

Can the worker be tricked into betraying his own interest?

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A summary of an address
by UE General Counsel...
Frank J. Donner

Can the worker
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THE ADMINISTRATION has evolved a four point strategy to try to trick America's working people into betraying their own interests, UE General Counsel Frank J. Donner told the union's 35th International convention.



Frank J. Donner

It aims to separate the worker from his allies, flatter him on the one hand and repress him and his organizations on the other to accomplish its aim of protecting the interests of the employers, especially those profiting from the war and the war-caused inflation.

The union's counsel told the delegates of a still unpublished report by a Presidential Commission on the Blue Collar Worker which points to such a strategy.

At the conclusion of his profound address, when he received a standing ovation from the delegates, Donner expressed utmost confidence that this cynical strategy will

fail and that the working people will be the moving force to advance their own and the country's interests.

AVERAGE INCOME BARELY ABOVE WELFARE LEVELS

The Blue Collar report concerns itself with 70 million Americans, 40 percent of the American families, including two million members of minority groups, according to Donner. "In this huge mass of people, the male head of the family has an average income, if he is white, of about \$8,900 a year, and if he is black, about \$5,900 a year.

"The median income of all the members of this blue collar group is slightly above the welfare relief level. These are the 'forgotten Americans' that the Nixon Administration has suddenly discovered and whose plight it now seeks to exploit to maintain its power," he declared.

The Commission notes that the worker's income stops rising just when the needs of his children become the greatest. He is concerned over his inadequate income, worried about the condition of his neighborhood, about poor schools, law and order, drug usage, pornography and job opportunities.

SHOP CONDITIONS DEPRESS FEELING FOR FACTORY WORK

The worker feels forgotten and left out, according to this report. He enjoys no visible share of the programs which are directed at the disadvantaged such as medical aid, housing, and job training.

It adds that shop working conditions are "oppressively tedious, noisy and mind-numbing, with little room for

human contact.” This plays a big part in establishing the feeling that shop work is not a decent career.

While it fails to fix the blame for such conditions, the report admits that youth is turning away from blue collar work regarding it as a sign of failure.

Donner pointed out that there is a terrible ignorance of workers in American life abetted by the schools which teach nothing about them and by the news media which are silent about them except when there is a strike.

SKILLS OF WORKERS NOT MATCHED BY PAY SCALES

He said that the skills of workers are under-valued. “When I go into the Westinghouse Lester plant and I see the men operating the complex lathes and milling machines or when I go to Waynesboro and see women engaged in delicate assembly work; or when I go to Dayton and see a guy working in the foundry—my first thought is he’s worth twice as much money as the guy in the front office who has some racket that he is performing that is totally useless.

“America is full of hustlers, con-men, people who make a living, and a good living, without contributing anything to the economy or to society. To put it another way, the sweat and skill of working people subsidize a parasitic managerial elite.”

The Presidential report concludes with the statement that “resentment is likely to worsen with any increase in unemployment, together with a continued push for opportunity for the disadvantaged plus the addition of returning veterans to the labor force.”

Recognizing the likelihood of this happening, Donner de-

clared, "by exploiting their fears, their frustrations, and their resentments" the Administration is hoping that workers can be made to forget their economic problems, their unions, and their aspirations for a better life.

ADMINISTRATION POLICY PROMOTES DIVISION

The four point strategy designed to accomplish this aim, the speaker said, starts by seeking to divide the worker from his allies such as the youth, the opponents of the war and the black people and to divert his hostility to the "long hairs." "Yes, to make us afraid of our own children who seek a humane and decent life; to pay lip service to the worker's hunger for decency and dignity while pursuing policies which degrade and rob him."

As evidence he cited a speech by Vice President Agnew in which the latter praised the Republican Party's devotion to the working man. "The forgotten American is no more," Agnew proclaimed. "We remember, we Republicans, we Republicans remember who pays the taxes. We remember who always had to fight the war. We remember who makes the automobiles, builds the planes and makes this country run."

WORKER PAYS FOR WAR THE BOSS GETS RICHER

The second ingredient of the Nixon strategy is to conceal the fact that the worker is paying for the war through inflation and unemployment, that the war is making the boss richer while the worker's living standards decline; that he pays through rotting cities, second-rate education for his children and inferior health care systems.

While flattering the worker and diverting him from the fact that the war which is costing three and a half million

dollars an hour is responsible for inflation and unemployment, the strategy is to tighten the shackles on the labor movement, Donner declared.

Among the steps in this direction have been the naming of a notorious anti-labor judge, Warren Burger, as Chief Justice. It was his court that several months ago ruled that an employer can get an injunction against his workers if they strike in violation of a contract which contains an arbitration clause.

The shocking thing about this decision, the UE counsel pointed out, is that the same issue was decided the other way by the Warren Court which had based itself on the Norris-LaGuardia Act enacted in 1932 after years of bitter labor struggle. Thus, the Court has reversed itself, undermined a vital labor law, and usurped the legislative functions of Congress.

Another sign of where the Administration is headed, was the ruling of the Circuit Court of Appeals that unions cannot bargain on retirement benefits of already-retired workers. The UE has a deep interest in this as it has cases against GE and Westinghouse on the same issue.

The National Labor Relations Board under Nixon has moved in an anti-labor direction, also, Donner declared. It ruled recently, for example, that even though an employer is guilty of violating the labor law by refusing to bargain with his employees, the government has no power to force him to make good losses suffered by the employees as a result of his misconduct.

That case involved the Auto Workers and the Ex-Cell-O Co., a company which for seven years fought the decision of its employees at another plant in Springfield, Vt., to be represented by UE.

In taking this stand, Donner said, the NLRB overruled its

own trial examiner who had taken the position that the employer should not be allowed to reap the benefits of violating the law; it scorned the federal Court of Appeals which had sent a similar case back to the Board saying: You find out how much these people lost as a result of the employer's refusal to bargain and decide on a meaningful remedy.

STRANGE CREW WINS WHITE HOUSE HONORS

The fourth point in the Nixon strategy, Donner said, "is to strengthen the bosses' labor movement at the expense of the workers' labor movement."

He said the former includes unions which collaborate with the employers, are corrupt, authoritarian, racist and reactionary while the workers' movement is based on class struggle, mutual aid, internal democracy and solidarity.

Nixon's reliance on the bosses' labor movement he continued, was exemplified by his shocking invitation to the construction union leaders, whose paid goons had violently assaulted New York peace demonstrators, to come to the White House.

In this honored group, Donner revealed, there was a business agent who two weeks earlier had been given a \$20,000 fine and a five year suspended jail sentence for extortion; a business agent who has been arrested and convicted for bookmaking and policy; a union official who with his sons and brothers collected \$448,000 in salary and expenses from the union's treasury. The Nixon guests included, also, two union officials who have been censured by the New York Human Rights Commission for violations by their unions of the prohibitions against racial discrimination.

"These are the men who in Nixon's eyes speak for the American labor movement.

Donner told the convention he was confident that the Nixon strategy of tricking the working people to go against their own interests would not prevail. He cited various polls of working people which found majorities condemning the President's handling of racial matters, his denunciation of students as "bums," his handling of the war and the way he is handling his job overall.

"The working people are opposing the war," Donner insisted, "not only because it is punishing them economically, but because it is racist, immoral and brutal . . ."

WORKERS' LEADERSHIP NEEDED FOR PROGRESS

"Working people," he continued, "are not animals in blue collars who are indifferent to the horrors of war. They are not rough beasts who have no human values, who don't give a damn when a child's eyeballs are fried in napalm or a forest is destroyed by chemical defoliants. I resent this patronizing notion that the working class lacks a humanitarian ethic."

Those who seek to change things for the better in this country, he concluded, will have to recognize that the working people represent the best in American life and that there can be no change in the structure of society without them.

He appealed to the delegates to recognize that "we cannot permit ourselves the luxury of hating our domestic allies as Nixon and Agnew would like." He urged rejection of fear and bigotry and for workers to join with those other segments of society who want to make an end to the war and to make the country serve the people's needs.

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