



LAST YEAR WE  
TOLD YOU TO JOIN  
**THE DODGE  
REBELLION**

WELL, THE HAMTRAMCK  
AUTO WORKERS DID,  
AND NOW!!!

FOR 1969,

**DODGE fever**

turns up the heat...

by Donna Shoemaker

A group of militant black workers have begun to organize at a Detroit auto plant and have thrown both the union and the company into a near panic. It is called the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and is located at the Hamtramck Assembly plant, also known as Dodge Main. It also has members in the nearby Huber Foundry. In both plants the workers are represented by local 3 of the United Auto Workers.

DRUM was formed last spring shortly after young militant blacks had helped lead a wildcat strike over the issues of speed-up on the line and blatant racism in the shop. Another wildcat, over similar issues, was initiated by DRUM this summer. Since then the group has been publishing its own newspaper which is widely read by black workers at the plant.

In Detroit, as in most urban centers, the semi-skilled and unskilled occupations in most basic industries are being steadily taken over by blacks. The concerns of the black workers are not simply bread and butter issues but involve job conditions and the racism of both the unions and management.

In many plants where black workers are clearly the majority, and where the local union is controlled by whites, black workers have organized themselves into caucuses which press for demands. A recent example of this is the black bus drivers' wildcat in Chicago where black workers walked out over demands against the company and the union, shutting down 50% of the operation.

From time to time black caucuses have emerged in UAW locals in Chicago and Detroit, but have found it difficult to remain as permanent groups when faced with the combined opposition of union and management. DRUM is perhaps the most defiant group yet formed among black workers.

#### CMBU

DRUM's development into a radical group was gradual as at first black workers sought to apply influence upon the existing union leadership. Before DRUM there had been a group called Concerned Members for Better Unionism set up by both black and white workers who were tired of the UAW's unresponsiveness to rank and file demands.

DRUM leader Ron March said, "We had

hoped to rectify the injustices peacefully, but repression from the UAW and Chrysler helped transform the CMBU into just a bourgeois social thing. It created divisions which lead into opportunism among some of the members. During the regular local union elections in May the organization was used by local leadership to unify young black workers behind sell-out candidates. After that experience a couple of us got together and realized that this was bull-shit.

"We decided to form an all-black organization both to give blacks a sense of togetherness and to prevent the kinds of division we had experienced in CMBU. We soon realized we were on to something because the idea of black unity was really hated by the power structure."

#### Short Range Goals

DRUM is now about five months old and is growing rapidly. Its specific short range goals are "full equity for black workers at all levels of the UAW structure and an end to racism by management". It is also fighting speed-up and reduction of the cost-of-living

allowance.

Blacks are traditionally discriminated against both in this plant and in Huber Foundry. While they are placed in the paint and body shop or in the pit on the assembly line, which are two of the least desirable jobs, whites are put on the inspection lines and in the trim shop, where working conditions are much better. These job placement decisions are not made on the basis of seniority or job experience, but are blatantly racist. Even at Huber, which is 90% black, whites have all the easiest jobs and blacks cannot get into skilled trades. The DRUM newspaper has been calling attention to this fact and the organization has been using this situation in its organizing efforts.

In fighting against speed-up and the ceiling on the cost-of-living allowance, DRUM is educating black workers as to the nature of their exploitation by both the company and the union. At coffee and lunch breaks and in their newspaper DRUM continually raises questions about why the UAW allows speed-up and why it limits the compensation to workers for rises in the cost of living while it ups the dues.

#### Union Kickback?

In a recent leaflet headlined "LOCAL 3, WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH MY MONEY?", they pointed out that nearly half of the annual dues collected by the local have been lent to the city of Hamtramck, at one time or another, for firemen and police salaries, etc. The local leaders secretly collect a nice return on their investment. This allegation has not yet been denied. Also the local's capital is deposited in Hamtramck banks rather than in banks in the black communities in Detroit, where most of the workers live. This means that Hamtramck benefits from money which should be going into black communities.

Hamtramck is a small city of about 45,000, mainly white and conservative, which sits within Detroit geographically. Its whole economy is dependent upon Hamtramck Assembly (Dodge Main). Chrysler Corporation runs the city. The plant, however, is old and at some point in the near future it is going to be moved to a new location somewhere north of Detroit. Therefore, the leadership of local 3, which is composed almost totally of older Hamtramck citizens who have a stake in keeping the plant in their town for as long as possible, will take no action which might antagonize the Dodge management.

DRUM's long range goal is to oust the present leadership and eventually gain control of local 3. It is this leadership which has worked with management to keep blacks out of skilled trades, to keep all but "tom" blacks out of local 3 offices and which gives whites all the easy jobs. It is this leadership which has failed to respond to the demands of the black workers. DRUM is planning to replace it with one which will work for the black majority.

In a news release, October 3, 1968 DRUM stated, "It is clear that the white ruling class cannot continue to survive without exploiting the black worker." It continued, "In the words of W.E. Dubois, 'The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor. And the emancipation of labor is the emancipation of the basic majority of workers who are black, brown and yellow'". In March's words, "Shutting down Hamtramck is a revolutionary act". For the first time workers would be able to control their work situation. Power would be taken out of the hands of the bureaucrats and put into the hands of the black workers.

#### Plant vs. Community Organizing

DRUM is organizing in the plant rather than in the communities because they believe they would never be able to get power in the communities; they would have no leverage and would soon be crushed. They might close down businesses and schools, but this would not create basic change. It would most likely win a few concessions, stir up a few people and dissipate their energy. The forces controlling a community are too diffuse and intangible to attack successfully. The plant on the other hand has

a clearly visible and vulnerable power structure and DRUM feels their most effective organizing can be done there.

The core of their program is the education of black workers about the structural reasons for oppression and racism in this society. This education will create a situation where blacks can understand their social and economic position; it will generate self-respect. Most of the blacks at Hamtramck are from all over the inner city and when this feeling of self-respect is taken back to the communities it will fundamentally transform that whole area. DRUM organizers believe such a power base will be created at the plant. Their slogan, "By winning the plant we win the community", refers to the psychological effect that the struggle in the plant will hopefully generate in the community. When people in the black communities witness blacks confronting the power structure from a position of strength they will feel a sense of unity, a sense of hopefulness. It may encourage them to organize themselves around issues in the community. DRUM itself does not plan to get into community organizing, but will lend aid and support to any such efforts.

#### Plant Elections

The most recent of DRUM's activities has been the attempt to elect a trustee to local 3. DRUM saw the election as a chance to place a radical black worker in a position of control over the local's finances. More than that, the elections were a way by which DRUM could organize young black workers to fight for control over the union.

The local UAW leadership attempts to play upon the initial reaction of white workers calling DRUM reverse racists and harrassing them on the job. After the summer wildcat, management fired 7 black workers for their actions in the strike. While the UAW won re-establishment for 5, it refused to fight for the other two who were DRUM leaders, and they were suspended from the plant.

In the last election the DRUM candidate Ron March presented a threat to the local union leadership, and in combination with the Hamtramck police, efforts were made to suppress DRUM.

Everyone except DRUM people was allowed to put up posters and leaflets in the plant. Some of the candidates had people driving workers to the polls at the local and although everyone used "No Standing" zones to pick up and drop off people, only cars with DRUM posters were ticketed. The police would invariably take half an hour to write up the tickets, thus preventing them from taking DRUM supporters to the polls.

#### Police Intimidation

In spite of this harrasment and the confusion of having 28 candidates in the running, Ron March received 563 votes, 60 more than the runner-up. After the polls closed about 50 of his supporters gathered in a parking lot and later at the local to await the returns. Police closed in on them at the hall and beat, maced and arrested them.

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# dodge rebellion continued

Since no candidate won a majority, March was placed in a run-off with a local leadership-backed candidate on October 3. Although no arrests were made during this election, all parking lots in the area were barricaded and the place was swarming with police.

March lost the run-off. Hundreds of retirees were brought in for the run-off. More important, people who had voted for him the first time were afraid to vote because of the mass of police around the plant and because of the police riot the week before. DRUM plans to contest the election in court.

## Not a Failure

Although DRUM lost the election they did not view their efforts as a failure. Their existence was dramatized by the event and the injustices surrounding the election have been good educational and organizing issues. In addition, other small insurgent groups of black workers, influenced by the example of DRUM, have been forming in plants around Detroit. The Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM) is one example.

The appeal of DRUM is primarily to young black workers. In discussing why DRUM lost March said, "DRUM has formulated its plans around three factors: black unity, black awareness and black identity. All the young blacks dig the program. It is real to them because of the constant intimidation by management and the pushing around of the workers by the supervisors that goes

on all the time. Only the old guys can't accept the identity part because they don't want black identity. This system has taught them to identify with whites and integration all their lives. Now they have too big a stake in leaving things alone. So they'll slip somebody in DRUM a \$10 bill and never show their faces at election time".

## Political Scope

Because of DRUM's dual appeal, some members are attracted only by its program of black consciousness, others by its wider revolutionary content. Therefore the political scope in DRUM ranges from winning equal opportunity in the capitalistic system for black to destroying the system altogether with blacks arising as the vanguard of the revolution. The more radical members are trying to develop an overall class consciousness in DRUM. They are studying their own history and reading Franz Fanon.

## The White CRU

The strong anti-white bias in DRUM has been altered by a new development in the plant. Not long before the election a handful of young militant white workers formed a counterpart to DRUM called the Committee for a Real Union (CRU). CRU's immediate aim is to fight against the racism of management and to organize white workers around DRUM's demands concerning job conditions. In its leaflet CRU attacks working class

racism: "We feel that there are things in this plant and in our local that the black workers and the white workers must fight against. Hamtramck is run by racists! Anyone who thinks this isn't true should ask themselves how many white people get placed on the line in the body shops".

There is some tension between the groups, for CRU expects to organize both whites and black while DRUM is concentrating only upon blacks. As yet, both groups see a need to work together on issues which concern them.

Although it is small and undeveloped, CRU is very significant in the face of what is happening now in the working class with the Wallace movement. Both black and white workers are enslaved by this society, but while black dissidence is being organized by groups like DRUM, white dissatisfaction is being channeled into "Stand up for America". The need for white working class organizers is immense. As Doug Youngblood, a community organizer in Chicago, has put it, "We must go to our people and organize...as agents of revolution, with our goal being to assist our people in becoming involved in the fight against the system that victimizes them in the same way that it does black people".

Since the election when CRU supported the DRUM candidate, the hard anti-white line in its newspaper and in its rhetoric has been toned down. There is a growing feeling that although blacks must org-

anize blacks, radicals of all colors will create a new society.

## Problems

One of the problems DRUM faces is that even though they may gain control of local 3, the corporation and the union can replace them all if necessary. Another problem is that DRUM's appeal is based to a great extent upon certain personalities who attract large numbers initially and create the illusion of success. DRUM could find itself operating on the assumption that it had organized a large number of committed people when it had actually organized few. Another difficulty is the hatred of whites among a lot of blacks. This could cause internal dissension and ultimately weaken the organization. DRUM will have to redirect this into a positive thing: a sense of their own history and of the class nature of this society, leading into a program for radical change.

The organizers in DRUM are not romantic, but are conscious of each step they take. Although they are inspired by Malcolm X and Franz Fanon, they are organizing according to the specific realities of Hamtramck and though they seek revolutionary change they don't pretend revolution is around the corner. They are hopeful at this point and have not yet lost their cool.

# dope on dodge



## Union struggle in Laurel Mississippi against the Masonite Corporation has, after a long up and down struggle, brought black and white workers together.

The April 1968 MOVEMENT reprinted an article by Robert Analavage of the SOUTHERN PATRIOT on the breaking of a strike in the Masonite hardboard plant.

Masonite obtained court injunctions against the strike and hired security guards. It brought in strikebreakers from all over the south...as well as using students from Mississippi universities. The company succeeded in splitting many black and white workers by playing one group against the other.

After nine months of struggle and five men killed, the International Woodworkers Union placed the local (5-443) under trusteeship. Then the International signed a contract with the company which the strikers called a "sweetheart deal". The strikers said they learned that Masonite had threatened the international union with a \$3,000,000 suit if it didn't put the local in trusteeship.

Nineteen hundred men were thrown out of work. It looked as if the local

was finished, but the strikers pulled themselves together and looked for ways to fight back.

The workers held a series of rallies in an open field in an adjacent county (they were denied use of their own union hall). They voted unanimously to take legal action.

Charges were filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The board agreed to accept charges of discriminatory rehiring (strong unionists were not called back to work) and interference in the internal affairs of the local union.

However, the board refused to reopen the question of whether the strike was legal. Three months after filing of the charges, the NLRB had taken no action whatever.

## Local Files Suit

So the local has filed suit in U.S. District Court against the international

union and Masonite Corporation, asking for two things:

1. That the trusteeship placed upon Local 5-443 be declared illegal.
2. That the contract signed by the international and the company on Dec. 6, 1967, be declared illegal.

The strikers distributed a leaflet in which they say: "In the simplest possible words, here is the situation. Masonite wanted our union broken. It is no secret that two Masonite officials came to Laurel for the purpose of finding out how the Union could be busted. "Working conditions at the plant have gone from bad to worse since last December. Several men have been killed, many more have been injured. Little of this is public knowledge.

"The company has tried to hide it, just as it has tried to hide the fact that its present production is way below the quality produced before April 21 last year. Check the stockmarket reports on Masonite; they indicate what we believe to be the case--that Masonite is in bad shape financially and its credit threatened."

The members of Local 5-443 have taken other steps to strengthen their cause. It is no secret that Masonite was able to split many black workers from their union brothers because the local itself had not fought discrimination and injustice.

Today, however, the local has a five-man committee--three white, two black--which includes all workers in deliberations. It is a small but important step for their own common interest.

In another step, the workers are publishing their own newsletter to keep the community informed on what is happening. The local paper is hostile to their cause (it is controlled by Masonite), and the strikers see the need to speak out with their own voice.

The workers say in their leaflet that "the struggle is not over! It can't be over while the Local remains under trusteeship--while we work under an ILLEGAL SWEETHEART CONTRACT--and while so many of our brothers are locked out by Masonite, simply because they are good union men."

Bob Analavage  
SOUTHERN PATRIOT