AFL-CIO Nearing Collapse, Says Federation President

When John J. Sweeney took over as president of the AFL-CIO five years ago, he said that the federation’s affiliated unions must recruit at least 1 million new card-carrying members every year to offset the losses experienced under preceding administrations.

Sweeney has frequently beaten the drum for his recruitment drive and announced new schemes to attract workers to the trade unions. At times he has also claimed that the effort was paying off. Indeed, union officials say that they brought in 350,000 new members in 2000 compared to less than 100,000 several years ago.

These results obviously have not been enough to offset the losses. In that respect, the effort has been such a miserable failure that Sweeney is reported to have told a “closed door” meeting of union officials in Los Angeles last month that unless the decline in membership is reversed the AFL-CIO might collapse.

According to a report printed in The New York Times on Feb. 15, an unnamed AFL-CIO official who attended the Los Angeles meeting quoted Sweeney as informing union officials that their recruiting and organizing efforts were woefully inadequate.

“Not only are the numbers totally unsatisfactory,” Sweeney reportedly said, “but if we don’t begin to turn this around quickly and almost immediately, the drift in the other direction is going to make it virtually impossible to continue to exist as a viable institution and to have any impact on the issues we care about.”

Sweeney has also scheduled a special meeting of union officials this month to repeat his warning and to urge unions to devote more of their resources and energies to recruitment and organizing drives.

Union officials and academics attribute the decline in union membership now down to 16.2 million, or only 13.5 percent of all workers in the country to several causes. The same New York Times article that reported Sweeney’s Los Angeles warning cited two examples.

“Kate Brenfenbrenner, research director at Cornell University’s school of industrial relations, said that since the mid-1980s, job instability and the decline in membership is reversed the AFL-CIO might collapse.

The same goes for Whirlpool, which plans to give 6,000 workers the old heave-ho. “Of the first 2,000 cuts, 1,000 would come in Brazil and about 650 in Asia and Europe,” the Times reported.

Incomes are interrupted, families are disrupted, life goes on, what? Well, the Times didn’t say, precisely; but at a minimum it was the boot.

How’s that again? Well, it goes like this.

When the Sara Lee company announced it was laying off 7,000 workers, less than half were workers in the United States. The majority were workers in other countries. Apparently they don’t count, so why worry about them?

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Incomes are interrupted, families are disrupted, life times aren’t as simple as they seem, at least not according to The New York Times.

The idea of a worker being laid off makes most people think of a worker being laid off. But even that is not the main thing. The main thing is that there is as much hiring as there is firing these days.

Headlines that aren’t the negative sometimes eliminate the positive. While companies were announcing close to 140,000 layoffs in January, 200,000 workers were being hired to replace those 200,000 who were laid off. Where did the 500,000 people go?

It is not uncommon for companies to announce layoffs of thousands of workers, for example, it may not mean precisely what it says. To sort that out, “expert” opinions were needed.

One was offered by Patrick Carey of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. “When a company announces 5,000 layoffs,” he said, “sometimes 5,000 people aren’t being laid off.”

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The People

2 THE PEOPLE

MARCH 2001

Statistical Fig Leaf Can’t Hide Obscurity of Capitalist Wealth

By B.B.

Last month’s issue of Scientific American offered a statistical summary and some commentary in a Forbes survey of the 400 richest Americans and the world’s richest people.

What the survey showed is the extent to which the capitalist class succeeds in rubbing the working class, and indeed society at large, into a state where, the latter, and only the latter, produces.

What the survey does not explore, however, is the process by which this accumulation and concentration of social wealth is achieved. And, of course, if it is achieved (and we almost certainly can assume that it is), the process by which it is achieved is a sign of the nature of society. Accumulating wealth is what the capitalist system is all about and, no doubt, it has been the object of those who live on the other side of the class divide.

What the Forbes survey found is that, worldwide, there are 586 billionaires. Of those, the industrialized Western countries, including Japan, account for 445. About half, some 274, are Americans. The 274 Americans own “2.6 percent of personal total wealth held by all Americans, compared to 33 percent held by the remaining 1 million households in the top 1 percent.” Accordingly, eight to 18 million capitalist “households” owned 35.6 percent of all U.S. wealth.

The Forbes report is not an isolated discovery. A similar survey of the 400 richest Americans and "households" found in May 2006 that the 274 Americans own “2.6 percent of personal total wealth held by all Americans, compared to 33 percent held by the remaining 1 million households in the top 1 percent.” Accordingly, eight to 18 million capitalist “households” owned 35.6 percent of all U.S. wealth.

Socialism will provide the requirements of a society in which human dignity and well-being will prevail.

A De Leon Editorial

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Depleted Uranium Plagues Balkans and Iraq

By Diane Seacre

Depleted uranium, or DU, is a deriva- 
tive of nuclear weapons. Ammuni-
tion made with DU has been used favorably 
with militarians because of its superiority as an armor-piercing weapon. Its draw- 
back is that DU shells release uranium oxide dust upon impact. The dust is 
radioactive, and exposure to it has been linked to a variety of health disorders in 
British and other veterans of the wars in which it was used. Naturally, civilians in 
country areas also are affected, regardless of which side to the conflict they supported or believed waging war in their interests, not to men- 
tion combatants from opposing forces. Although militarians and politicians, 
particularly in the United States and Great Britain, have emphatically denied any 
connection between DU and the ailments many veterans complain of, there is 
much evidence that this is changing as veterans report in- 
time skills in more ways than one. In war, if used "properly," DU-laced ammunition brings swift and sudden death. However, the lingering illnesses and prolonged suffer- ing that it inflicts on those who survive 
its war-time uses may fit the prophetic formula for a fate worse than death.

Special Treatment for Anarchists

An Oregon legislator who says he is tar- geting the "political correctness" of hate crime legislation with his current bill that would make it a hate crime to smash a store window or sabotage a company. There are already laws against such activ- ities, of course. But the bill, introduced by Sen. Gary George (R-Newberg), would add an additional five years' imprisonment for anyone whose crime is motivated by "a political belief that support capitalism...." Those who defied the use of DU-laced ammunition claim that it is only margin- ally effective and could not possibly be the cause of higher-than-normal rates of cancers in war veterans. Apparently, how- ever, the toxic substances contained in DU ammunition are not limited to urani- um oxide.

According to the Jan. 24 issue of Aus- tralia's Sydney Morning Herald, some NATO troops of the Kosovo and Bosnia regions on surveillance missions have developed leukemia and other can- cers. Similar ailments have been diag- nosed in U.S. and allied Gulf War veterans. Since "the latent period of carcinogens...is two to 10 years for leukemia and 15 to 60 years for solid cancer" these reported in- stances may only be the beginning of DU- related illnesses in veterans and "peace- keeping" forces.

Moreover, the civilian populations of 
those areas of Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Kuwait and particularly Iraq are not only suffer- ing from large outbreaks of DU-related cancers, but also face environmental dev- astation. When DU ammunition impacts its target, the carcinogens fly in all directions. After the shell or missile demolishes a tank or some other target, the radioactive uranium oxide dust released penetrates drinking water and farmlands, thereby contaminating the food chain.

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According to the Sunday Times of London, DU shells "were made out of metal containing a pol- yethel cocktail of waste...containing 
traces of elements that indicate the probable presence of plutonium and other highly toxic nuclear byproducts." (Jan. 21) The same report noted that "inevitably...the effects of DU in Kosovo...found traces of elements indentifying plutonium.

The Times article also cited a recently published book in which the authors claim that "the only possible source for DU containing plutonium are Paducah, Ky., Portsmouth, Ohio, and Oak Ridge, Tenn., which used the contaminated ura- nium." The enriched uranium needed for nuclear weapons and nuclear fuel, and from which DU is derived, is produced at these three U.S. facilities.

Ironically, the Morning Herald reported 
that DU ammunition has "traces of plutonium and uranium 236, and proba- bly no neptunium and americium." This highly toxic nuclear waste is produced at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion plant. Uranium from Australia is imported to and enriched at the Paducah plant. This production is that which was pro- duced at Paducah and the other U.S. facilities has been contaminated by the other substances mentioned. Presumably the contamination has been continuous since before the 1990-1991 Gulf War. However, for its adversature by other substances explains the health problems veterans complain of, the contaminants that would make capitalist imperialism and militarism.

War and its weapons are as much a deriva- tive of capitalism..." (Daniel De Leon said in his 1910s "From Roman History.") "The roots of capi- talism are literally watered with the blood of the proletariat. The fields of produc- tion—mills, shops, railroad beds—yards— are drenched with the blood of workers and bodies of workmen. Capitalist progress is built upon the skulls and crosstoxins of the working-class victims."

While the "fields of production" certainly holds true on the fields of war.

...Cold War Waste

(Continued from page 1)

The capitalist political state is perenni- ally preoccupied with the impact of its wastes. Since the profit motive is a capi- talist benefit. This encompasses not only min- imizing costs that might affect the profits of the entire capitalist class, but also guid- ing such funds that must be allocated into lucrative contracts for those industrial executors in "solving" the problem. In short, profits rule.

Socialism's approach will be guided by the principle of producer training. To warn- ings, the hazards of nuclear proliferation and disposal of wastes are another of capi- talism's "wounds of Damocles" that hang over humanity and will tax the abilities and resources of future socialist society. However, any comparison between the way capitalism addresses its problems 
not entirely disarmed by such pronounce- ments—pro and con—and the war ques- tion, core conflict in which we are engaged today, it is critical to have a voice and 
be able to speak. This is paramount...." The Times article also cited a recently published book in which the authors claim that "the only possible source for DU containing plutonium are Paducah, Ky., Portsmouth, Ohio, and Oak Ridge, Tenn., which used the contaminated ura- nium." The enriched uranium needed for nuclear weapons and nuclear fuel, and from which DU is derived, is produced at these three U.S. facilities.

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A Page from Working-Class History

The Singer Revolt

The action of the workers in Singer’s was an historical expression of the nature of an industrial revolt. To find an explanation of this uprising one has to follow developments in the world of work and machinery. Four or five years ago a few workers employed at Killowie commenced to talk of Industrial Unionism. The soil being peculiarly suitable for such seed, the result was the formation of an Industrial Union Group in January 1909. The Group flourished and developed so much that in January, 1911, it became affiliated to the Industrial Workers of Great Britain. Consequent with this change of ideas the economic condition of the workers was subject still further to the dominance of “Capital.” The effects of economic depression were felt keenly, and were driven home to the workers by surprise, as the management by surprise, as the management by surprise...
was that “the Company had nothing to add to what had already been said.” One of the deputation of seven men replied that was the reason it had submitted the complaint, not that the management would receive any answer, as they had done in the past, a deputation from any Department in which the department in question was engaged, instance was given—that of the Buffing (13) Department (see Manifesto below). On the following day (Friday) the Strike Committee discussed the advisability of recommending these terms to the work- ers. After the discussion, the deputation recom- mended these terms to the work- ers, which a grievance might exist, and an add to what had already been said.” One was that “the Company had nothing to con- crete cases, let us say a word as to what in the past. But before pointing out any pernicious method of the workers’ reason for embarking on this industrial struggle:—

The particular grievance at present occasioned by the present state of affairs, we invite the workers, as having been compelled to do extra work, which averaged an annual loss of 2%. The girls now demand 2d. (i.e., 4pence) per hour of the time girls are employed on a particular operation, 12 on average of A.S.E. members, by a large and change of the management. Three weeks later the terms of the statement on the post card:—

At this juncture the works manager, a Yankee, with all the “sharp” meth- ods of his calibre, appeared upon the scene. He let the Strike Committee know that, for the moment, he would not receive another deputation, but that he would communi- cate with the workers direct. This he did in the form of a reply post card sent to each individual worker. The following are the terms of the statement on the post card.

To the Former Employees of the Singer Manufacturing Co., Ltd.,

......................

The Singer Manufacturing Co., Ltd.,
From numerous sources we learn that the management have in the past admitted this prin-

The manager stated in one of the lead-

The self-imposed discipline was something that was marveled at; for instance, the application to the Strike Committee by individuals of their hours of lifting their wages at a time other than the time of the strike, was a matter of indifference to them as to how they should act. Then, again, the splendid order and self-control shown in the actual conduct of the various meetings and proce- dure unique in the industrial history of this country. In these demonstrations the Factory, which lay in a large field near the Factories, formed themselves into regi-

So much for the conduct of the workers, general, now for the conduct of the Trade by sending back their wages. The self-organized Workers, organised in the Scot- tish Trendle and Sheet Workers’ Society, came out in support of the girls who had the grand lodge, and recommended this Strike action. This indicates that even the Trade Unions have not sapped the trade union movement. The women, or- ganised in the Scotch Typographical Society, refused to do work other than their own. The management, which was the foundation of all union-

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Daniel De Leon speaks of the "right" of the recalcitrant socialist ballot backed up by the "might of the integrally industrially organized forces" as the "might" mean "force and violence"?

It means force, but not violence. When force and violence are back- turned together they imply military action, i.e., force of a violent and bloody kind. But force is not necessarily violence. And the force implicit in the Socialist Industrial Union, as projected by the Socialist Labor Party, is meant to avert violence.

"Karl Marx said in Capital: "Force is the way of the middle of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power." Our task.

The observation is a recognition of two facts—one, that ruling classes cling stubbornly to their power and privileges, notwithstanding their being forced to, and two, real power consists of control of a nation's productive resources. Frederick Engels, dwelling on the same point in Anti-Dühring, put it this way: "...In a word, the triumph of force depends upon economic power, on economic power depends the ability to organize actual material instruments...Economic force is the control of great industry.

Such is the force implicit in the Socialist Industrial Union as advocated by the SLP. It is in (De Leon's words) "an equivalent for a military force—a mighty nonmilitary engine of physical power."

How will this force be applied? The political movement of the Socialist Industrial Union will establish the right to socialize production at the ballot box. Here the superior numerical strength of the workers will register the demand that all the industries, factories, mills, mines, railroads, etc., be made the private property of a handful of useless parasites, become the collective property of all the people. And to implement this demand, the workers, organized in the Socialist Industrial Union, will take possession of the industries, factories, etc., and lock out the out-voted capitalist class.

It will not be a matter of marching on the factories as, for example, an army marches on the fortress of the enemy. Actually, since the work- ers run the industries from top to bottom, they have de facto posses- sion. At this very moment workers are running the railroads, communications and energy systems, mines, mills, etc., Workers have charge of every ore deposit and they drive the trucks. In short, the work- ers are in a perfect strategic position to assume complete control of the nation's economic machinery. With their "mighty nonmilitary engine of physical force," the Socialist Industrial Union, they must back up their ballot and establish the Socialist Commonwealth.

However, the SLP's views on Cuba are summed up in its publication In Cuba Socialism Will Never Be Destroyed. Two of these men lived and worked in countries that are usually referred to as "emerging" or "developing" countries. What those countries are emerging from is the preindustrial or agricultural stage of their history. What they are developing into are industrialized capitalist countries. They are striving to reach the stage that the United States and other "ad- vanced" countries reached long ago.

Socialism presupposes a highly developed, industrialized society. Whatever merit Trotsky and Guevara had as advocates of progress in their own countries, their ideas were quite naturally, developed and conditioned by the circumstances that existed in those countries. Those conditions differ greatly from those that exist in the United States.

American Socialists cannot look back to pre-industrial and essen- tionally pre-capitalist conditions in developing their own ideas. Just as Trotsky and Guevara had to deal with conditions as they found them in their own lands, we must deal with conditions as we find them in the United States. For that reason, the SLP looks to nei- ther Trotsky nor Guevara. Rather, it looks to the works of the American Socialist, Daniel De Leon, who lived and worked in the most advanced of all industrialized capitalist nations.

Note that what we are speaking of is a constructive force, not a destructive one. And the very Socialist Industrial Union that takes and holds the industries will set up its own organs of adminis- tration. The new socialist govern- ment will be composed of representa- tives of the workers in the vari- ous industries.

But it must be noted that such a transition to socialism averts economic paralysis, hence chaos, by keeping production going.

The Socialist Industrial Union is the workers' power! Study its principles. Help to build it.

Funds

Thanksgiving Fund

Sectarian Wayne County, Mich. ($20); G. Olman $75; A. G. Sim ($1 for each year of membership in SLP); W. & N. Carles $50; M. Culpepper $10; A. Cantarella $1. Total: $94

Christmas Box

Chris Dobreff $200; Stanley W. Andrick $100; $50 each Alan Taylor, Anne Vakarovsky "In mem- ory of Mary and Elia Misheff." Donald Rogers, Len Kubit, Anon- ymous $42; $25 each William H. Nace, Blake Beavon, Eileen Burris, Bill Romburg-Ray Minnick $17.25; Albert E. Moore $20; $10 each David Peterson, Stephen Hawkinson, Brett T. Lamour $5.50; Anonymous $1. Total: $765.75

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Activities notices must be received by the Monday preceding the third Wednesday of the month.

OREGON

Portland Discussion Meetings—Section Portland holds discussion meetings every second Saturday of the month. Meetings are usually held at the Central Library, but the time varies. For more information please call Sid at 503-236-2081 or visit the Web site at http://pdx.psw.home.mind- spring.com. General public invited.

TEXAS

Discussion Meetings—The SLP group in Houston has discussion meetings the last Saturday of the month at the Houston Public Library, Franklin Branch, 6440 W. Bellaire, southwest Houston. The time of the meetings varies. Those interested please call 713-721- 5926, e-mail redes1964@net- zero.net or visit the groups Web site at http://home.bossean.com/pol- itics/houstonsp.

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A.P.T.

FOUNTAIN OF FREEDOM

2001 SLP National Convention

Banquet Fund

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Enclosed is my contribution of $__________

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A.P.T.
AFL-CIO Nearing Collapse

(Continued from page 1)

For the past few weeks, we’ve been living at the whims of manage-
ment we may have never met. The remaining employees to unionize.

Without a contract or recognized man-
agement we may have never met. The remaining employees to unionize.

Our people had been struggling to

In the debate it developed that

management the AFL-CIO’s use of the

Arid Lands

(Weekly People, March 2, 2001). Out in Nevada, located along

the lower part of the Gila River, are three Indian tribes: the Pinus,

Maricopas and Papago. The first from time immemorial, the last two for

many genera, have supported

themselves largely by agric-
culture under irrigation. While set-

tlers along the upper portion of the river have been diverting the water

for their own needs, the Maricopas

and Papago have been forced to

use. There is net enough water

available there now to irrigate their

reservations which has been the case

for all of them can be employed in farm-

ing. This is the way the Indian “com-

es in” and is made to join “Border Labor,” a pseudo program for the labor-

demanding and poorly paid positions in the

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...
The Paris Commune of 1871

Our Annual Tribute to The Paris Commune of 1871

By B.G.

The 19th-century women’s movement in the United States had its roots in the movement to abolish slavery, as many women of conscience enshrined in antislavery organizations had dedicated themselves to the toleration of male members and frequent- ly denied voting rights in the organization. Their own secondary status in the movement to free slaves impelled these women to begin thinking about their own status in American society.

Abolitionist Henry Stanton and his new bride, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in England in 1840. It was there that the women delegates faced the humiliation of segrega- tion in a special ruled-off space and the refusal of the convention members to tolerate them. The personal denunciation of them and their subjection. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her committee commented on biblical passages that reflected the patriarchal and denominational culture of the New Testament, noted that the Bible passed. Stanton henceforth lobbied to pass the 13th amendment of their pioneering effort to build a better society. And it draws Marianne lessons from their experience to be used in building a better society they shed their blood to build.

The committee placed Bible events in their historical context, noted that the Bible was written by men and not by God, and stated that many of its customs and con- cepts belonged to a bygone barbarous age.

This work, The Woman’s Bible, was pub- lished in 1869 and horrified the more con- servative members of the movement. At the next annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association held in Philadelphia in 1870, it was publicly disowned despite an impas- sioned plea by Susan B. Anthony, who rec- ognized that the motion to disown the work- shop to old, abolitionist writers of the day. She assured her own convictions.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton had insights into the women’s rights movement. By class prejudice and governmental force. Science itself was made in the 1870s. The separation of church and state was decreed. Paris ceased to be the play- ground of exploiters, domestic and foreign. Universal suffrage was instituted. The standing army and police, the government and people’s force. All functionaries, elected or appointed, were held responsible and were subject to recall.

Capitalism has lied that the Commune held power by terror. Actually, it formally abolished the totalitarian. The terror of the Commune was the several dozen capitalists that took when they reconquered the workers by military power and betrayal.

The hatred shown the French workers by their French masters had no parallel in modern European history to that time. Even the German conquerors had never seemed anything like it. And no wonder! Na- tional differences among capitalists don’t submerge class similarities. As Benjamin Disraeli said, the French workers are a nation apart from the capitalists.

The Socialists and Labor Party honors the workers of the Paris Commune on their 130th anniversary of their pioneering effort to build a better society. And it draws Marianne lessons from their experience to be used in building a better society they shed their blood to build.

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