

Hard Times in Chicago

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC CRISIS

"Hard Times are Fighting Times" was the slogan that brought 2,200 people from all across the country to the Hard Times Conference January 30-February 1.

The purpose of the conference was to join forces in a national campaign that would strengthen and link up local and regional struggles flowing out of the current economic crisis. Over 75 people from St. Louis and Kansas City attended the conference, including members of Work Force and Worker Unity Organization and many people we work with in our shops and communities.

The conference was first called by the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, and sponsors included the American Indian Movement, General Brotherhood of Workers, Puerto Rican Socialist Party, United Black Workers, and a host of other National and local organizations.

The Federation of Marxist-Leninist Organizations, to which Worker Unity Organization in St. Louis and Work Force in Kansas City belong, also co-sponsored and participated in the conference on the planning board.

Given the wide range of issues and experiences of the organizations present--many of whom had never worked together--there was a lack of clear direction forward. The conference focus was an economic Bill of Rights, which listed many and various demands that people need, but are not met under capitalism. But because of the diversity of views in the organizations present, no particularly important demand or overall strategy for moving forward peoples' struggles was developed.

WORKSHOPS AND ONGOING ORGANIZATION

Workshop topics included anti-racism, workplace organizing, women, unemployment, and international solidarity. Out of these came many important developments:

- the formation of a national organization of women to launch a campaign against forced sterilization, mainly of Black and Third World Women;

- the formation of a national network of workplace organizers with special emphasis on fighting racism and sexism among workers and organizing outside traditional trade unions;

- support for the independence struggles of peoples in Chile, Angola, and particularly Puerto Rico and Native American Peoples;



Kathy Dorsey, Brooklyn, addresses Hard Times Conference

- support for the struggles of black people in the Cush District of Mississippi to determine if they want independence and their own government, as led by the Republic of New Africa.

- support for the Republic of New Africa, a movement of Black people to claim portions of the Deep South;

- total opposition to the Rodino Bill, which would give the government increased power to harass Mexican "illegal" workers.

NATIONAL & LOCAL DEMONSTRATIONS

Going into the conference we in the Federation hoped for a higher level of unity to result among those present and a firm plan for continuing work. As it happened the conference did agree to work around a national demonstration in Philadelphia, on July 4th--called "a demonstration for a Bicentennial without Colonies". This would call for independence for Puerto Rico, Native Americans and an end to U.S. Imperialism. Also plans were made for April 15, demonstrations in each locality calling for tax money to be used for jobs and not war, as well as a demonstration on November 1, to support Black Liberation Day and freedom for five Puerto Rican prisoners who have been in prison since the 1950's for their work in support of Puerto Rican Independence.

Those persons who were on the planning board for the conference will continue to work together to plan for future consolidated action. They will be joined by other people representing organizations that develop for the work initiated at the Hard Times Conference.

BLACK PARTICIPANTS CRITICIZE CONFERENCE

The conference itself was predominately white, about 10-15% of those attending were Puerto Ricans and Mexicans and about 5% were black. The black participants formed a Black Caucus and on the floor of the conference criticized the planners for not adequately involving black people in planning the conference and not allowing time for the Black Caucus to meet, and for ignoring in the agenda and workshops the right of black people for self-determination; that is the right of black people to form them-

selves as a separate people to control their own lives and destiny.

The Federation supports these criticisms by the Black Caucus, and believes the inadequacies pointed out by the Caucus were the major failings of the conference.

CONFERENCE AN IMPORTANT STEP

We in the Federation feel that the Hard Times Conference was an important first step in developing unity of politics, program, and direction for a broad socialist movement in this country, and also in developing a revolutionary party of the working class.

We who have been working in relative isolation in various cities throughout the country have long felt the need for such a party. We can't bring about the fundamental change, we can't have the strength necessary to smash capitalism if we work only on a city by city basis. However, united in one organization, we would have great strength--only a small part of which was represented by the 2,200 people that attended.

Both Work Force in Kansas City and Worker Unity in St. Louis intend to take up many of the demands and proposals put forth by the conference, through our own efforts and with the help of organizations and people we work with.



Granite City Steel

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really mean too much unless the unity of the workers is expanded to include many other groups in the plant. The importance of overcoming differences and individualism, the importance of "sticking together," has never been clearer.

Third, people are seeing that they won't be able to rely for much help on the International. The only way the Feb. 21 action came about was when leadership came forth from the men themselves to call a special meeting to develop a plan for what had to be done.

Finally, many workers now realize this isn't just an economic battle with the company, but a political battle. The issue is, who will control the conditions of work at the plant. It is the same issue that faces working people everywhere - in the workplace, community, and government. Who is going to run things, the workers or the capitalists?



TWINS!