribe the upper strata of their working classes. Thus, opportunism in the form of "a 'bourgeois labor party' is inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries". (CW 23:116)

The situation was similar but not, however, identical to the situation of England. The rise of several imperialist powers in the 20th century in sharp international contention raised new contradictions. England's 19th century stability cannot be repeated, either for the imperialist system as a whole or for any one imperialist power. The rise of a number of imperialist powers altered the international situation creating a new contradiction: while the industrial capabilities of the major powers had been more or less equalized (England's industrial monopoly was finished) the size of their colonial holdings was not (England was still predominant). The international competition for markets and stable sources of raw materials could be resolved only through

war.

In Lenin's view, the interimperialist rivalry of the 20th century placed limitations on the ability of any single country gaining the sort of unchallenged hegemony enjoyed by England in the pre-imperialist era--the material basis for reformism is qualitatively circumscribed in two ways. First, the competition between imperialist powers reduces the superprofits, the bribe, and consequently, the size of the opportunist stratum. Second, intensified oppression and exploitation of the masses in times of war puts a strain on the opportunists' domination over the labor movement.

The last third of the nineteenth century saw the transition to the new, imperialist era. Finance capital not of one, but of several, though very few, Great Powers enjoys a monopoly. . . This difference explains why England's monopoly position could remain unchallenged for decades. The monopoly of modern finance capital is being frantically challenged; the era of imperialist wars has begun. It was possible in those days to bribe and corrupt the working class of one country for decades. This is now improbable, if not impossible. But on the other hand, every imperialist "Great" Power can and does bribe smaller strata (than in England in 1848-68) of the "labour aristocracy".

(CW 23:116)

After noting some of the similarities between the current historical epoch and the role of England in the former one, Lenin returns to the analysis of imperialism to underline the distinctions of the current stage. These particularities of the period are emphasized in Lenin's arguments on the national question and the importance of the slogan of "self-determination" for the oppressed nations. His basic objective is to demonstrate how opportunism as national chauvinism is bound up with the contradictions of imperialism and, in fact, greatly intensified as compared to earlier stages because of its new internationalist character.

. . . in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into two international camps, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant-nation bourgeoisie--obtained, among other things from the double--or triple--exploitation of small nations--while the other cannot liberate itself without liberating the small nations, without educating the masses in an anti-chauvinist, i.e., anti-annexationist, i.e., "self-determinist" spirit. (CW 22:343)

The objective basis for the international opportunist camp is further detailed in Lenin's argument that the struggle against imperialism takes different forms in oppressed and oppressor nations:

Is the actual condition of the workers in the oppressor and in the oppressed nations the same, from the standpoint of the national question?

No. It is not the same.

(1) Economically, the difference is that sections of the working class in the oppressor nations receive crumbs from the superprofits the bourgeoisie of these nations obtains by extra exploitation of the workers of the oppressed nations. Besides, economic statistics show that here a

larger percentage of the workers become "straw bosses" than is the case in the oppressed nations, a larger percentage rise to the labour aristocracy. That is a fact. To a certain degree the workers of the oppressor nations are partners of their own bourgeoisie in plundering the workers (and the mass of the population) of the oppressed nations.

(2) Politically, the difference is that, compared with the workers of the oppressed nations, they occupy a privileged position in many spheres of political life.

(3) Ideologically, or spiritually, the difference is that they are taught, at school and in life, disdain and contempt for the workers of the oppressed nations. This has been experienced, for example, by every Great Russian who has been brought up or who has lived among Great Russians.

(CW 23: 55-56)

So, to sup up, using the framework that Marx and Engels asserted for analyzing the basis of opportunism in the working class of imperialist England, Lenin examined the phenomenon of opportunism and the labor aristocracy in his own time. In so doing he came to two conclusions:

(1) The rise of new imperialist countries tended to intensify the inter-imperialist rivalries, cutting into superprofits and narrowing the social base of opportunism. This tended to create conditions favorable for intensified class struggle and socialist revolution particularly based on the lower strata of the working class. (2) There was a counter tendency strengthening the base for class collaborationism arising from the contradiction between imperialist countries and the oppressed nations.

This analysis defined the dialectic between the strength and weakness of international imperialism and the strength and weakness of social-democracy, the political expression of opportunism in the workers movement. Thus, in periods of international crisis or intensification of the contention between imperialist Great Powers, communists could expect a corresponding weakening in social-democracy and its influence within the working class, particularly among the lower strata. On the other hand, in periods of relative stability for imperialism, the role of the super-profit bribe would bolster the influence of social-democracy, based on the expanded labor aristocracy.

## B. The Character of the Labor Aristocracy

### B1. General Characteristics

The concept of the "labor aristocracy" is never spelled out by Lenin in a particularly detailed manner. In fact, he considered the specifics of the labor aristocracy to be secondary questions. The main question was the existence of the "bribe" as the economic basis of opportunism.

The bourgeoisie of an imperialist "Great" Power can economical-  
ly bribe the upper strata of "its" workers by spending on this a hundred million or so francs a year, for its super profits most likely amount to about a thousand million. And how this little sop is divided among the labor ministers, "labor representatives" (remember Engel's splendid analysis of the term), labour members of war industries committees, labour officials, workers belonging to the narrow craft unions, office employees, etc., etc., is a secondary question. (CW 23:115)

Further, Lenin recognized the complexity of the relationship between the economic base of opportunism and its actual political expression and emphasized that the key identification of opportunists wasn't made by their location or position with the system of class stratification, but by their actual political line.

Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitely decided only by the socialist revolution. (CW 23:117)

However, although "secondary" we cannot afford to dismiss the analysis of the labor aristocracy. Especially since it is the "secondary questions" - the size and forms of the "bribe", the composition of the labor aristocracy, and the precise relationship between the upper strata and its political leadership (the "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class") that have been the most controversial in the recent history of the U.S. left. Within our own unfortunately pragmatic movement, all too often, Lenin's general argument is more or less accepted depending on whether or not these secondary questions can be "answered." All too often, Lenin's categories have been vulgarized or dogmatically applied in this debate. Our main objective in this section is to indicate the scope of Lenin's thinking on these particular questions. As a preface, we need to recognize that Lenin's remarks on the question of the labor aristocracy are made in the course of sharp political polemics where detailed theoretical synthesis of secondary points was not a priority.

Lenin defines the labor aristocracy as a "...small minority of the working class..." that "...enjoys better terms of employment and is most imbued with a narrow-minded craft spirit and with petty bourgeois and imperialist prejudices." Lenin used the term "labor aristocracy" interchangeably with the concept "upper strata of the working class. He describes both variously as the "thin upper crust" or "top of the labor movement." Following Engels, Lenin generally includes the craft unions in the labor aristocracy, but at different points in his writings he also includes additional categories: members of trade union and social democratic party apparatuses and office employees. In one example Lenin appears to say that the corrupted minority could be numerically quite large, including the bulk of organized workers in nineteenth century England and in Germany before World War I (one-fifth of the proletariat in Lenin's example).

At this point we would like to focus on four particular points that Lenin draws out in his discussions of the labor aristocracy.

First, the upper stratum depends on imperialist super-profits for its existence. The proletariat in all capitalist countries is stratified. In some ways this takes place along universally consistent lines (e.g. existence of a reserve army of labor of unskilled workers; the universal distinc-

tions between skilled and unskilled labor) and in some ways this occurs in more specific fashion (e.g. racism, national oppression, etc.). Under imperialism this stratification is accentuated and intensified by concessions paid out from imperialist superprofits. The result is a "relatively larger and more stable labour aristocracy."

Second, the special concessions to the upper strata corrupts and narrows its vision of class struggle. Under imperialism, certain trades and sectors of the working class due to special skills, organizational strength, strategic position, etc. gain conspicuously better conditions for themselves. The real mark of a labor aristocracy is that it struggles consciously to perpetuate its better position at the expense of other strata of the working class. (exclusionary, protected unions are a clear example of this). Economically, the labor aristocracy is able to maintain its wage levels at, or above the historically-determined average value of labor power on a permanent basis. While in times of severe economic crisis even "protected" strata suffer a decline in wages, the overall effect is mild compared to the losses of the lower strata.

Third, not only the upper strata, but the masses generally in oppressor nations receive some benefits from imperialism. Both Lenin and Engels pointed out that "To a certain degree the workers of the oppressor nations are partners of their own bourgeoisie in plundering the workers (and the mass of the population) of the oppressed nations." For example, many social reforms conceded to the workers in imperialist countries accrue to the entire class, not just to the upper strata.

Fourth, the key distinction of the labor aristocracy is its opportunism. Although the existence of upper strata is based on economics, economics alone doesn't determine the political and ideological opportunism that dominates there. For this reason Lenin makes a strong point of calling on communists not to eschew struggle in the reactionary trade unions, but to struggle everywhere "the masses are to be found."

## B2. The "Bribe"

One of the central (and more controversial) concepts that Lenin uses is the "bribe." "The whole thing boils down to nothing but bribery. It is done in a thousand different ways: by increasing cultural facilities in the largest centers, by creating educational institutions, and by providing cooperative, trade union and parliamentary leaders with thousands of cushy jobs." Obviously, Lenin has something more in mind than simply higher wages or bulging, plain brown envelopes -- he implies a whole system of economic, political and cultural concessions, reforms and privileges for the labor aristocracy and its representatives.



Why does Lenin use the term "bribery" to describe the relationship between the imperialists and the labor aristocracy? Engels described what he called the "privileges" and "benefits" of imperialism, but Lenin uses the much stronger term. There seems to be two reasons for the sharper description: First, Lenin wanted to underline the betrayal of the leadership of the Second International in no uncertain terms. By recognizing and supporting "defense of the fatherland," i.e. "defense of the bourgeoisie's predatory interests in the imperialist war, against the proletariat," these misleaders had truly sold out.

Social chauvinism is a consummated opportunism. That is beyond doubt. The alliance with the bourgeoisie used to be ideological and secret. It is now public and unseemly. Social chauvinism draws its strength from nowhere else but this alliance with the bourgeoisie and the General Staffs. (CW 21: 443)

Second, Lenin wanted to emphasize the use of the International misleaders to corrupt the entire working class movement. "The latter can neither be brushed aside nor suppressed by brute force" he said. "It must be demoralized from within, by buying its top section" (CW 21: 445). He asserted this as a general policy of the international bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie cannot maintain its rule without winning over another class or fractions of other classes. In countries where capitalism is primitive, the bourgeoisie and proletariat contend for the support of the peasantry. In advanced capitalist countries, in which the petit-bourgeoisie is relatively insignificant, the bourgeoisie consciously struggles for influence over sections of the proletariat itself. Ideological hegemony is too fragile by itself, therefore, the necessity of the bribe.

### B3. The Labor Lieutenants of Capital

In Lenin's discussions of the labor aristocracy, he makes a distinction between the aristocracy as a whole and its leadership. He adopts De Leon's term "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class" to describe those leaders of the trade unions and political parties "who had virtually entered the service of the bourgeoisie as its deputies." Lenin attacks these misleaders as the most conscious and nefarious segments of the upper strata and targets them as particular enemies among the class collaborationists. Although the upper strata as a whole is corrupted by imperialist bribes, Lenin still believes they can be won over to socialism:

We are waging a struggle against the "labour aristocracy" in the name of the masses of the workers in order to win them over to our side; we are waging the struggle against the opportunist and social chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class over to our side. It would be absurd to forget this most elementary and most self-evident truth. (LWC)

Lenin wrote this in June, 1920 during the revolutionary "First Period" when the upsurge of the masses intensified

the focus on the social chauvinist leaders. Lenin was clear, however, that the objective for sharpening the struggle with the "labour lieutenants" wasn't simply to remove them but to "win the working class over to our side" and away from social chauvinism. Trade union tactics call for appealing to the "lowest mass," the "real majority ...who are not infected by 'bourgeois respectability'." "This," Lenin says, "is the essence of Marxist tactics!" The question is whether the policy of the leadership represents the interests of the labor aristocracy or the interests of the masses.

#### B4. Class Stratification

A question that necessarily arises while examining the phenomenon of the "labor aristocracy" is this: What is the relationship of the "upper strata" which is based on the receipt of portions of imperialist or monopoly superprofits to the overall stratification of the proletariat which occurs in the course of class formation during the competitive stage of capitalism based often on various non-class forms of oppression? The central point to recognize is that stratification is inherent in capitalism. We need only recall Marx's writings in Capital on the reserve army of labor, the factory system, the employment of women and children, and the division of labor in manufacture and in society. Furthermore, as capitalism as a mode of production develops and proceeds from one stage to another -- likewise do social relations within and between classes. The relations that characterized classes and strata within classes become the basis upon which new, or altered relations develop. Hence, the phenomenon of the "labor aristocracy" cannot be understood simply in its economic connections to imperialist superprofits. It must be examined in its intersection with the previously formed stratification of the working class -- in its intersection with the labor process, i.e. skilled and unskilled labor, and with national, racial, religious, sexual, etc. forms of oppression. From this, it follows that the basis for opportunism in the labor movement is not limited to the most recent economic phenomena of imperialism, but includes the historic and particular stratification processes.

To illustrate this we will examine the particular relationship between the labor aristocracy and the division of skilled and unskilled workers in the development of capitalism.

Although we assert that in certain periods, under particular conditions, the labor aristocracy objectively expands to include much broader sections of the working class, its stable core has historically been associated with the elite skilled workers. There are two general questions here: First, what accounts for the division between skilled and unskilled in capitalist production? Second, why is it that the skilled workers function as a labor aristocracy?

First, Marx comprehensively addresses the problem of skilled and unskilled labor. Two features of this phenomenon

must be mentioned, in order to understand the historical origins and significance of the division. 1) The value of the labor power of skilled labor is higher than the value of labor power of unskilled, or simple labor. This is due to the additional costs to society for the training of skilled labor, and this process is regulated by the law of value. The notion that skilled labor is "worth more" than unskilled is merely the reflection in the minds of people of the objective fact that skilled labor power requires a greater share of the total social labor of society to reproduce than simple labor power.

2) As compared with handicraft production, the general and historical tendency of capitalist production is to replace skilled labor with unskilled, and to drive down the value of labor power of both. This process produces the phenomenon of stratification and continually transforms its nature to correspond to the progress of capitalist production.

In the period of manufacture, in which the "collective laborer" appropriates, under capitalist control, the production functions that once belonged to each individual artisan, subdividing these functions among a mass of detail laborers, there "develops a hierarchy of labor powers, to which there corresponds a scale of wages." Further,

Manufacture begets, in every handicraft that it seizes upon, a class of so-called unskilled labourers, a class which handicraft strictly excluded. If it develops a one-sided specialty into a perfection, at the expense of the whole of a man's working capacity, it also begins to make a specialty of the absence of all development. Alongside of the hierarchic gradation there steps the simple separation of the labourers into skilled and unskilled. For the latter, the cost of apprenticeship vanishes; for the former, it diminishes, compared with that of artificers, in consequence of the functions being simplified. (Emphasis added) (Capital, Vol. I:XIV:3)

In the period of machinery and modern industry, this process is extended and intensified:

Hence, in the place of the hierarchy of specialised workmen that characterises manufacture, there steps, in the automatic factory, a tendency to equalise and reduce to one and the same level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of machines; in the place of the artificially produced differentiation of the detail workmen, step the natural differences of age and sex. (Capital, Vol. I:XV:4)

As the mass of workers become machine operatives and attendants, the category of skilled workers, "whose occupation it is to look after the whole of the machinery and repair it from time to time," becomes "numerically unimportant." Further, these mechanics and kindred workers are "a superior class of workmen, some of them scientifically educated, others brought up to a trade; it is distinct from the factory operative class and merely aggregated to it." (Ibid.)

Contemporary writers, such as Harry Braverman, have shown that these historical tendencies affect not just the industrial proletariat, but also the masses of workers exploited by commercial and bank capital, a phenomenon of which Marx was not unaware, even in its embryonic stage. Thus, in Marx's discussion of commercial capital, he writes,

The commercial workers, in the strict sense of the term, belongs to the better-paid class of wage-workers — to those whose labour is classed as skilled and stands above average labour. Yet the wage tends to fall, even in relation to average labour, with the advances of the capitalist mode of production. This is due partly to the division of labour in the office.... Secondly, because the necessary training, knowledge of commercial practices, languages, etc., is more and more rapidly, easily universally and cheaply reproduced with the progress of science and public education the more the capitalist mode of production directs teaching methods, etc. towards practical purposes.... With few exceptions, the labour-power of these people is therefore devaluated with the progress of capitalist production. (Capital, Vol. III:XVII)

The particular tendencies that predominated in earlier periods of capitalist development do not disappear, but rather emerge in more backward sections of industry that are being transformed, or appear -- often in new forms -- in new branches of the economy or old industries that are being reconstituted on a new technological basis. The general trend is to displace labor by machines, or automatic machine or flow processes. However, the specific natures of different production processes mean that this trend will unfold unevenly and with effects that temporarily counteract it. This is the phenomenon of technological advance bringing new categories of skilled labor into existence, which then eventually undergo a process of devaluation similar to the older skilled categories.

As we have seen in our brief survey, devaluation of skilled labor power relative to simple labor power can be caused by at least three factors inherent in advances in capitalist production: 1) the division of coherent crafts or professions into their component tasks; 2) the introduction of technology that makes the skilled labor superfluous; and 3) progress in mass education that simultaneously increases the supply of skilled labor-power, while reducing the amount of socially necessary labor incorporated in the training of each individual worker.

However, these factors are affected by the class struggle as well. Labor power is a very special commodity, in the sense that it is able to defend itself and increase its own value. Skilled workers have historically struggled to prevent devaluation. They have been most successful in those industries in which mechanization has encountered technical obstacles due to the nature of the production processes, most notably in construction. In general, however, skilled workers have focused on resisting tendencies 1) and 3) above, rather than fighting mechanized production

that inevitably will win out. The main forms of resistance have been struggles to maintain coherent and distinct craft groups with specific tasks, in relation to each other and to the mass of production workers; and struggles to restrict entry to the crafts by control over apprenticeship programs and licensing.

This phenomenon leads us into the second question of why skilled workers tend to function as a labor aristocracy. The problem is posed correctly if we view it as the intersection of the craft interest of skilled workers and the bourgeoisie's interest in winning allies among a section of the working class.

Craft unionism arises out of the spontaneous movement by skilled workers to protect themselves from capital's drive to devalue their labor power, absolutely and relative to the mass of workers. Craft unionism seeks a monopoly over employment of workers in a given section of the labor market. Though all unions aim for this to a certain extent, the character of skilled labor provides definite advantages in excluding competition from other workers, since only a narrow portion of the reserve army has the training to do particular kinds of skilled labor. Craft unionism attempts to protect itself by measures designed to maintain its skill level, as well as to restrict the supply of skilled labor. Further, the strategic position of skilled labor in production, particularly where it is not immediately threatened by technological change, provides craft unionism with a certain independent bargaining leverage with capital. As a result it doesn't have to take the mass of production workers into consideration.

It is almost a principle of capitalism that skilled labor excludes broad categories of workers who face racial, national, and sexual oppression. In the U.S., craft unionism used the historically developed forms of oppression as weapons to further restrict competition. In the most general sense, this was accomplished by refusing to organize on an industrial basis, since the vast majority of minority, foreign-born and women workers were concentrated in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Particular barriers were imposed by Jim Crow constitutional clauses and other entry restrictions. An important difference must be noted, however, in the type of exclusion practiced against Black workers and other social groupings. Not only were Black workers excluded from the craft unions, they were deliberately driven out of the skilled positions they occupied. As described by Foner:

During the 1880s and early 1890s, Negro labor in Southern cities was important in railroading, shipping, and building. Beginning in the late 1890s, the Negro workers in Southern cities were steadily eliminated from skilled jobs as a result of a deliberate conspiracy between employers and the craft unions. By refusing to admit Negro members and by preventing union members from working with men who were not in the union, these organizations gradually pushed Negro workers out of

skilled positions they had held formerly. Where Negro craftsmen were organized in separate, Jim Crow locals, they receive little or no assistance from the city central labor bodies, composed of white men.... The skilled place held by the members of the Negro local were eyed jealously by the white craft unions.... The national unions to which the Jim Crow locals were affiliated, refused to protect their jobs or wage scales.

The substitution of formal apprenticeship training, controlled by the craft unions, for "picking up" the trade was an important factor in limiting the opportunities for Negroes in the skilled trades. Employers and unions conspired to confine apprenticeships to whites,....

In general, we must conclude that the striving of craft unionism to provide security for the skilled workers at the expense of the rest of the working class is a basic condition for the constitution of a labor aristocracy. As we have seen, this striving is rooted in the specific position occupied by skilled workers in capitalist production.

However, it is only the conscious intervention of capital that consolidates the upper stratum of the working class as a labor aristocracy. The bourgeoisie requires the capacity and need to make concessions; the former is provided by monopoly and imperialism, the latter by the advances of the working class movement. From the bourgeoisie's standpoint, the skilled workers represent the decisive section of the proletariat to win as allies: they are a relatively small stratum with strategic importance in production; and they are antagonistic to the mass of workers, though still influential over them. Thus, capital is willing to concede certain prerogatives to the skilled workers, such as unionization, control over entry to the trades and higher wages, so long as basic management control is not undermined.

It is not coincidental that in the U.S., the period from 1895 to 1901 saw the rise of monopoly capitalism, the purge of Black workers from the skilled crafts, and the complete collapse of the AFL into conscious and systematic class collaboration. As Foner sums up, the AFL leadership

...was prepared to come to terms with the trusts -- and, indeed, to become prominent champions of the trusts -- provided that their craft unions of skilled workers were allowed to exist in certain limited areas of the giant monopolies. In return, they agreed to do nothing to organize the vast majority of the workers employed by the trusts -- the foreign born, Negro and women workers.

The transformation of the AFL's policy from that of narrow, militant craft unionism at its founding, to the ideology of Gompersism -- "narrow-minded, selfish, case-hardened, covetous, ..., imperialist-minded, and imperialist-corrupted," in Lenin's words, -- reflected the transformation of the skilled upper stratum of the working class into a labor aristocracy.

From this example, we can conclude that the existence of an exclusive labor aristocracy requires a socially evolved system of principles and practices that exclude certain workers from particular industries and occupations. Whether based on unskilled labor, national or racial categories, sex, or age, these exclusionary systems have a life of their own and develop somewhat independently of each other in the course of class formation. Their interpenetration, however, is very significant. It is only by examining the interpenetration of these separate phenomena that we can develop an overall understanding of the evolution of a persistent labor aristocracy.

To sum up, from these observations, we can draw three general implications:

(1) The existence of a labor aristocracy has a historic basis in social forms of oppression which are politically and economically reinforced in the era of imperialism. To some extent this is consciously recognized by both the monopoly bourgeoisie and members of the labor aristocracy, especially the leading elements. (The all-white character of many craft unions in the U.S. and their explicitly racist policies is a classic illustration.)

(2) It follows from this that the labor aristocracy is not simply misled, but has an objective, albeit historically temporary, stake in maintaining the special oppression of certain workers concentrated in the lower strata of the proletariat. (We should note, however that the corollary of this is not that communists "give up" the struggle for a more advanced view among aristocratic workers.)

(3) The struggle against racial, national, and sexual oppression is integrally bound up with the class struggle centered in the lower stratum of the working class.

### C. Lenin's Tactics

Based on the general analysis of opportunism and its expression in the workers' movement, Lenin formulates a general strategy for the labor movement. While this strategy is clearly formulated in the concrete situation of the WW I period and the split of the Second International, the framework is established as the principles for tactics in the stage of imperialism. The following points represent the kernel of Lenin's theory for working class struggle.

(1) The political split of the workers' movement expressed in the dissolution of the Second International has an economic basis in the social relations of imperialism. This is found in the analysis of "superprofits" and the "bribe." As a result, the opportunist trend "can neither disappear nor 'return' to the revolutionary proletariat." On the contrary, it will persist until the revolution. Consequently, revolutionary tactics call for a sharp ideological, political and

organizational rupture with the opportunist forces. The formation of the Comintern and the very existence of the world communist movement rests on this analysis.

(2) The opportunist "labor aristocracy" constitutes "the social mainstay of the bourgeoisie." -- that segment of the class that will align itself with the bourgeoisie. On one point there can be no illusions: the entire working class will not be won beforehand to the need for revolution and a fraction will actively resist. "There never has been, and never can be, a class struggle in which part of the advanced class does not remain on the side of the reactionary forces." (1919)

(3) Therefore: "No preparation of the proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is possible, even in the preliminary sense, unless an immediate, systematic, extensive and open struggle is waged against this stratum, which, as experience has already fully shown, will no doubt provide the bourgeois White guards with many a recruit after the victory of the proletariat." (July, 1920)

(4) Since the labor aristocracy claims to represent the interests of the working class as a whole, its influence in the lower strata must be fought with the aim of destroying "...every trace of its prestige among the workers." (1919) And further:

By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are defending the temporary privileges of a minority of the workers, that they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influences, that they are really allies and agents of the bourgeoisie, we teach the masses to appreciate their true political interests..." (1916) (Emphasis Added)

(5) Tactically, this requires appealing to the "lowest" mass, the real majority" of the working class rather than the labor aristocracy, "particularly those who are least organized and educated, who are most oppressed and least amenable to organization." (1920)

This does not mean leaving the reactionary trade unions as Lenin makes clear in Left-wing Communism..., but it does mean creating a sharp polarization with the opportunists.

(6) In sum, the struggle against the labor aristocracy is first and foremost a struggle against its political influence over the working class movement. In a strategic sense this requires communists to demarcate from opportunism and wage a struggle to defeat its influence.

(7) Finally, Lenin emphasizes that because of the economic roots of opportunism, the struggle to isolate its influence will be protracted, especially in the strongest imperialist countries.



SECTION II: THEORY OF THE LABOR ARISTOCRACY APPLIED TO THE U.S. SINCE WORLD WAR II

INTRODUCTION:

In the period since World War II, the U.S. monopoly bourgeoisie achieved an enormously expanded capacity to make concessions to certain well-positioned strata of the working class, and -- in certain instances -- to the working class as a whole. This is the material basis for the expansion of the labor aristocracy in the U.S. beyond the narrow stratum of unionized skilled workers, and it is the principal factor that accounts for the strength of opportunism in the labor movement and the near-total isolation of the left after the historical gains of the 1930s and war years. Finally, the extraordinary length of the period of stabilization -- over 30 years in the U.S. if we take 1940 as the starting point of rapid economic expansion -- meant that it shaped the consciousness and political behavior of an entire generation of workers.

The position that the labor aristocracy in the U.S. is insignificant and that the material basis for its existence has been qualitatively circumscribed, is usually argued by reference to Lenin's observation in 1916 that inter-imperialist contradictions would prohibit any of the Great Powers from reproducing England's 19th Century ability to bribe great numbers of workers. It is our conclusion, however, that what Lenin termed "improbable" -- that a 'bourgeois labor party' could prevail for long in the imperialist countries or that it would again be possible "... to bribe and corrupt the working class of one country for decades" -- in fact became a reality in the U.S. in the thirty-year period following the end of World War II.

The period of relative stabilization of world capitalism under U.S. hegemony is analagous to the period of England's world domination and "prosperity" in the 19th Century, with similar effects on the class struggle in the U.S. and the evolution of political trends in the labor movement.

This position represents a line of demarcation with revisionism in the U.S. The leading theorists and political leadership of the CPUSA have consistently refused to acknowledge the social reality of the labor aristocracy in the U.S., and this is connected with the party's political conciliation of liberal-opportunism in organized labor.

In 1949, V.J. Jerome, the editor of the CPUSA's theoretical journal, Political Affairs, wrote

Clearly, there is a decline in monopoly capital's material basis for bribing a labor aristocracy in the United States. (The labor aristocracy itself was diminished by the 1929 crisis, continuing unemployment, and the rise of industrial unions in the mass-production industries.) Without foundation, therefore, are

current defeatist moods, that the material basis for the labor aristocracy is extending, and that the class struggle must gear itself to a 'slow-down.'

Nearly a quarter century later, in 1973, George Meyers, a leading figure in the CPUSA's Labor Commission and frequent party commentator on trade union affairs, came to a similar conclusion:

Much of the confusion over the question of the 'aristocracy of labor' injected by Marcuse and other petty-bourgeois radicals has been pretty well cleared up by life itself. It is rather difficult these days to put auto and steel workers in that category. Workers who can be defined as part of the 'aristocracy of labor' -- and I would define them as those who can write their own ticket -- have always been small in number and are growing even smaller (unless we want to put the trade-union officialdom in that category.) However, a serious problem does exist, and that is the problem of narrow craft unionism which occurs among skilled workers, carefully instilled in them during lengthy apprenticeship training programs.

In a sense, these two statements reflect the degeneration of the CPUSA. Jerome, in 1949, fighting to preserve the CPUSA in the face of massive attacks and the deadening legacy of Browderism, can be partly excused for not anticipating that the stabilization of world capitalism under U.S. hegemony would persist for three decades. Politically, this view seemed to be an unprincipled concession to right opportunism at the time; and theoretically, the international communist movement was incapacitated by attempts to mechanically apply the post World War I history to the aftermath of World War II.

Meyers, writing after 30 years of relative stabilization cannot be excused. He manages to ignore the significance of an entire period of world history on the development of the U.S. working class. Moreover, his definition of the labor aristocracy is subjective and abandons Lenin's theory of the connection between imperialism and opportunism. For Meyers, the problem is not the labor aristocracy, but rather craft unionism, "which provides Meany with his reactionary base." The implication, of course, is that opportunism in organized labor is not a reflection of the overall dynamics of imperialism, but instead is caused principally by factors internal to the capitalist labor process.

That this is an accurate characterization of the CPUSA's line is confirmed by the party's view of the relationship between the AFL and CIO. In the mid-1950s, when the merger took place, the CPUSA praised it as a step forward for organized labor because it would provide enhanced bargaining power and organizing capacity. Although party writers mentioned the reactionary politics of the new federation, this was seen as a secondary feature. Supposedly, the inherently more progressive tendencies of the industrial unions would eventually win out. All this managed to ignore was the fact that the merger only was able to take place because the left had been

purged from the CIO, and the leadership of the industrial federation had no differences with the AFL on any significant questions of foreign and domestic policies. That the merger had negligible results for the workers -- but did have the effect of strengthening the right-wing in the international labor movement -- has been rationalized by the CPUSA ever since as a problem of craft union influence. Thus, in 1969, Carl Bloice, could sum up in Political Affairs: "It was through the craft unions that opportunism attained a degree of hegemony over the merged labor organization."

Not only is this view patently false historically, it reduces opportunism to a question of 1) craft interest, and 2) the careerism and moral shortcomings of the leadership of the industrial unions.

A correct orientation to opportunism in the U.S. labor movement must start from the fact that the leaderships of the craft and industrial unions shared common political assumptions - most important, unqualified support for U.S. imperialism and anti-communism; they engaged in class collaborationist policies, which seemed to result in gains for the mass of organized workers; and they were supported politically by the majority of members of their organizations.

This phenomenon can only be explained on the basis of Lenin's theory of the labor aristocracy. While it is true that a complex set of factors such as "free land," immigration, racism, advanced bourgeois democracy, etc. have hindered the development of class consciousness in the U.S. and bolstered opportunist trends, socialist ideas and more class conscious forces always have had some influence. These reached mass proportions in the conditions of economic crisis and the struggle against fascism. The complete suppression of socialist influence after World War II and its failure to regenerate, and the total hegemony of opportunism in organized labor, can only be accounted for by the "exceptional" circumstances of U.S. imperialism and the expanded labor aristocracy that it created in the U.S.

(The role of serious errors by the CPUSA in contributing to the victory of opportunism is not the issue here. By the late 1940s, the position and influence of the party in U.S. life was such that there was no way it could have stopped the opportunist tide. The more important question is why the defeat of the left turned into a total rout: Serious political errors and the growing influence of revisionism must bear much of the responsibility. This question must be examined as part of a thorough reappraisal of the history of the CPUSA by the rectification movement.)

A. The Material Basis for the Expanded Labor Aristocracy:  
Imperialist Stabilization Under U.S. Hegemony

We are in no position to provide a thorough-going analysis of the history of imperialism since World War II, or the political economy of U.S. capitalism in this period. Our limited goal is to give an overview of the contours of the period and its chief features for the purpose of showing U.S. imperialism's expanded resources for bribery of the U.S. working class. We must emphasize from the outset that the period of stabilization was historically temporary, and that the contradictions of imperialism are increasingly forcing the U.S. bourgeoisie to withdraw the protections it once afforded the U.S. working class. Nevertheless, this is not happening at one stroke and is affecting different strata of the working class in different ways. The particularity of the present capitalist offensive in the U.S. cannot be understood without grasping its relationship to the reformism of the previous period; nor without acknowledging that U.S. imperialism is not exhausted, but still possesses significant reserves for protecting its home market and an upper stratum of the U.S. working class.

A1. The Post-World War II Stage of Imperialism

We can define the years from the end of World War II to the present as a particular stage in the development of the general crisis of imperialism. The concept of the general crisis of imperialism refers to the historical transition from capitalism to socialism as one country after another makes the revolutionary break from the imperialist system, which is beset by ever-intensifying internal contradictions. (This is to be distinguished from the concept of cyclical crises of over-production and financial "panic" that regularly paralyze capitalist countries (the "business cycle").) The general crisis of imperialism manifests itself in periodic general structural crises that reflect a complex intensification of contradictions on a world scale. The previous two periods of generalized structural crisis were "resolved" by world wars.

The stage of imperialism in the inter-war period essentially bore out Lenin's prediction that inter-imperialist contradictions would severely undermine tendencies toward bribery and reformism. The labor aristocracies in all imperialist countries were weakened and narrowed. (In fact, Dimitrov cited this phenomenon in explaining the basis for the United Front Against Fascism.) However, the contention between two imperialist blocs, the rise of fascism, the depression, and the successful construction of socialism in the Soviet Union led to the world crisis of World War II and the general reorganization of the imperialist system on a new basis.

The main features of the new stage of imperialism which took shape during the world war and the following decade include: 1) the emergence of a powerful socialist camp, which has conspicuously altered the world balance of forces between capitalism and socialism; 2) the collapse of the European-dominated colonial system and the rise of both revolutionary national-liberation movements and a U.S. dominated system of neo-colonialism; 3) U.S. hegemony over the world capitalist system and the general muting of inter-imperialist contradictions; 4) within advanced capitalist countries, the development of extensive systems of state monopoly capitalism in order to facilitate capital accumulation and "regulate" the class struggle.

## A2. Stabilization and Crisis

We can further define two general phases of this stage of imperialism: a period of relative capitalist stabilization that began soon after the end of World War II and continued until the early 1970s; and a period of general and intensifying crisis beginning with the economic and political dislocations that unfolded from 1968 to 1975. The main events that signaled the shift from stabilization to crisis were the U.S. defeat in Indochina; the rupture of the Bretton Woods monetary system in 1971; the sharp rise in world oil prices in 1973; the deep cyclical crisis of 1974-1975 (the greatest curtailment of industrial production since the Great Depression); and the coexistence of high rates of inflation, unemployment and low growth rates that emerged as constant phenomena in all advanced capitalist countries.

Now that the post-World War II stage of imperialism has entered a period of structural crisis, it is possible to place the period of relative stabilization in clearer focus. In general, this is an important theoretical task before the communist movement in order to understand the origins of the present period and unfolding economic and political trends. This is especially needed as we believe that the crisis is developing within the basic international framework that came into existence in the early post-war years--the basic features of the post-war stage that we noted earlier have not been qualitatively changed. Most important, U.S. imperialism, despite setbacks, still maintains hegemony over the capitalist world and is encountering no serious rivals for that position. Any thorough analysis of the actual relations between U.S. imperialism and the European powers and Japan must still conclude that all the other imperialist countries, taken individually or as a group, are still qualitatively dependent on U.S. finance capital, U.S. markets and the U.S. military. The main threat to U.S. hegemony, as it has been throughout the post-war stage, is from movements for national liberation and socialism that not only restrict the U.S. sphere

of exploitation, but remove countries from the imperialist camp. In this stage of imperialism, the decline of U.S. imperialism is completely bound up with the decline of imperialism as a whole.

In attempting to grasp the impact of this stage of imperialism on the class struggle in the U.S., the period of relative stabilization is crucial to understand. It provides insights into how we can expect the class struggle in the U.S. to unfold in the present period of crisis.

### A3. International Features of the Period of Stabilization

U.S. hegemony rested on the fact that it emerged from World War II not only as a victor imperialist power, but as the imperialist country that owned the largest and most advanced industrial plant, possessed vast gold reserves, acted as the chief creditor for its imperialist competitors, and maintained strategically-decisive military superiority. Relative to the war-devastated European powers and Japan, the U.S. effectively held a monopoly position that provided the economic and political capacity to restructure the imperialist system -- in significant respects comparable to England's 19th century industrial and colonial monopolies, but at a higher stage of capitalist development. Beginning during the war itself, but especially in its immediate aftermath, the U.S. took measure to construct the institutions, alliances and international relations of production and exchange that would insure conditions of "orderly" capital accumulation. The new international system -- which included such institutions as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT), the World Bank, NATO, etc. -- both depended upon and insured the privileged position of U.S. finance capital.

The period of stabilization was largely a result of the particular configuration of imperialist relations developed in the immediate post-war years. U.S. monopoly-capital was the largest and determining component of the system. Lenin, in Imperialism, summed up the "four principal types of monopoly, or principal manifestations of monopoly capitalism" as arising in the spheres of 1) industrial production, 2) ownership of raw materials, 3) banking, and 4) control over colonies. In all of these spheres, U.S. monopoly capital has been dominant throughout the post-war stage of imperialism, but especially during the period of stabilization when its imperialist competitors lay prostrate from the war. U.S. industrial output was greater than all of its imperialist competitors combined; U.S. domestic reserves of raw materials were unequalled and its extensive international holdings especially effective control over world oil production and marketing, placed other capitalist countries at an extreme disadvantage; U.S. banks replaced England as the world's main source of liquid capital and the dollar similarly replaced the pound-sterling; and, by the mid-1950s, the

U.S. had largely replaced European and Japanese interests in the colonial world, by 1960 controlling almost 60% of the world's export capital. On this fourfold monopoly basis -- to which must be added military monopoly -- the U.S. was able to establish a dollar-based monetary system, low tariffs and "free trade", penetration of the internal markets of its imperialist rivals by direct investments in means of production and ownership of ostensibly European capital, and the expansion of dozens of U.S. monopoly enterprises into so called "transnational" corporations. In sum, U.S. imperialism built a relatively stable economic and political environment within which capitalist trade, investment and production could expand very rapidly. This benefited all the imperialist powers, especially the U.S. because of its hegemonic position.

Several additional factors contributed to the post-war "prosperity" that proceeded within the international imperialist framework described above: 1) the massive reconstruction of the European and Japanese economies, which provided vast markets for U.S. export of capital and commodities; 2) low energy prices that reduced production costs and the value of labor-power; 3) the scientific and technological advances that produced major gains in productivity in agriculture and basic industries, as well as created new industries such as aerospace, synthetics and computers; 4) the restructuring of U.S. economic and social life by means of government sponsored highway construction, home-building and suburban developments. 5) Finally, the massive increase in state expenditures, particularly on military goods; manipulation of fiscal and monetary policies to counter the business cycle; and increased social spending to moderate social conflict contributed to increased economic and political stabilization.

In general, all these factors worked, though often with contradictory effects, to increase the general rate of profit and facilitate the realization of surplus value, thus offsetting temporarily the tendencies toward stagnation that had emerged full-blown in the 1930's.

#### A4. Contradictions Leading to the Present Period of Crisis

It should be obvious that the period of stabilization and prosperity was inherently contradictory and bound to turn into its opposite. This isn't the place to describe or analyze how all of the contradictions of the period of stabilization concretely unfolded. We need only mention the rapid rebuilding of the European and Japanese economies; struggles against neo-colonialism; increased bargaining power of raw material exporting countries; monopoly pricing arrangements and state policies that accelerated inflation, the massive increase in debt, etc., as examples of trends that undermined stabilization. In the most general sense,

the period of stabilization was undermined by its very success in promoting capitalist production, since the main economic trend of the period -- the enormous development of the productive forces of social labour over 30 years throughout the imperialist system -- accelerated the tendency of the average rate of profit to fall. Just as in England in the late 19th century, the exceptional circumstances of the period of stabilization produced counteracting influences that held the tendency in check; however, then as now, this constitutes an historically temporary situation that inevitably, as we are seeing, disintegrates into crisis and stagnation.

#### A5. The Material Basis for Reformism and Bribery

The capitalist development of the productive forces in the period of stabilization is the key to grasping the phenomena of the labor aristocracy in the U.S. Long-term economic growth and rapid capital accumulation provided the bourgeoisie with vast resources to engage in reformism over a 30-year period.

In general, we must conclude that the period of stabilization permitted U.S. monopoly capital to generate enormous super-profits from the combination of the massive worldwide investments of U.S. capital, the acquisition of former colonial markets, control over the world monetary and credit system, increase of monopoly within the U.S. use of the state as "collective capitalist", and the surplus profits generated by racism in the U.S. These advantages provided the U.S. bourgeoisie with perhaps the largest means of bribery for a longer period, that has ever existed in any country. \*

\*See appendix for further discussion of category of superprofits.



## B. The Labor Aristocracy and Opportunism in the U.S. Since World War II

The period of stabilization under U.S. hegemony resulted in the consolidation and expansion of the labor aristocracy in the U.S. By consolidation we refer to the long-term stability enjoyed by the upper strata and the resulting tendency for it to function as a coherent "interest group" under the auspices of the AFL-CIO and, to a certain extent, the Democratic Party.

The core of the labor aristocracy is the skilled craft workers, especially in the construction industry; however, the labor aristocracy expanded overall to include important sections of unionized production workers in the monopoly industries and government employment, as well as groupings of "proletarianized professionals", such as teachers, industrial technicians, skilled health-care workers, etc. In addition, the masses of U.S. workers, though not part of the labor aristocracy, shared in the benefits of the period in the forms of steadier employment and government facilitated increases in the "social wage".

The various forms of spontaneous class struggles in the period of stabilization, whether trade union strikes or mass social movements for reforms can only be explained within this general framework.

Finally, it follows from this perspective, that the labor aristocracy in the U.S. is increasingly being destabilized and that it is objectively contracting as imperialist crisis compels the bourgeoisie to take steps to liquidate or alter the arrangements that insured relative economic security for the upper strata of the working class.

### B1. Problems of Analysis

It is not possible to draw an exact line of demarcation between the labor aristocracy and the rest of the working class. This is partly a function of the descriptive and relative nature of the category, as well as the complexities of the empirical work required to distinguish various strata. Significantly, the inexactness of the category reflects social reality in at least three major ways:

First, since the entire working class receives some protections and benefits from U.S. imperialism that are bound up with the general process of accumulation, and the occupational stratification of the working class tends to take the form of a hierarchic gradation rather than a sharp polarization between "have" and "have nots", we find that what demarcates the labor aristocracy from the great mass of workers is the high degree of benefit. There is a conspicuous gulf between the most upper stratum of the labor aristocracy and the lowest stratum of the working

class, but the exact dividing line that marks off the lower membership of the labor aristocracy is continuously shifting.

Second, the labor aristocracy is defined by its political role as well as its economic conditions and relationships. Whereas all sections of the labor aristocracy must be part of the upper strata of the working class, it doesn't follow that all sections of the upper strata necessarily function as a labor aristocracy in the full sense of the term. In life, for example, the left in the trade unions had to be politically defeated and suppressed; the improvement in the living conditions of the workers wouldn't have "naturally" accomplished this. The existence today of progressive and reactionary "dual unions" in the electrical and longshore industries, whose members have almost identical wages and conditions, testifies to the importance of politics.

Third, the specific impact of racism must also be considered. In the core of the labor aristocracy, among the skilled craft workers, racial exclusion has been a defining characteristic for 90 years. The problem arises when we examine the expanded sections of the labor aristocracy, particularly the unionized workers in basic industry. By 1970, the number of Black factory workers was about proportionate to the number of Black people in the general population. In certain industries, particularly in the largest urban areas, minority workers in some cases make up a majority of the factory operative workforces, for example urban auto plants in the Midwest. To a certain degree, the semi-protected status of the industrial stratum also provided benefits for minority workers. However, in general, this status has not been fully realized because of racism. Two phenomena stand out in this regard: First, most minority workers entered the workforce in the late 1950's and 1960s. Consequently, they generally hold lower seniority which relegates them to the worst and lowest-paid jobs, more frequent layoffs, and a smaller share of seniority-based fringe benefits. Overt discrimination in department assignments, harassment by management, poor representation by union representatives, etc. also places minority workers in a much less secure position than their white co-workers. Second, and most important, minority workers face racial oppression in society at large: what protections minority industrial workers because of their membership in the expanded labor aristocracy stops outside the plant gate. Overall, this situation has worked to undermine the political stability of the *expanded labor* aristocracy. The autoworkers union is the most important example of this phenomenon: Thus, we find that Black auto workers have *forced* the opportunist leadership to take relatively progressive positions on certain social issues, while still maintaining the general class collaborationist framework.

Fourth, we should be reminded of Lenin's observations that, "There are no pure phenomena, nor can there be, either in Nature or in Society...."; and "... one must remember that social science (like science generally) usually deals with mass phenomena, not with individual cases." For sure, many exceptions can be found to counter our general appraisal of the U.S. labor aristocracy, but our purpose in this paper is solely to identify the main features and trends of this phenomenon.

## B2. The Labor Aristocracy's "Protections"

Many observers of labor in the U.S. have noted the "social contract" established between the union movement and monopoly capital in the early years of the period of stabilization. Politically, the alliance was essential to the U.S. bourgeoisie's international strategy. As described in Line of March, (Vol. I, No. 5, p. 70)

Organized labor would receive a virtual guarantee of steadily rising real wages, and employers would cease attempts to bust unions; labor would have to promise ever-rising productivity and the commitment to support capital in its imperialist expansionism, anti-communism, and conspicuous push of minorities and women out of positions they had gained during the war years.

The period of stabilization provided extremely favorable conditions for "labor peace," and the bribery of key sections of organized labor and its acceptance of certain "necessities" of capital accumulation reinforced certain supports of stabilization and U.S. imperialist expansion.

In the most general sense, stabilization of imperialism under U.S. hegemony provided objective "protection" to the U.S. working class from international competition, absolute impoverishment, and the economic dislocations associated with the business cycle. The notion of protection must be understood relative to the conditions of the immediately preceding historical period, and the conditions of workers in other countries. The labor aristocracy, both because of its strategic position in the economy and the policies of the bourgeoisie, gained the greatest and most consistent benefits. This phenomenon can be illustrated by examining unemployment and wage levels.

### B2a. The Labor Aristocracy and Unemployment

The labor aristocracy was relatively protected from unemployment in several respects:

First, the working class as a whole in the period of stabilization was protected against what Marx called the acute form of relative surplus-population that is caused by industrial crises.

Second, the position of the labor aristocracy in the economy generally isolated it from the latent and stagnant forms of unemployment, which primarily affect workers in competitive industries, retail trades, agricultural workers, etc. Immigrant

workers and minorities are especially subject to these forms of the reserve army, which are characterized by high instability, temporary employment, the lowest wages, and general conditions of poverty.

Third, even though the labor aristocracy provided workers for the floating form of the reserve army, i.e., the constant attraction and repulsion from industry caused by technological advances and particular market disruptions causing production slow-downs, the general expansion of production in the period (along with union security protections) meant that the number of unemployed industrial workers was relatively low. Further, those that were laid-off were not unemployed for long periods. This was especially true for skilled craft workers, who maintained overall unemployment rates about half that of operatives. White workers also enjoyed special advantages, both in generally holding higher seniority and finding it easier to find re-employment when they lost their jobs. The more privileged government workers, mainly in federal employment, benefited from the massive expansion of government spending and rarely faced unemployment (civil service policies provided additional security).

#### B2b. The Labor Aristocracy and High Wage Levels

The main advantage provided the labor aristocracy was "high" wages that were continually rising. The basis of this phenomenon was, first, the rapid capital accumulation of the period of stabilization.

This had two relevant effects: an increased demand for labor-power in the industrial sectors (especially construction, capital goods and military production), which provided favorable conditions for union wage struggles; and high profits generated by increased productivity that allowed monopoly capital to absorb increased labor costs (if production was stable and undisrupted by strikes). Productivity increases required organized labor's submission to technological advances and job losses; otherwise wage increases would have resulted in reduction of profits. (Monopolies can sustain the profit advantages of productivity increases by selling above production costs for protracted periods, a process that results in generalized inflation.) In practice, unions didn't resist automation, in return for high wages for the workers that remained -- in effect, this created a more compact labor aristocracy.

Of course, this process resulted in the relative impoverishment of the labor aristocracy and the working class as a whole, since capital appropriated the bulk of productivity gains. However, the decisive aspect insofar as spontaneous mass consciousness was concerned was the absolute improvement in living conditions for many workers.

The second basis for high wages was monopoly superprofits directly, which reduced the pressure on capital to increase

its profits by driving wages below the value of labor-power. In general, the existence of monopoly superprofits implies the possibility of wages rising above the level of necessity. This possibility is only realized in life by the workings of the class struggle. Only a minority of the labor aristocracy has the monopoly control to be able to maintain wages above the level of necessity permanently, even in favorable periods. The majority of members of the labor aristocracy -- and certainly this was true for the expanded labor aristocracy in the U.S. in the post-war period -- benefited from imperialism to the extent that they were able, through union struggles, to prevent employers from driving wages below the necessary level. It must be remembered that the great mass of workers, even in a period of stabilization and "prosperity," receive wages far below the socially necessary norm. (However, it must also be stressed that the socially necessary subsistence wage level in the U.S. is historically determined and itself reflects the relatively privileged position of the U.S. working class on a world scale.)

To illustrate this situation, consider that in 1971, only 60 percent of craftsmen (the core of the labor aristocracy) earned wages high enough to allow them to support a family of four at or above government determined levels of minimal subsistence. Only slightly over 30 percent of operatives and kindred workers (representing the higher-paid unionized industrial workers) maintained at least subsistence levels. The vast majority of workers -- some 80 percent of service and retail workers, 75 percent of clerical workers and laborers, as well as the majority of operatives -- received wages below the amount required for minimal subsistence.

To understand the impact of the period of stabilization on wage levels in the most general sense, two comparisons are necessary -- with workers in other countries, and with previous periods in U.S. history.

First, the U.S. working class enjoyed conditions of life far superior to those of workers in other imperialist countries until the mid-1970s. As late as 1970, for example, wages of German workers in manufacturing were only 53.5 percent of U.S. wages, Japanese workers 34.3 percent, and French workers 29 percent. By 1979, the large wage gap had been narrowed, and certain imperialist countries -- Germany, Sweden, Belgium -- maintained wage levels higher than those of U.S. workers. But it is important to note that for close to forty years, U.S. workers received the highest wages in the world by a very substantial margin.

Second, the wage gains of U.S. workers during the period of stabilization were historically exceptional. Average real take-home pay for production workers in the U.S. manufacturing sector increased by 42 percent from 1946 to 1969 (with the greatest increase occurring between 1955 and 1965). Real wages increased in 19 out of these 23 years. Overall, this represents the largest and longest sustained increase in this century.

\* \* \* \* \*

The improvement in the material conditions of life for large sections of organized labor provided favorable conditions for opportunism to extent its influence and isolate left forces. The period engendered bourgeois illusions, moods of national chauvinism, confidence in capitalism, expectations of permanent economic growth, and support for class collaborationist policies among millions of U.S. workers, in all strata of the class, but especially the unionized upper strata who were acquiring the greatest share of concessions from the bourgeoisie.

Relatively high wage levels that were increasing made it possible for the better situated workers (particularly if they were white) to obtain home mortgages and credit for consumer durables, pay tuition for their children to attend colleges, and in a small minority of cases, enter the ranks of the petit-bourgeoisie for a time (as small contractors, independent truck-drivers, shop-owners, etc.)

Significantly, these gains were won with the lowest level of strike activity since the late 1920s and early depression years (if measured relative to the expanded size of the workforce). This phenomenon indicates the monopoly bourgeoisie's willingness to make concessions in order to insure stable production and social peace.

Naturally, bourgeois ideologists and the opportunist leadership of organized labor attributed the improvements in the conditions of the workers to the wonders of capitalism and the effectiveness of class collaboration, which were predicted to continue permanently.

### B3. The Character of Opportunism in the Period of Stabilization

#### B3a. Significance of the Realignment to the Right in the late 1940s

Liberal-opportunism has controlled the "commanding heights" of organized labor in the U.S. for over 30 years, as well as nearly almost all of the lower-level leadership. This fact is so evident and has been with us for so long that many on the left tend to take it for granted.

In essence, the stabilization of imperialism and the resulting long-term improvements in the standard of living of organized workers, produced a parallel stabilization in opportunism's political position in the labor movement. The strength and durability of opportunism is accounted for by the strengthened and expanded labor aristocracy, but its initial consolidation required the political defeat of the left in the trade unions and a general realignment of forces. This point must be stressed, since it is an important corrective to economic determinist perspectives. The political gains of the previous historical period -- especially the industrial unions and the anti-fascist front -- and the ideological development of the working class, had to be suppressed, neutralized and turned into their opposites in order for the working class to be generally coopted. The monopoly bourgeoisie understood this necessity quite well and gave

full support to the opportunist forces in the labor movement.

The purge of the left and the capitulation of center forces in the CIO to the most reactionary elements in both labor federations is the key political event that has determined the direction of organized labor in the U.S. for the last 30 years. We cannot lose sight of the historical significance of this shift in the balance of forces. Not only does it determine the conditions under which we take up the struggle for our historical strategic objective in organized labor -- to defeat the opportunist trend all-sidedly -- it provides us with a context for evaluating subsequent developments in the trade union movement. (If we consider the period of stabilization comparable to that of England's privileged position in the late 19th Century, then the victory of opportunism in the U.S. trade unions can be equated with the collapse of the radical Chartist Movement in 1848 that determined the course of English working class history for forty years.)

The split in organized labor occurred in the historic context of a general "politicalization" of the working class in the U.S., a phenomenon that emerged in the 1930s and increased during the war years. Politically, there was a distinct break with the old craft unionist policies of "pure and simple trade unionism" and isolationist foreign policy attitudes. "Trade union politics" inevitably matured and went beyond strictly economic issues to become involved with the foremost political issues of the period.

A particularity of the U.S. working class movement is the absence of any form of independent workers' parties. Consequently, the trade unions have functioned not only as economic defense organizations, but as the main centers for U.S. working class political activity. Leading bodies in the U.S. trade unions tend to play a comparable role politically to the Social-Democratic parties in Europe. Of course, the distinctions are important as well, especially since this situation represents a generally lower-level of class consciousness and organization: Thus, opportunism in the U.S. labor movement has tended to take the form of open class collaboration with capital -- liberal-opportunism -- without employing the socialist rhetoric characteristic of Social-Democracy. This was especially true after World War II.

The struggle that broke out after the war in the trade union movement focused almost exclusively on political questions, with major emphasis on issues of U.S. foreign policy. This point must be emphasized to counter certain narrow syndicalist assessments that conclude that the left was isolated mainly because of its failures in handling strike struggles or handling shop grievances. (This view persists today in the notion that a trade union movement that split over the central political questions facing

the working class can be realigned today solely or primarily around economic issues internal to the trade union movement.)

In general, the struggle that broke out in organized labor reflected the monopoly bourgeoisie's need to win the organized workers to its plan for post-war imperialist domination and containment of socialism. An all-sided political, economic and ideological assault was launched to get the unions "in line" politically and to be less volatile in the economic struggle. This took a very different form from the bourgeoisie's "open shop" assault on the working class after World War I: The objective wasn't to destroy organized labor, but to isolate it from leftwing and progressive politics, and to channel the economic struggle into stable and orderly collective bargaining procedures.

At the time, it was recognized by all forces that this new form of class collaboration rested on the promise of relatively full employment and wage concessions for the unionized workers. The union leadership and the politically active workers were conscious of the stakes in the struggle and the objective possibility of expanding production and living standards on the basis of military production and rebuilding the European economies on a capitalist basis. The bourgeoisie, by means of legal proscription of the left, favors to the right-led unions (especially in the AFL), and financial and ideological support for right forces in internal union struggles, bolstered the strength of opportunist forces who already had relatively favorable economic conditions for struggle given the improving economic conditions.

The concrete issues within organized labor that polarized the opportunist trend and the left-progressives were:

-- Whether to actively fight Taft-Hartley (the opportunists decided the main aspect of the law was the anti-communist provision -- which they supported as a weapon against the left -- and that the trade union restrictions could be lived with);

-- Whether to support the Marshall Plan (the opportunists supported this policy as the concrete application of the monopoly bourgeoisie's "general line" in the immediate post-war period);

-- Whether to split the international labor movement (the opportunists supported this in order to extend their influence over the trade unions in other countries, as well as to isolate the communist-led unions);

-- Whether to support the Progressive Party candidacy of Henry Wallace (the opportunists supported Truman and consolidated their alliance with the bourgeoisie and position in the Democratic Party).



The overall victory of opportunism -- manifested in the purge of the left from organized labor at all levels -- represented to the bourgeoisie that organized labor had become a willing ally. The victory of opportunism in the CIO set the basis for the AFL-CIO merger in 1955, which historically represented the consolidation of opportunism in the organized labor movement and reflected the expansion of the labor aristocracy to include key sections of industrial workers in mass production. A secondary aspect of the merger (which the CPUSA at the time raised to primary status) was the need to re-establish the labor movement's position in the economic struggle, which had been eroded by Korean War inflation and the Republican Administration, and to maximize influence in the Democratic Party. In sum, in order for the labor aristocracy to receive its share of the expanding fruits of imperialism, it had to be better organized.

### B3b. Main Features of Opportunism in the U.S. since World War II

Although the essence of opportunism in the U.S. has remained unchanged -- sacrifice of the long-term interests of the proletariat to the narrow, temporary interests of the labor aristocracy -- the new conditions of imperialism after World War II required it to adopt an altered character in the post-war period. This reflected the development of the organized labor movement and the overall world situation of stabilization of capitalism under U.S. hegemony. The following features of opportunism in the U.S. have been conspicuous throughout the post-war stage of imperialism. We are stressing these features in order to underline the political requirements of the struggle against opportunism today. (Although differences have emerged between opportunist forces, especially between Social-Democrats and Liberals, in a strategic sense this trend is coherent -- though our tactics must certainly take account of the "shades of difference.")

Opportunism's main expression has been general collaboration with U.S. finance capital and the state in furthering the aims of U.S. imperialism in the sphere of foreign policy.

This phenomenon reflects opportunism's adaptation to the overall requirements of the U.S. bourgeoisie in the post-war situation. Internationally and domestically, the bourgeoisie recognized that organized labor needed to be an essential bulwark of its strategy. Since the purge of the left, opportunism has served the bourgeoisie well.

The objectives of the U.S. ruling class in this stage of imperialism have remained consistent, and these have also been the objectives of organized labor: isolation and "containment" of the socialist camp; safeguarding the neo-colonial system; and guaranteeing the privileges of U.S. monopoly capital within a stable capitalist world.

The tactical differences that have emerged in the trade unions over how to accomplish these goals -- notable the differences that surfaced over the Vietnam War in the

late 1960s -- tended to correspond to similar differences among the bourgeoisie. (Both ruling class forces and the opportunist trend were forced to adjust to the mass anti-war movement.)

Opportunism's international line has both reflected the "false consciousness" of the majority of workers on questions of foreign policy, and it has played a major role in permeating the working class with ideas of anti-communism and national chauvinism. Since the purge of the left, there has been no significant pole in organized labor representing a proletarian internationalist perspective.

Although the opportunist forces in U.S. organized labor have historically supported the bourgeoisie's foreign policy initiatives, the significance of this aspect of the general policy of class collaboration increased qualitatively after World War II. It can be contrasted with the 1920s and early 1930s when isolationism dominated the thinking of organized labor in foreign affairs, and labor opportunism's main expressions were class-collaborationist schemes with employers to raise productivity, refusal to organize mass production workers, and political opposition to social welfare programs for the masses of unemployed. (It was not an accident that the polarization and realignment of the labor movement in the mid-1930s took place around precisely these issues.)

In addition to lining up U.S. workers behind imperialism, opportunism has collaborated with finance capital and the state to utilize organized labor as a key instrument of U.S. foreign policy.

Parallel to U.S. finance capital's drive for world domination, the labor opportunists sought hegemony over the world labor movement in the capitalist countries, first in Europe and then in the neo-colonies. The essential phenomena has been well-documented: support for the right-wing European unions after the war; splitting the World Federation of Trade Unions and forming the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, attempts to infiltrate and manipulate trade union movements in oppressed countries through the American Institute for Free Labor Development and other regional centers. State Department and CIA collaboration and financing was essential to all these ventures.

In a sense, the labor aristocracy in the U.S. has served as a base, not just for opportunism in the U.S., but for opportunism in the international working class movement. The fact that the policies of the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department went on "over the heads" of most workers doesn't change the objective relationship that has existed.

Opportunism has functioned as a key mainstay of the Democratic Party, which has been the chief political expression of the alliance between the labor aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

The Democratic Party has been the main vehicle of imperialist political reformism. Organized labor has operated in the party at all levels, supplying funds and manpower; further, its role has legitimized the party in the eyes not only of most union workers, but of many non-union workers in the lower strata of the proletariat.

Historically, the key turning point that consolidated the post-war alliance between the labor aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in the Democratic Party was organized labor's almost total support for Harry Truman in 1947-48. That this occurred after Truman's assault on the striking unions in 1946 and the passage of Taft-Hartley in 1947, indicates that something had changed very rapidly. That "something" was twofold: The opportunist forces had succeeded in lining up the trade unions behind Truman's Cold War policies, and the Democratic Party leadership finally realized that it couldn't dismantle the New Deal totally without losing vital trade union support. The danger that the Progressive Party, led by consistent New Dealers who actually believed U.S. imperialism could be made benign and rational, could gather forces in organized labor was very real. Therefore, the Democratic Party adopted much of the domestic social program of the Progressives, most important a plank supporting civil rights. The trade unions returned to the Democratic Party fold, based on the line of imperialist expansion and anti-communism abroad, reformism and anti-communism at home -- and they have solidly remained there ever since.

The opportunists have participated in the Democratic Party for the purpose of insuring that workers, in the first instance the labor aristocracy, receive "their share" of state allocated benefits and protections. Of course, this has also included alliance with employers to gain protections and subsidies for particular industries.

The Kennedy-early Johnson years represented the high point of success during the period of stabilization: increased military spending reduced unemployment, and expanded social welfare programs increased the "social wage." It is this Golden Age of "guns and butter" that the opportunist trend now wants to restore.

A final point here is on the question of the actual composition of the leadership of the opportunist trend in the labor movement. The prevalent view is to only include trade union officials (the "labor lieutenants"). A more theoretical and accurate characterization would be that the "bourgeois labor party," as Lenin termed the political expression of the opportunist trend, in the U.S. actually functions as a fraction of the Democratic Party and that

its representatives include certain politicians. In this sense, Hubert Humphrey was as much a representative of opportunism in the labor movement as certain trade union leaders. This assessment has implications for how we view the general struggle against opportunism.

Opportunism has supported and conciliated racism in order to protect its alliance with the bourgeoisie, as well as the privileged position of the white members of the labor aristocracy.

The occupational structure of the U.S. working class has intersected with racism to produce a largely white labor aristocracy. Politically, opportunism has taken advantage of this phenomenon to consolidate its position by appealing to the "white interests" of workers, rather than their class interests.

The position of the craft unions in excluding minority workers in collaboration with the racist hiring policies of the employers is well-known. In 1969, the percentage of Black workers in the building trades was 6.8 percent, with the vast majority concentrated in the laborers category. (Figures for specific trades were: carpenters, 1.6 percent; electricians, 0.6 percent; painters, 3.7 percent; plumbers, 0.2 percent; iron workers; 1.7 percent.) Within both organized labor and the larger political arena, the craft unions have played a key role in headquartering the resistance to affirmative action programs. In practice, the programs that were initiated in the late 1960s have made hardly a dent in the racial composition of this stratum, which invariably unites with the bourgeoisie in white racial solidarity against minority members of the working class.

More important politically, however, has been the degeneration of the anti-racist role of the industrial unions. The CIO was in the forefront of the struggle for racial equality in the 1930s, mainly due to left influence; after 1948, the organized labor movement played little role in the anti-racist struggle, in the workplace or in society. More often than not it played an obstructionist role.

After the realignment to the right in the CIO, many industrial union locals in the South reverted to Jim Crow segregation; and the CIO organizing drive in the South in the late 1940s collapsed as it capitulated to racist practices and Red-baiting. The leading liberal representative of opportunism in the CIO, Walter Reuther, rode to power by baiting communists who supported protection against layoffs for Black workers hired during the war as engaging in "reverse Jim Crow," as well as relying on Klansmen as his lieutenants in the southern auto plants.

In those industrial unions that have significant minority memberships, opportunism to a limited extent has been compelled to support struggles against the most blatant forms of racism. However, opportunism's main base of support in the industrial unions has remained the better situated white craftsmen and higher seniority "semi-skilled" white workers, and this has been reflected in the vacillation on the anti-racist struggle of even the most progressive unions. At the level of international unions, the main political base of support for opportunism has often been those locals with higher white concentrations. This is most apparent in the large conglomerate unions such as the Teamsters, in which, for example, the long-distance haulers (an almost exclusively all-white category) are the most protected economically and have historically constituted the main support for opportunism. Even in more backward industries with weaker unions in which workers could scarcely be considered part of the labor aristocracy -- for example, the clothing workers -- a narrow, skilled, white, male stratum tends to provide the main political support for the opportunists in leadership.

The pervasive strength and influence of opportunism meant that organized labor was largely peripheral to the mass anti-racist movements of the 1950s and 1960s. The trade unions played little role in the drive to win civil rights in the South. The merged labor federation had very favorable conditions for organizing the South if it had combined a serious organizing drive with active support for the mass anti-racist upsurge. But the organization of the South would have disturbed the increasingly cooperative arrangements with monopoly capital, threatened the white AFL-CIO members in the region, and opened a channel for the left to re-enter the labor movement.

In 1963, the AFL-CIO provided no support for the March on Washington (though the UAW did participate). Reacting to the urban rebellions of the mid-1960s, the AFL-CIO did support, to a limited extent, the economic and social legislation that resulted, but primarily saw it as a concession in order to pacify the lower strata of the working class (who were needed to bolster the labor aristocracy in the Democratic Party), as well as a means to increase the economic cushion for members of the labor aristocracy itself.

In general, the anti-racist movement represented the most important working class struggle in the period of stabilization. It was based on the lowest strata of the working class who advanced the interests not only of minorities, but the interest of the proletariat as a whole. The craft union core of the labor aristocracy

directly opposed the anti-racist struggle, while the more liberal section of the opportunist trend, mainly based in the industrial unions, vacillated in its support and attempted to "contain" the political aims and level of militancy of the movement.

Finally, it must be noted that what positive motion occurred in organized labor itself in the period of stabilization was largely due to the influence of the anti-racist movement and the developments in political consciousness of the lower strata of the working class. Examples include farmworker organizing, the expansion of state and municipal sector unionization, etc.

The main aspect of opportunism in the economic struggle has been protection for the labor aristocracy at the expense of the class as a whole.

Although the overall line of opportunism is bound up with this phenomenon -- for example, support for military spending benefits certain members of the labor aristocracy, but it is paid for by taxing the whole class -- here we will consider the issue narrowly.

Certainly opportunism resulted in "sell-out" contracts, dead-end grievance procedures, speed-up and poor working conditions for members of the labor aristocracy itself, but from a general, historical perspective, the labor aristocracy was relatively well-protected in the period of stabilization.

Opportunism's principal economic characteristic has been its neglect of the economic welfare of the masses of non-aristocratic workers.

The most obvious example of opportunism's narrow, selfish outlook is organized labor's conspicuous failure to organize the South and the occupational groupings and industries in which the lower strata of the class, minorities and women are mainly concentrated.

Equally important has been organized labor's withdrawal from serious mass political struggles to improve conditions for the class as a whole, while relying exclusively on fighting for advances for the labor aristocracy through collective bargaining. Examples include: struggles for pension plans, as opposed to improving the social security system; struggles for a "guaranteed annual wage," as opposed to increasing and extending unemployment compensation; struggles for private health insurance, as opposed to national health insurance; exclusive concentration on wage struggles, as opposed to fighting for restrictions on layoffs and for political measures to provide jobs. The monopoly corporations obviously had an interest in conceding some of these demands: Private pension plans, for example, tend to guarantee loyal, stable workforces.

The opportunist line on collective bargaining breakthroughs was that they would eventually "trickle down" to the rest of the class as upper standards were increased. While partly true, in the main the labor aristocracy received substantial economic benefits, while the mass of workers were forced to rely on wholly inadequate welfare programs. This arrangement was politically and economically a boon to the U.S. bourgeoisie, who didn't have to maintain the large and costly social welfare systems of its European counterparts.

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In sum, labor opportunism in the period of stabilization developed specific policies and methods of class collaboration based on the overall requirements of U.S. imperialism and the interests of the expanded labor aristocracy. At the heart of opportunism's general line has been support for U.S. imperialism's foreign policy and racism. Opportunism has conducted the economic struggle, sometimes militantly in particular unions, within the limits imposed by its overall support for U.S. imperialism and its political alliance with the bourgeoisie (which has been organizationally centered in the Democratic Party). It is inconceivable that the opportunist trend in organized labor can be challenged -- much less defeated -- without the left directly confronting, ideologically and politically, the main features of opportunism's line and practice for the last 30 years. Most important, the influence of opportunism must be combatted among the masses of workers.

#### B4. Fractions of the Labor Aristocracy (A Brief Overview)

##### B4a. The "Old" Aristocracy of Craft Workers

Marxist-Leninist have traditionally included unionized craft workers in the labor aristocracy. This stratum -- almost exclusively white, male and predominantly of northern European ethnic background -- has historically been represented by the AFL and the outlook and policies of class collaboration and craft unionism. In the first section of this paper we discussed the particular intersection of craft workers as an upper stratum and the formation of the labor aristocracy. Although the basic analysis still applies today, the changing character of capitalist production, the narrowing of the wage gap between the crafts and industrial workers, and the rise of industrial unionism, have combined to weaken the position of the skilled workers as an upper stratum.

In the 1920s and 1930s, this stratum was undermined first, by the development of mass-production industries, which reduced the importance of craftsmen in the labor process and also brought into existence the mass of "semi-skilled" workers in industry, and secondly by the impact of the industrial crisis of the 1930s that resulted in

mass unemployment and wage reductions for even the most privileged skilled workers. The rise of the CIO on the basis of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers was steadfastly resisted by the AFL, which sought to restore only the advantages of the small craft stratum. However, the section of craftsmen in basic industry were compelled by objective conditions to ally with the majority of production workers in building the CIO, while the AFL's strongest base remained in those industries relatively untouched by modern technological methods, notably construction. As a result, the AFL unions were also forced to undertake organization on an industrial basis in order to compete with the CIO -- the Teamsters, Carpenters, Machinists, Electricians, etc., made substantial inroads; however, in contrast to the CIO unions, the expanded AFL unions reserved hegemony for the skilled workers within them. In general, the industrial workforces organized by the AFL unions have consistently remained the "whitest" in manufacturing.

These changes haven't altered the fact that the craft workers -- especially in the building trades -- still constitute the core of the labor aristocracy in the U.S. As we noted earlier, racism is probably the most essential mainstay of this stratum's privileged position.

The construction workers are the most important component of this fraction of the labor aristocracy. The position of these workers, weakened during the Great Depression, was consciously solidified by the bourgeoisie in the post-war period. Not only did construction expand tremendously as part of the general expansion of U.S. capital, but the U.S. government deliberately promoted a "building boom" by means of GI-home loans, guaranteeing of savings-and-loans, tax incentives, government financed infrastructure (especially the national highway system), and military related construction.

Even though the construction industry has been transformed by technological advances, the final stages of construction and assembly are still the preserve of skilled craft workers -- some 3 million workers who enjoy a great deal of bargaining leverage. The particular character of the industry has worked to the advantage of the craft unions, since it is composed of thousands of small contractors. Until this decade, this also worked to the advantage of monopoly capital, which supplied the building materials at monopoly prices and bought industrial and office buildings at relatively competitive prices. (In practice, the line between the craft unions and the small contractors is a very narrow one, with many unions controlling the functions normally reserved to management in other industries -- and many workers moving into the ranks of small contractors and then back again, depending on the ebb and flow of business.



Politically, the craft unions, contractors and monopoly capital have worked together to promote the interests of the construction industry. For the craft unions, this has meant not just narrow questions such as building codes, but support for all aspects of capitalist expansion, which the construction industry is integrally dependent on.

This collaboration is presently being undermined by the high prices in the construction industry and the intensifying economic crisis. Monopoly capital is increasingly moving to force the craft unions to make concessions by organizing open shop coalitions of small contractors, as well as by an assault on the legal protections that have benefitted the unionized craft workers (such as the Davis-Bacon Act). Nevertheless, this attack is occurring within the general framework of class collaboration that has existed for decades.

B4b. The "Expanded" Aristocracy of Unionized Production Workers in the Monopoly Industries

In 1953, William Z. Foster pointed out that the declining influence of the skilled craft workers as a base for opportunism required the bourgeoisie and "labor lieutenants" to cooperate in extending influence over other strata of the working class. He observed that,

One of the new labor trends, especially in the U.S., is for the big employers, instead of, as formerly, favoring the skilled workers at the expense of the unskilled, to make wage concessions to the stronger unions in general, at the expense of the weaker ones and of the unorganized.

This policy was essential in order to coopt the militant and progressive industrial workers organized by the CIO, solidify the base of the opportunist leaderships, and generally "bourgeoisify" the most important sector of the U.S. working class.

To a certain extent, skilled workers within the industrial unions function as an aristocratic "fifth column" that receives special privileges from capital and often exercises disproportionate political influence in the industrial unions; however, in the period of stabilization, the mass of production workers received certain benefits as well that cannot be underestimated, in the forms of rising real wages and relative job security that we discussed earlier. The seniority system, basically an advance for the trade union movement, insured that older workers (for historical reasons predominantly white and male, especially after the post-war purge of women and Blacks from the workforces), would receive the advantages of the period, but for some time would be spared the negative effects (layoffs caused by automation, etc.). These workers have traditionally provided

the political support for the opportunist leaderships.

Workers and unions in the monopoly industries have particularly benefited from war production, which has provided the opportunists with a direct "self-interest" argument for supporting U.S. imperialism.

This is the most unstable sector of the labor aristocracy: First, its privileges rest primarily on the exceptional situation of U.S. imperialism in the period 1950 to 1970. Second, it is now coming under direct attack by monopoly capital, which can no longer afford concessions in a sector most vulnerable to inter-imperialist competition. Third, the heterogeneous character of these large workforces, especially a large contingent of minority workers, with direct ties to the lower strata of the proletariat, tends to prohibit this section playing the same type of role as the exclusive building trades.

Thus, we should expect the phenomenon of contention between workers who desire to regain or hold onto the benefits of being an aristocracy, and those who see their interests with the mass of the working class and the struggle to break with class collaboration.

#### B4c. "New" Aristocracy of Proletarianized Professionals and Intelligensia

Although these groupings are increasingly more important as the occupational structure of capitalism in the U.S. changes, only certain groupings are unionized and play an aristocratic role within organized labor. (In Europe, larger sections of this stratum are unionized, often serving as a base of support for the Social-Democratic parties.) The role of this stratum in the Democratic Party is an important question to be examined.

This stratum has certain similarities to the craft workers, in the sense that special training is the key to maintaining a "scarcity" of these type of workers, which provides them with certain objective economic advantages. Racial exclusiveness is also a feature that both have in common. However, an important difference is the lower degree of trade-union consciousness among workers in this stratum, though this is changing rapidly for certain occupational groups: teachers, nurses, social-service workers, airline pilots, etc.

Another characteristic of this stratum is that large sections of unionized workers in it are in the public sector. Thus, these workers received particular advantages from U.S. imperialism's capacity to increase the social wage of the working class. This is now at an end.

Politically, the unions representing workers in this stratum have, if exclusive and craft-like such as the AFT, allied with the most reactionary section of the AFL-CIO, often on a racist basis. Members of this stratum in industrial unions, have played contradictory roles, often resembling that of the skilled workers in the manufacturing industrial unions.

### III. Conclusion

(1) We have shown through an examination of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the connection between imperialism and opportunism, that the opportunist trend is a permanent feature of the working class movement in the era of imperialism. This is due to imperialism's capacity to provide the material basis for a section of the proletariat to politically ally with "its" bourgeoisie. The social base for this phenomenon is the labor aristocracy, the upper strata of the working class that is best positioned to win concessions from the bourgeoisie -- and whom the bourgeoisie is most anxious to coopt given these workers' strategic place in production, higher political development and level of organization, and influence over the masses of workers.

(2) The class struggle in the U.S. since World War II can only be understood by applying this theoretical framework. The complete domination of opportunism over the organized labor movement in the U.S. was built on a firm material foundation: the lengthy period of stabilization of world capitalism under U.S. hegemony, and the expanded labor aristocracy that was created in the U.S.

(3) The upper strata of the working class in the U.S., including an important section of the unionized industrial workers, received certain protections and privileges during this period -- relative employment security and increasing real wages -- that provided favorable conditions for opportunism to consolidate its political hegemony. However, for this to occur, the opportunist trend had to politically defeat and suppress the left in the working class movement in order to stabilize its position and extend its political influence over the more advanced sections of the proletariat.

(4) The chief features of opportunism in the U.S. in this stage of imperialism have been: total support for the foreign policy of U.S. imperialism; support and conciliation of racism; political alliance with the bourgeoisie primarily through the Democratic Party; and economic protection for the upper strata, at the expense of the masses of workers.

(5) The present period of imperialist crisis is destabilizing the labor aristocracy economically and the opportunist trend politically. Weaker and less protected fractions of the labor aristocracy are under heavy attack, and the opportunist trend is beginning to splinter. However, we must reject an overly optimistic interpretation of how fast this "break up" of the expanded labor aristocracy in the U.S. will proceed. At this point, the policy of the bourgeoisie isn't to liquidate the labor aristocracy, but rather to restrict its privileges as part of a general reduction in the standard of living of the working class. The bourgeoisie still politically needs to maintain the stability of at least the core fractions of the labor aristocracy; and the opportunist trend is attempting to bolster its position by tentative demonstrations of militancy and political influence in the Democratic Party. We must stress that U.S. imperialism, while in crisis, still has

considerable reserves to protect its home market and its alliance with the labor aristocracy.

(6) The strategic task before the communist movement in organized labor in this period is to realign significant sections of workers to the left. This will be a difficult, complicated and protracted process, essentially dependent on the correctness of our political line. Concretely, this represents a struggle to reverse the realignment to the right of the late 1940s, but in a new historical setting of intensifying imperialist crisis.

The communist movement must struggle for the essential polarization in organized labor in this period to take place around the fundamental issues underlying the 1940s realignment: whether or not to support U.S. imperialism's foreign policy; racism; the Democratic Party; exclusive economic protection for the upper strata; and restrictions on left participation in the political life of organized labor. These issues were not accidental nor independent of each other, but as a whole represent the pivot of struggle between opportunism and left-progressive politics in this stage of imperialism.

The specific character of the polarization in this period is bound up with the labor movement's attitude toward U.S. imperialism's turn towards war and racially-defined austerity for the masses in this country.

Finally, it is obvious that the struggle to realign the labor movement to the left requires, in the first place, the establishment of a leading communist party.

(7) Although there are many implications for communist tactics that flow from this overall analysis, this is an area that requires further discussion and study once we've reached agreement on the general theoretical framework used in this analysis and the particular assessment of the labor aristocracy and opportunism in the U.S.

APPENDIX: PROBLEMS IN THE ANALYSIS OF THE CATEGORY OF SUPERPROFITS

We must raise objection to certain views that vulgarize the concept of monopoly capital's capacity to bribe the labor aristocracy. These views fall into two general categories: 1) attempts to separate the question of superprofits and bribery from the overall dynamics of capital accumulation under imperialism; 2) attempts to narrow the category of super-profits to the point that the labor aristocracy couldn't exist.

First, it must be recognized that imperialism is not merely something "extra" added onto the U.S. domestic economy, but rather a world system in which the U.S. economy is situated; the U.S. is connected with all the other parts of the system by innumerable bonds. As we tried to indicate by our description of the world system that emerged after World War II, U.S. monopoly capital exploited the whole of the capitalist world, much as England did in the 19th Century. This phenomenon had its effects on the domestic U.S. economy in that it provided the impetus for expanded industrial production, favorable terms of trade, reduction of costs, intensified concentration of capital, etc. The massive export of U.S. capital, for example, provided foreign markets for U.S. goods -- in particular capital goods -- supplied the U.S. with cheap sources of raw materials, and provided a high rate of profit that raised the general rate of profit of U.S.-based capital.

The argument that considers bribery a simple matter of allocating a share of profits to the labor aristocracy, overlooks the more general basis for reformism, which is the fact that the process of world-wide exploitation accelerated for a time the advance of industry and the gains in productivity in the imperialist countries, and especially in the U.S.

Further, as the "strongest link" in the imperialist system, U.S. monopoly capital has had the political power to force other imperialist countries and the neo-colonies to absorb the shocks and losses entailed in the process of capital accumulation. The U.S. working class has benefited from this "protection" as well. In fact, as the period of crisis intensifies, the importance of this aspect of bribery, which was of secondary importance in the period of stabilization, will more and more come to the fore. What Marx wrote about the competition of capitalists within a single country could well be applied to the international situation today:

So long as things go well, competition effects an operating fraternity of the capitalist class, as we have seen in the case of the equalisation of the general rate of profit, so that each shares in the common loot in proportion to the size of his respective investment. But as soon as it no longer is a question of sharing profits, but of sharing losses, everyone tries to reduce his own share to a minimum and to shove it off upon another.



The class, as such, must inevitably lose. How much the individual capitalist must bear of the loss, i.e., to what extent he must share in it at all, is decided by strength and cunning, and competition then becomes a fight among hostile brothers. (Capital, Vol. III

As the strongest imperialist power, the U.S. appears to have considerable resources to protect U.S. monopoly capital and its domestic market for some time, relative to the overall losses that will be suffered by imperialism as a whole in this period of crisis.

Second, when we consider the question of superprofits per se, we find that this category is used one-sidedly by many analysts. A common argument is to show by empirical data that the quantity of profits derived from foreign investments is too small to bribe any large section of U.S. workers. Apart from technical difficulties in such calculations (including the confusion of the category of profit used in capitalist accounting with the much broader category used in Marxist political economy), these arguments invariably tend to reduce the category of monopoly superprofits to one of its components -- superprofits from exploitation of colonial peoples. Some of Lenin's comments tend to support this approach, particularly in polemics in which he was attempting to emphasize the parasitic character of imperialism and the objective, systematic nature of the connection between oppressor and oppressed nations. However, if we take Lenin's writings on imperialism as a whole -- and Marx's analysis of profit in Capital -- it is clear that the category of superprofits must be interpreted broadly and in its particularity.

In this respect, we must distinguish between the different forms of profit accruing to monopoly capital: 1) the average profit gained in proportion to monopoly capital's share of the total social capital (this is the essential and typical form of profit associated with competitive capitalism, which continues to exist in modified form under monopoly capitalism); 2) the surplus profit gained as a result of technological innovations and the resulting ability to temporarily see products above production costs (this, too, is typical of competitive capitalism, but is greatly modified by the enormous increases in technological advances under monopoly capitalism, as well as monopoly tendencies to permanent pricing above production costs); 3) the specific forms of monopoly superprofits.

Sources of monopoly superprofits include monopoly pricing, which operates in the sphere of circulation to appropriate a portion of the surplus value of other capitalists and the wages of the working class); monopoly control over raw materials, markets, credit, etc., as well as the vast concentrations of capital in the monopoly sector, which operate as barriers to the tendency for capital to flow into lines of higher profit, which is the





essential process that depresses profit rates to the average; state assistance by means of cost-plus contracts, various forms of subsidies, building of infrastructure, etc.; as well as export of capital.

(We must also consider the surplus profits generated by racism in the U.S. This form of profit predated monopoly capitalism. In general, racism creates a mass of workers whose wages are maintained permanently far below the value of labor-power, which greatly increases the total mass of surplus-value; the law of the average rate of profit insures that this additional surplus-value will be incorporated into and raise the average profit received by each sum of capital. Even though the surplus-profits of racism do not directly constitute a specific form of monopoly superprofit, the modification of the average profit in the stage of monopoly capitalism means that by far the largest share of surplus-profits generated by racism are appropriated by monopoly capital. In this sense, it is correct to conclude that a large portion of the surplus-profits of racism are incorporated into forms of monopoly superprofit. Thus, even the "enlightened" monopoly-capitalist who may employ minority workers at his own enterprise at the value of their labor-power, still benefits from society-wide racism.)

Considerable empirical work must be done to ascertain the precise amount of superprofits that have been appropriated by U.S. monopoly capital, but we would suspect that the study would definitely show a quantity of superprofits quite large enough to bribe a significant section of the U.S. working class. Even taken alone, the category of earnings of foreign investment accounted for about 22 percent of domestic nonfinancial corporate profits in 1964 (and this estimate is weighted to the low side.) When we add on all the other sources of monopoly superprofits, domestic and international, the enormous capacity of U.S. monopoly capital to create a relatively large labor aristocracy must be considered extremely plausible.

