



Challenges to a changing US working class

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Review: *US Labour in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from Above, the Promise of Revival from Below* by Kim Moody, Verso 2007. Reviewed by Andy Yorke.

Moody's book is a contribution to the debate around the US working class and how it can rebuild its strength in the unions, workplaces and communities. What kind of answers does he give?

Kim Moody is a long-time activist and writer of influential books and articles on the US labour movement. He is a founder of *Labor Notes* bulletin, which seeks to promote union organisation, workers' struggles, and rank and file initiatives that challenge the union bureaucracy's inertia and concessions to capital. In *US Labour in Trouble and Transition*, Moody delivers a 'State of the Union' address, analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the US labour movement and outlining his strategy for reversing its long-term decline and rebuilding 'working class power'. To do this, he divides his book into three parts, starting with the changes US capitalism and the working class has undergone since the 1970s, and then dealing with the response of the unions to this. In the final section he focuses on a series of recent events that illustrate the contradictions and possibilities of US labour in the new millennium, from the 2005 split in the AFL-CIO federation, which produced the rival Change to Win coalition, to the massive 'Day without Immigrants' on 1 May 2006, a political general strike involving millions of migrant workers, both legal and illegal.

While Moody dismisses the idea that there can be a 'simple road map to power' for the US working class, he certainly lays out what he considers to be the main lines activists need to work along in order to renew workers' organisation and turn around the unions, which organised 32.5 per cent of US workers in 1953 but only 12 per cent today.¹ Central to his strategy are the new forms of workers' organisation, workers' centres, union democracy movements, strike campaigns, that have sprung up in the new century. His goal is to suggest ways of 'pulling all these together' to prepare the workers' movement for an 'upsurge,' similar in scale to those of the early 1900s, the 1930s and the 1960s.

The big question is, how can these organisations that have arisen 'from below', both inside and outside the unions, against the bosses and in large measure against the resistance of union bureaucrats, too, succeed in permanently overcoming both the blight of bureaucracy and the employers' and the state's inevitable counterattack? Ultimately, Moody is unable to answer this. By focusing on trade unions and workplace organisation as the beginning and end of workers' struggles in America, he demonstrates a strong tendency to economism, what Lenin defined as the belief that workers should privilege economic struggles via the trade unions, plus such political issues as relate closely to this, in the belief that these will spontaneously develop towards political action at a later stage.

Thus he underestimates the role that movements of the racially and socially oppressed, antiwar and anti-imperialist mobilisations have played, and can play, in organising workers and advancing their class-consciousness. Above all, although he recognises the need for a workers' party in the US, a labour party based on the unions, and expects it to be related to a future surge of unionisation, he does not see the role of a revolutionary party as central to preparing such an upheaval or as the necessary leadership and strategist for such a revolutionary situation or period.

This is a serious mistake. It ignores the fact that, historically, unions have organised only a minority of workers in the US, and that the black civil rights, the youthful antiwar and anticapitalist mobilisations and, most recently, the

immigrant workers' movement, have played a critical role in radicalising US society. Together with militant forces in the unions they hold the power not only to transform and massively expand the unions, to bring about Moody's 'upsurge,' but present the opportunity missed in past periods to create a new, powerful working class party committed to the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism.

Whilst Moody clearly supports the development of a labour party based on the unions, he says little or nothing about what its role should be, other than to wage political campaigns, stand in elections, and ultimately break the unions from the Democrats. Ultimately, his book fails to provide the strategy that militant workers and anti-imperialist fighters so badly need. By rejecting any sort of 'road map to power', Moody is rejecting the need for a programme, understood as a conscious strategy, and hoping, instead, that a series of pragmatic measures and forms of organisation thrown up by the struggle itself, will, if generalised, meet up with a spontaneous upsurge and thus succeed where the syndicalists, communists and Trotskyists of the past failed. He is wrong. Such a method will, at best, reproduce those failures. Nevertheless, Moody's book remains an invaluable overview of the US labour movement and its problems and there is much to gain from a critical reading of it.

The 'Great U-Turn' of the 1970s

Moody starts with a comprehensive survey of the changes in US capitalism that underlay the demographic shifts in the working class and the decline in the unions since the 1970s. His first three chapters are a very valuable summary of the changes to the US economy and, consequently, to class relations over the last three decades. Packed with statistics, it is an excellent source of information for any activist.

He begins his story with the big picture, the 'great transformation' that began in the mid-1970s with the reversal of the long boom in the capitalist world economy of the post-war decades. The long boom saw the US working class grow in numbers and for a large section of it, achieve what looked like a 'middle class' lifestyle. This was based on rising real wages, greater job security, home ownership and participation in the consumer society. All this was embodied in the ideology of the American Dream; material prosperity, individual freedom and an acceptance of capitalist values and US imperialism's dominant role in the world.

However, almost at the beginning of this process, American unions accepted reactionary anti-union laws, the Labor-Management Relations Act, usually known from its drafters as 'Taft-Hartley'. This allowed states, especially those where unions were weak, to draft even more restrictive anti-union laws than the federal act. These were the so-called 'right to work' laws that made mass unionisation very difficult. Moody actually gives insufficient attention to these shackles, all of which are still in place. Though more limited and disguised than in Europe, the state also provided a degree of welfare unseen before the war. Moreover, there were also serious moves to expand this in the 1960s to sections of the excluded black population (Johnson's Civil Rights and 'Great Society' legislation) American unions accepted this deal with the employers and the state and became a privileged and highly bureaucratic force in US society, firmly wedded to the Democrats and not even forming that party's left wing. Union membership stabilised and then stagnated. No serious attempt was made to unionise the Southern states where new industries were rising.

Drawing on the analyses of Robert Brenner and Anwar Shaikh, Moody shows how this social compact between unions and the state was thrown into reverse in the crisis-hit 1970s. With falling profit rates in the manufacturing 'core' of the system, there was a 'great U-turn' in capitalism that launched seemingly never-ending waves of attacks on workers' jobs, wages, conditions and unions.

These attacks went global in the 1980s, pushed by the big industrial powers in a package of policies under the label of 'Free Trade', and imposed on their own working classes and on the economies of the semi-colonial, or 'Third', world by means of debt and global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. Known as Reaganomics in the USA and Thatcherism in the UK, this new turn by the capitalists, driven by the need to restore profit rates, unleashed the period that became known as globalisation; falling tariffs and controls leading to rising trade and competition on the international market.

Unions and workers' social wage in decline

The US bosses' fight to hike up the rate of exploitation and boost profits since the 1970's has meant assaults on workers' gains on every front. First off, it has seen an endless wave of closures as factories are relocated abroad, creating big net job losses in some sectors such as textiles, apparel (i.e. clothing) and chemicals. There has also been a geographical restructuring of industry within the US towards the non-unionised Southern states and many previously rural areas. Foreign car manufacturers set up new plants, industries such as meatpacking shifted from old unionised areas in the North-East, and container-based freight moved from ports to inland sites. As a result, the South has become a major industrial centre in the last half century, now accounting for nearly a third of manufacturing in the US and still growing. The unions have failed to follow these jobs, so union density is now 5.8 per cent in the South, far below the 12 per cent national average.²

In the 1990s, the hunger for profit also drove a massive wave of investment in the US to boost productivity and raise profits. Productivity rose by 4.5 per cent a year from 1990 to 2003, after a decade of lower rates. Real fixed assets per worker rose by 119 per cent while unit labour costs rose overall by only 1.5 per cent in that thirteen year period.³ In 2005, US workers as a whole produced over 30 per cent more in each hour they worked than in 1995.⁴ Japanese kaizen methods, involving speed-ups and team-working, aided this hike in exploitation. In one example, General Motors' car workers used to produce only 45 seconds of actual work in each minute, but in the newer NUMMI GM-Toyota joint venture plants, this was raised to the Toyota standard of 57 seconds of actual work! Moody does the maths to show that this means a massive \$29,215 boost to the surplus value extracted from each worker per year, no doubt on the back of their stress, exhaustion, and injuries.⁵

These two trends, relocating plant to low wage areas or countries, and restructuring to intensify work and raise productivity, have led to 5 million job losses in the traditionally unionised, better paid, manufacturing sector. This has accelerated in the new century with nearly 2.9 million manufacturing jobs lost under the Bush administration alone.⁶ Union membership, density, strike figures, and recognition votes all went into decline in the 1970s as employers' union busting tactics became more refined, and nastier.

In addition, the union leaders have made massive concessions on wages, healthcare and pensions in a failed bid to defend jobs, often allowing two-tier workforces to arise, with the newer workers on schemes stripped of benefits. As a result, not only have real wages fallen continuously for US workers since the 1970s, except for a short period in the second half of the 1990s, but the 'social wage' of healthcare benefits and pension provision has also fallen. Moody's figures for real wages for workers in production and non-supervisory grades show that these have fallen from their high point of an average \$315.44 per week, in 1972, to \$274.49 per week in 2006. Meanwhile, he shows that, during the 1990s, the real value of all benefits in private sector compensation fell by almost one percent a year, as more and more workers lost their coverage, while those that retained it paid larger contributions for less.⁷

Moody's stockpile of statistics makes a powerful indictment of capitalism, which, even in the wealthiest major country in the world, has only managed to keep going forward only on the back of a massive hike in the exploitation of its working class and relentless cuts in their standard of living. It also reveals a picture of a changing working class, pointing to new contradictions that the movement must focus on and lever open to unleash a new wave of organising and struggle.

Working class changes and new possibilities

The three decades since 1975 have seen not only worsening conditions for the US working class as a whole, but also major transformations in its structure that are driving new struggles and organising efforts.

Women and black workers have entered the workforce on an unprecedented scale to become a stable, unionised wing, although this trend began in the previous, post-war period that Moody describes. By 2007, women had risen to become 48 per cent of the workforce, and from 21 per cent of all trade union members in 1974 to 44 per cent. Meanwhile, black workers continue to have a slightly higher rate of unionisation than the average, with 15.8 per cent of black male workers in a union.⁸

However, it was the explosion of immigration from the 1980s onwards that brought about the greatest change in the

working class. Immigrant labour now accounts for 15 per cent of the US workforce, most of it from Latin America and over half lacking citizenship (12 million out of a foreign-born workforce of 21.4 million) either with green cards, temporary permits or illegal.⁹ Overlapping with this has been the rise of a low-paid, largely immigrant workforce, especially in the South and in the service sector, which has increased its proportion of employment as manufacturing jobs declined.

Moody has focused, rightly, on the impact of these workers' struggles both inside the mainstream unions, such as the giant Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and its 'Justice for Janitors' campaign in the early 1990's, and outside the unions through workplace organising and community-based workers' centres such as the rural Florida Coalition of Immokolee Workers. The 'Day without Immigrants' May Day strike of 2006, gave a forceful proof of their effectiveness. This massively super-exploited immigrant workforce has already shown its potential for self-organisation and militant action. Now, as Moody rightly says, this must be brought into the unions to revive and democratise them.

Even where labour seems weakest after the changes of the last three decades, Moody's analysis of the economic transformations that globalisation has wrought in the US allows him to see chinks in capital's armour. So, while US manufacturing workers are now fewer, they produce more value for the capitalists than ever before. In addition, the rise of a more globalised world, with trade growing faster than GDP, has meant that transport and logistics have grown in importance to connect the different links in the new global chains of production and to distribute commodities to the wider markets. As a result, the US transportation workforce grew by 27 per cent between 1990 and 2000.¹⁰ This section of workers is even more powerful now in a situation where goods are not stockpiled in huge inventories, but produced 'just in time' to be shipped to market as needed, so strikes can immediately cripple global production and the flow of goods, hitting the bosses hard and very quickly.

Moody's strategy for reversing the decline of the US unions and building 'workers' power' flows from these changes; organise the South and new immigrant working class, focus on manufacturing and logistics, the 'productive' heart of capital where surplus value is created. Moody then examines the role of the union bureaucracy in the decline of the unions. We will look at the limitations of this strategy later.

SEIU: the new bureaucracy

Throughout the book, Moody examines the role of the trade union bureaucracy in limiting struggles, cutting deals with big business that give away jobs and conditions, and stifling workplace organisation and rank and file resistance to dictates from above. He shows how 'business unionism', the idea that capital and labour are in a responsible partnership, or class collaboration, to give it its real name, turned into a policy of givebacks and concessions in the name of saving jobs throughout the 1980s.

He identifies the Chrysler bailout in 1979-1980 as the watershed moment, when the strategy of concessions in the name of saving jobs became the mantra of the union bureaucracy. This was followed by Reagan smashing the air traffic controllers' union PATCO in 1981, a message for any unions thinking of rebelling against the new order. Moody correctly shows how the natural consequence of this was declining union membership, and the bureaucracy responding with inter-union mergers in order to shore up its finances and influence. This has allowed the unions to get ever bigger but, at the same time, become ever more distant from their members, while the leaders and officials continue to accrue the same privileges and high pay as before.

Like many other commentators,¹¹ he sees the 2005 split in the AFL-CIO, which produced the Change to Win rival federation, as a bureaucratic split with no qualitative difference between the two sides. He looks in detail at the SEIU, the driving force in the split, which is developing business unionism to new heights, into what Moody calls 'corporate unionism'.

The SEIU is the largest and fastest-growing union in the US, bucking the trend of decline by doubling its numbers in the past decade. Its Justice for Janitors campaign pioneered a new approach, organising the traditionally non-unionised and low-paid, including immigrant worker. The union adopted a strategy of identifying unorganised sections of

workers, researching into the structure of the corporate sector, and carefully planning a campaign, involving lobbying and media pressure alongside strikes and protests that in a controlled way tapped the creativity and militancy of the workers.

In general, the SEIU focuses on sectors not directly threatened by globalisation and the danger of offshoring, but cleaners, hotel workers and health workers. As a result, it is not building the kind of industrial power at the heart of capitalist production that Moody thinks should be the strategic goal of the labour movement.

Most importantly, the SEIU is heading in the opposite direction to the kind of workplace organisation and member-led activism that Moody stresses is the key to rebuilding the unions. The SEIU's model does not at all break from business unionism, but rather updates it by copying the modern corporation's size and techniques, merging unions and locals into 'mega-locals', building 'labour market share' in targeted industries, so that sectoral deals can be made and stable contracts established by professional negotiation. A massive bureaucracy of professional organisers plans the campaigns and carries them out. With scale, come yet more resources for the bureaucracy to expand into new labour markets, just like the corporate expansion logic of Starbucks or Walmart:

'Today, the smallest two-thirds of the AFL-CIO's 60 unions average less than 60,000 members apiece, not nearly enough to wield market clout in most cases. Conversely, when SEIU merged the New Jersey janitors' local into the larger, richer New York union, it could suddenly afford to commit 50 organisers and \$5 million a year to recruitment.'¹²

And 'partnership' is similarly extended, as SEIU president Andy Stern states:

'Employers need to recognise that the world has changed and that there are people who would like to help them provide solutions in ways that are new, modern, and that add value', and unions can help business 'to operate more efficiently', offering for instance to provide hiring halls like a 'labour contractor' or even act as an 'outsourcing vehicle' that takes on benefit plans and training programmes on behalf of the employer.¹³

The end-product is huge 'mega-locals' that sometimes cover more than one state. The examples Moody gives are almost unbelievable. SEIU 'Local 1', headquartered in Chicago, covers workers from Wisconsin down to Missouri, this is, perhaps, Andy Stern's take on the slogan 'Think globally, act locally'! A Local 1 bureaucrat explained, 'It's not unlike what businesses will do with their core industries.'¹⁴ In such structures, any healthy workplace organisation becomes lost, without power or voice, they are in reality a bureaucratic prison house. It comes as no surprise that Andy Stern sees union democracy as impeding the leadership's initiative, union members weren't even balloted on the historic split with the AFL-CIO!

The greatest proof of the failure of this model is that, while it has organised millions of workers into unions, they have often seen wages fall or wage gaps widen. The Los Angeles workers who spearheaded the Justice For Janitors campaign have seen their real wages fall ten per cent since joining the union.¹⁵ This will endanger the gains that have been made, and could see an exodus of such low paid workers from the movement. Kim Moody is dead right; the real choice is not between the two federations, but rather between their models and a completely different kind of trade unionism, based on workplace organisation, struggle and the most thoroughgoing democracy.

Union reform or rank and file movement?

The US trades unions show to the greatest degree the 'caste-like' features and petit bourgeois or middle class life style and mentality of the union officialdom. Top union leaders are paid like corporate CEOs, up to \$700,000 a year, while thousands of staff are paid over \$100,000 each.¹⁶ Moody cites a study showing that a third of these bureaucrats were never even members of a union, but were hired from the outside as staff and rose through the ranks of the hierarchy, not through the votes of their members on the shop floor. Half come from middle class backgrounds.¹⁷ This army of bureaucrats is no doubt growing in relative size and privilege, but does not represent the diverse, poor and oppressed workforce of 21st century America. Ultimately, this bureaucracy rests on a relatively privileged layer of workers in more secure and generally better paid jobs (at 35 per cent union density, workers in the public sector have a

membership rate nearly five times that of private sector employees) that are insulated from the pressures of the job market and often able to live a 'middle class' lifestyle.¹⁸

So, when officials are making concessions, or imposing mergers or cutbacks on their members against their wishes, what is the solution? In describing a few of the reform and opposition groups in the unions, Moody warns of the danger of simply electing a different, more left, leadership. In this he is correct. Many years of campaigning by the oppositional New Directions caucus in the Transport Workers Local 100 led to its candidate Roger Toussaint being voted in as president, only for him to opt for 'one-man rule', using the local's sixty non-elected and well-paid staff and his constitutional powers to stay in office, with disastrous results for the 2005 transit strike.¹⁹ Moody states that, 'It is never enough to change the faces at the top. What needs changing are the two fundamental relationships that define a union: the relationship of leaders to members and that between leaders (and the institutions) and the employer.'²⁰ He stresses all the key elements to build a concerted struggle to take back the union and take on the bosses: workplace organisation with accountable stewards/ reps, militant member-led struggle, campaigning for workers' democracy, and an end to 'partnership'.

He is right that we cannot reform the unions simply by electing more left leaders but there is also more to it than just encouraging bottom up democracy. We need a worked out strategy of measures that will actually liquidate the union bureaucracy as a privileged caste. Although the various forms of left caucuses he mentions can be a start, we need to debate and agree a set of basic principles to achieve democratic control of the unions at every level from workplace locals to the national executives. However, this will never be really successful if it is not accompanied by a massive drive to unionise the vast majority of US wage earners presently not in unions. Moreover this must start with the poorest paid and super exploited workers. Once they start to mobilise, and necessarily clash with their brutal employers and the state and federal forces that back them up, then the radicalism of the entire US workers' movement will rise exponentially. This is what Moody refers to as an upsurge but which he seems to await with a degree of fatalism. Socialists need to fight to build a rank and file movement within the unions with the conscious goal of transforming them.

Central to its policies should be that elected representatives of those taking action democratically control every strike or union campaign, not full time officials. Strike committees should control both the action and the negotiations.

All officials should be regularly elected and paid the average wage of those they represent to ensure that they have a direct material interest in improving the wages of their members. They should be recallable by those who elected them.

All those seeking a rank and file movement's endorsement at election should submit themselves to its discipline and agree to fight for its democratically agreed policies, if elected.²¹

The relationship of a genuine rank and file movement to the bureaucracy, especially to the left leaders who repeatedly rise with support from the ranks but, all too often, as Moody shows, become conservative and undistinguishable from the right once in office, is crucial. The correct attitude can be summed up with the slogan, 'with the leaders wherever possible, without them where necessary.'²² A key historical model is the Minority Movement, developed by the Communist Party of Great Britain in the early 1920s, under the guidance of the Comintern before its takeover by Josef Stalin.

Moody does, indeed, address the problem of the power of the bureaucracy to sabotage. He talks about 'Building the rank and file movements and organisations that are fighting for a more effective, democratic, and inclusive union in the context of the main fight with the bosses, the Farrell Dobbs approach of letting the bureaucratic old guard get caught in the cross fire.'

But he adds:

'Realistically, however, the bureaucracy is far more omnipresent and in the way these days than in the early 1930s, so that there is no hope of avoiding internal union conflict if any progress is to be made... We build these rank and file groups, acts of resistance, and movements on their own terms, but offer an analysis of the roots of the problem and a

bigger vision of how to address them when appropriate. We call this social movement unionism: a unionism that is democratic, acts like a movement and not just an institution, and reaches out to other working class and oppressed people to build a mass movement for change.²³

The problem is that Moody does not go far enough, either in addressing the depth of the problem or in the transformations needed not only in the unions but in the campaigns and social movements, too, if the bureaucratic caste is to be dissolved. Unfortunately, as many examples show, the bureaucracy has immense powers to retaliate, sidelining struggles and victimising militants, sometimes violently, as in the grotesque case of 1,000 UAW officials, some armed with baseball bats, forcing wildcat strikers at the Chrysler Mack Avenue plant back to work in 1973.²⁴ Moody does not answer the slippery and difficult question of how to take over the union and transform it, to advance alternative leaders but make sure they are not absorbed into the bureaucracy. He does not have a strategy to end the cycle of left leaders being elected only to betray their supporters, and does not lay out the alternative policies of working class democracy with which to replace the union bureaucracy.

Unions and social movements

Moody is far from unaware of the problems faced by the so-called social movements as well as the trade unions. Many of these movements have been initiated by 'people of faith', not to put too fine a point on it, by sections of the churches. In addition, of course, the churches, particularly those belonging to the 'religious right' are an enormous obstacle to a trade union, let alone a political, reawakening of US workers. Obama was quite right in his famous 'gaffe' when he included religion as one of the painkilling drugs for communities blighted by workplace closures, mass unemployment, low paid and insecure jobs. As his critics pointed out, he was echoing Karl Marx's view that it was 'the heart of a heartless world' and 'the opium of the masses.'

Moody explores the phenomenon of workers with religious or racist ideas, such as those that solidly vote Republican, particularly in the South and Midwest 'Bible Belt'. He rightly slams the Democratic Party for its role in creating the Rust Belt and Workfare. Its thoroughly bourgeois nature means it will never be able to break such workers from their reactionary ideas. Racism, too, has been the Achilles heel of the US working class for the last 150 years. Only class struggle, united with a conscious struggle against racism, can break down such ideas. Moody asks, 'Can today's union leaders or those waiting in the wings, present a convincing class analysis that does not sweep race under the rug as the CIO mistakenly tried to do in the 1940s?'²⁵

But, even here, Moody approaches the question with his trade union blinkers on. It is not just a question of organising black or immigrant workers into the unions, but campaigning for the unions to build movements and take militant action against racism and to fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. Already, the Republican Party (and many in the Democrats) are pushing legislation to block any legalisation of the mass of undocumented workers while the state terrorises and deports immigrant workers in the wake of the Day without Immigrants, and a racist vigilante movement grows. Now, in the context of a US recession, and a hike in unemployment, the rise of a racist, anti-immigrant movement is a real possibility.

To bolster his case for militant trade unionism as sufficient, Moody ends up downplaying the role of the competition between workers engendered by capitalism and racial inequality as a real force and pressure driving racist attitudes, arguing that poverty is primarily due to the 'competition of capitals' not competition between workers. He uses the textile and electronics industries as examples of where the 'brutal competition between marginal capitals' has driven a shift to super-exploitative forms of labour organisation and production methods; sweatshops, home working, poverty wages and unemployment.²⁶ He cites research showing that, in at least four cases, in California, the unions and wages declined, driving white Americans out to be replaced by immigrant workers prepared, at least initially, to accept worse pay and conditions.²⁷

Of course, this is true at the most basic level; the roots of unemployment and poverty lie in the over-accumulation of capital, the falling rate of profit, and attempts by capitalists to counteract this by hiking up the rate of exploitation. But the story does not stop there. Moody paints unemployment as simply a passive, economic process thus minimising its results. He ignores the fact that, in reality, the bosses and their powerful media encourage workers to blame the

competition of immigrant labour, to demand harsh measures against illegals, as a false solution to their problems. Restricting the supply of labour is a classic craft union response to competition in the labour market and it opens the door to racism. Marxists have said this from the earliest days of the labour movement. The answer is to organise the incoming workers, but we cannot afford to ignore the material roots of racism, or we will never defeat it.

The capitalists, from the factory level to the national level (such as the Colorado Republican Senator, Mike Tancredo, who supports the racist vigilante Minuteman group), do not sit still and leave things at the economic level. They also make open appeals to white workers and seek to organise them around these demands: 'get rid of immigrants?', 'get rid of affirmative action?' (or, in the old days, 'keep the blacks in their place and you will have more jobs?').

Sections of white workers do respond to this, and can be organised in such movements. The bosses take actions that consolidate racism, as the old saying that blacks are 'last hired, first fired' confirms. In Ireland, the Orange Order, a cross-class bloc of Protestant workers organised and led by the Protestant bosses on the basis of Protestant supremacy and support for British imperialism's control of Ireland, not only became a mass organisation but also engaged in actions such as throwing Catholic workers out of the major workplaces, such as the docks, in 1918.²⁸ The Jim Crow South was no different, and contemporary systematic racism in the US in education and hiring, along with the mass of illegal workers, estimated to be as many as 12 million, are a new institutionalised form of racism.

Moody is a little too quick to downplay the reality of competition between workers and, following from that, the role real material privileges play in struggle. He would doubtless say, like the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, that he is simply trying to counter the propaganda, but his book is really aimed at union activists, militants and the left, and such an advanced layer of workers needs an analysis that exposes the real roots of the problems we face in organising the working class, so that we can generate tactics to defeat them.

To say that one group, black or Latino workers, is oppressed, is to admit that the other group, white workers, gains some advantage or privilege, no matter how small, historically temporary and ultimately self-defeating, those 'gains' are, compared to what a united class struggle for workers' needs could win. When workers are facing repossession of their homes, unable to put food on the table, in danger of losing their jobs, supporting jobs for 'Americans first' has real weight to it. We will not win workers by arguing that competition and privileges do not exist. We need to win them to the realisation that their marginal privileges and the divisions in the working class that racism brings weaken their resistance to massive attacks. A united struggle on a class basis can improve their lives beyond recognition; bringing permanent job security, a real democratic society and an end to fear and insecurity in all its forms.

The key to this unity however is a consistent anti-racism, a fight to make the unions and other workers' organisations fight in the front line of the struggle against racism, alongside its victims who are fighting back. This means not shirking from a rejection of racist calls for ever more border controls that necessarily pit worker against worker, nor from class struggle methods of resisting state attacks: strikes, defence guards. If such a movement against racism is combined with the class struggle approach that Moody advocates, rather than the timidity and class collaboration of the reformist leaders, then workers can be won to choose class over race, as history has shown.

It is here that Lenin's arguments about imperialism, the union bureaucracy and a layer of privileged workers, the 'labour aristocracy', can explain the real heart of the problem. The role of US imperialism, the world's leading superpower with the biggest banks and corporations, in sucking super-profits from the semi-colonial countries is crucial. As Lenin's analysis shows, the labour bureaucracy ultimately rests on the 'labour aristocracy', sections of better paid workers in more secure, skilled jobs who are able to enjoy a middle class lifestyle and whose ideas reflect this apparent security and prosperity under capitalism.²⁹ This is especially true in a polarised, race-stratified working class such as in the USA, and Lenin makes a point of contrasting the chasm between the existence of the best-paid workers in the imperialist countries and the life of immigrant labour. The identification of sections of the US working class with the middle class is well-known, one of the AFL-CIO's major arguments on why to join a union is entitled 'Unions help bring workers into the middle class'!³⁰

This is true of all imperialist powers, Japan, Britain, Germany and so on, but it is even more true in the US, the

hegemonic imperialist power where the jobs and wages of huge swathes of workers are dependent on military production and contracts, with over half a trillion dollars spent on defence and security every year. Nonetheless, even here, permanent security is illusory. Sometimes, capitalism no longer has a need for this or that section of the labour aristocracy and they come under attack. Equally, of course, no workers are safe in a generalised crisis such as the Great Depression, which is why it would be wrong to write-off any section of workers or refuse to organise them. In times of crisis and revolution, such workers can be broken from their ideas and won to struggle, as the history of mass strikes across Europe in the 1920s and '30s shows.

The conservatism of these layers of better-off workers, who have made their peace with capitalism, is the material root of reformism and other bourgeois ideas, such as nationalism, racism and sexism in the working class. The union bureaucracy fundamentally rests on these sections of workers and transmits these bourgeois ideas into the working class as a whole, not least through its support for the Democratic Party. At the other end of the scale, layers of unskilled and semi-skilled white workers exist that the same union bureaucracy has abandoned, and they are under increasing economic pressure of stagnating wages and debt. They mirror some of the same attitudes and hold reactionary ideas, prey to the demagogues of the church and the Republican Party, having never broken from Jim Crow and helped along by the Democrats' culpability in creating the Rust Belt.

Of course, Moody in no way downplays the importance of racism. He highlights the 'Day without Immigrants' as one of the major events showing the potential for a real turning point in the working class movement. He rightly thinks that the unions must organise within the immigrant movement. He even recognises the need to organise immigrant workers in order to rebuild the unions but, vital as this is, it is just one side of the equation. Equally important is a political struggle by the unions against racism and a consistent defence of immigrant workers, such as the decision of two British unions to fight for the abolition of all immigration controls.³¹ We need to appeal to social movements to support union organising and for solidarity with strikes, but we must also campaign for the unions to initiate and support social and political movements against racism and imperialism as a way of combating and overthrowing these bourgeois ideas in the white working class and, at critical moments, giving these movements the possibility of calling on the power of strikes to back up their demands.

This dimension is missing from Moody's analysis which, when it says 'Labour'³², means the unions and organising workers at work for their economic demands and power, as opposed to the 'working class'.

'Labour' or class?

In the final analysis, Moody whilst he emphasises the goal of 'workers' power', has a vision of this that starts exclusively from the trade union movement and always ends back with it. As a result, he either downplays or ignores the importance of a political party in organising the working class both in its day-to-day struggles and as the only instrument with which it can finally take power. Only from such a standpoint, and with such an instrument, can all aspects of the class struggle be addressed and then act back on the trade unions and the economic struggle, too.

In this regard, US Labour in Trouble and Transition lacks an analysis of one key aspect of neoliberal assault, the growth of casualisation. This is despite the fact that the analysis already has all the key elements in place for this; the rise of service sector employment, the 'Walmartisation' of retail, the rise in the 'reserve army of the unemployed', the emergence of immigrant labour. But Moody misses out completely on young workers, who are one sixth of the workforce but are only 4.8 per cent unionised, a third of the national rate. Despite vibrant campaigns around unionising Starbucks, for instance, and despite the success in France of young workers occupying McDonald's to force the bosses to recognise their union, young Americans remain at the margins of the union movement, except insofar as unions have employed quite a few social movement activists out of college as organisers.

While Moody may be right that the union movement should build up its strength against other anti-union companies before it tackles Wal-Mart, there is a vast layer of insecure, terribly paid, young workers whose potential energy and enthusiasm the unions have largely failed to tap. Students Against Sweatshops, the anticapitalist, antiwar and environmentalist movements have shown that many youth are radicalised by such political issues and are willing to take action. This, and many of the direct action methods that they have developed, can also be applied to their own job

situations. This interaction between political and economic issues is only possible from the standpoint of attacking capital as a whole, not simply one vicious anti-union employer. It is an element missing because of his focus on the unions in manufacturing and logistics.

Moody is very positive about the growth of workers' centres, which have blossomed as part of the immigrant workers' struggles; 122 out of the 137 centres around the country in 2005 dealt specifically with immigrant workers' issues.³³ He rightly notes that, being based in the community, they do not have the 'direct workplace power' that a union represents, instead relying on pressure which often falls back on legal tactics. They are not truly independent but rely on funding from foundations, and we could add that as part of the 'community' and with an NGO structure they represent an admixture of workers and professionals, lawyers and full time staff that are ultimately middle class. Moody rightly cautions against the simplistic approach that 'unions + social movements = an upsurge' stating that such things cannot be manufactured easily.³⁴

However, he does not go much further than cross-union initiatives, such as Jobs with Justice, and living wage campaigns and is largely silent about how they relate to political issues such as race or immigration. For instance, when he refers to the extensive organising in immigrant communities that had to exist to pull off the May Day 2006 political strike, which went beyond working class organisations, his answer is that unions need to be 'aware and respectful of such organisations', seeking a political alliance to which the unions bring their own 'socio-economic agenda'.³⁵ Other political and social movements outside the workplace, Moody ignores, skimming over the antiwar movement, and giving US Labor against the War only a mention. So what is the 'socio-economic agenda' that union activists should bring to these movements, other than organising in workplaces and mobilising workers? Moody does not say.

'Respectful' coalitions with churches, NGOs, and other middle class organisations may be a start, but these forces will ultimately shrink from militant action, so socialists need to build working class forms of action and bring in the strike weapon to transform these united fronts. For instance, in Britain, the platforms of the Stop the War Coalition's mass demonstrations saw the left, like the Socialist Workers Party, 'respectfully' applauding Labour MPs and trade union leaders from several major unions, but they did not demand these leaders call on their own members to strike and blockade the streets as the only way to stop the war.³⁶ An alliance is a starting point, but its goal must be to move beyond protests to mass demos, mass civil disobedience and mass strike action. This means not simply a programme of economic demands, but strike action for political ends. It means also being ready for a struggle with the agents of capital within the communities, just as one needs to struggle against these agents in the trade unions. In the latter, it is the bureaucracy; but in the 'communities' it is the small and not so small business people, the clergy, the 'non-political' NGO organisers. Of course, this is not just a question of denunciation but of showing in practice to their followers the misleadership they are giving.

The question of finding campaigns that orient youth to the workers, including the unemployed, has a critical importance for socialist strategy, and for any effective working class militant or union activist. This is equally necessary and, indeed, will greatly help, unionisation drives. In France, in 2006, the general strikes that the unions mounted around the CPE struggle were inspired by, and reinforced, the mass occupations of universities and schools by French students. If this had combined with the explosions of the marginalised youth from the suburbs (the banlieus), which took place only months before and no doubt contributed to the school strike later, it could have not merely shaken the right wing French government, but brought it down and created a movement that could have blocked the rise of Nicolas Sarkozy, the 'French Thatcher' now attacking union pensions.³⁷ As the anticapitalist movement across the world has showed, young workers, students and the unemployed are a powerful force that can be allied to unionised workers in pursuing their goals, and give their strikes the explosive social power of the streets.

Moody ultimately is dismissive of social movements compared to unions in terms of social change:

'Unions like those in South Africa and Brazil...(that 'ed) played a leading role in the fight for democracy and had close links with the working class communities their members lived in. They acted like movements, not just collective bargaining agents. But these unions, those of the CUT in Brazil and COSATU in South Africa, were based first and foremost in the workplace, which was the source of the cohesion and power that allowed them to lead the broader

movements. They did not lean on the 'community' so much as lead it... It was CUT and COSATU that brought added power to the favelas and townships, not the other way around... Necessarily we always return to the first principle: the power the class possesses by virtue of its place at the heart of capitalist accumulation in the workplace or on-the-job.³⁸

It is true that the COSATU mass 'stayaways' (general strikes) played a central role in undermining the will to resist of the apartheid regime and bringing it down. But it was combined with, and was an integral part of, a political movement that created the crisis in the first place. In fact, the failure of the COSATU unions to create a working class party with a strategy for working class power and socialism, a goal in which tens of thousands of union and youth movement militants actually believed, as against the popular front and stages theory of the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress, not only aborted the development towards socialism but robbed black workers and the rural and township workers of well-paid jobs, decent housing, and the land, too. This is where the stages theory (African capitalism first, later socialism) leads you. In South Africa it has led to a small black bourgeoisie enriching themselves as part of the ruling class, while the mass of black workers continue to suffer.

Just as bad as the unions' failure to play a key role in creating a workers' party is when they end up creating a reformist party, that is, a party that, at decisive moments for capitalism's survival, preserves, rather than overthrows, it. Thus, Moody fails to consider how uncritical support for the Workers' Party (PT) by the militant unions of the Brazilian CUT, led to a neoliberal Lula government. This is of enormous relevance to the US because it makes clear that is not enough just to have a workers' party based on the trade unions. Brazil, in the last two decades, as well as Britain in the entire twentieth century, shows that a reformist workers' party, and reformist governments, represent a break with capitalism in name only.

Moody does not ask how the working class can develop and lead the social or political movements rather than 'respectfully' allying with middle class or bourgeois leaders, who seek to limit the workers' movement to their own goals and demobilise the movement when these are gained or, more usually, as soon as the capitalist order is threatened. The alternative was, and is, the strategy of permanent revolution. But a strategy needs a strategist, a collective human embodiment, a party. It is not a spontaneous process.

This is the real 'socio-economic agenda' that socialists should be advancing; arguing for 'social' movements to base themselves on the working class, its democratic organisations and forms of struggle, as a class with no objective interest in racism, war or exploitation, and with the social power to deal real blows to the governments and bosses responsible for them. That means fighting for a programme of demands around these issues, a programme that calls for forms of struggle, occupations, walkouts, blockades, strikes, self-defence organisations, that can achieve victory and, in the process, energise and inspire thousands of workers to take the activism back into their workplaces. What is needed is not simply the 'addition' of social movements to the trade union movement but, rather, the interplay of movement and union and what demands they jointly raise and fight for. To connect and lead, to fight for a programme that links these campaigns to the struggle for working class power, we need a working class party, and one with a revolutionary programme.

For instance, the US Communist Party led many attempts to organise workers in the South in the 1930s, through a series of campaigns, movements and union organising efforts, from the campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys (1931), anti-lynching campaigns and unemployed councils, to organising sharecroppers alongside rural agricultural wage labourers. They also provided the key activists for the CIO's Steel Workers' Organising Committee (1936) and the unionisation drives of industrial workers, including sit-down strikes.³⁹ Stalinised from the beginning, they were crippled with the Popular Front strategy and turned to support for the Democrats from 1936 onwards, ultimately blocking the road to organising the South and to revolution. Nevertheless, while the working class movement in the South advanced, it did so due to the interplay of political campaigns and economic struggles, which mutually reinforced each other.

Unions first, then a party?

The unions spent over \$100 million on candidates in the run up to the 2004 election, the vast majority for Democrats but some for Republicans and, no doubt, they will top that in the current 2008 elections.⁴⁰ While this shows the

political bankruptcy of both the AFL-CIO and Change To Win bureaucrats, the fact that they can spend such huge sums is a sign of the immense wealth on which the union bureaucracy rests, wealth that could provide not only a war chest for mass organising drives, but to build a political party of the working class. Moody raises a very interesting point about how the spate of union organising slowed down as 2000 approached, when unions turned to the elections and poured money and staff into campaigning for the Democrats.

Moody is in favour of a Labor Party as an alternative to the Democrats. In the 1990s, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers' union leaders canvassed for support for a Labor Party. As a result, four national unions held a convention in 1996 at which 1,367 delegates represented national unions, state-wide unions and many locals, and set up a Labor Party. Moody argues that this Labor Party did not take off because it aimed for growth by gaining more and more national union affiliations, parallel to the union's top-down merger strategy, rather than building from below to get union locals participating. Where chapters were set up, decision making remained in the hands of the national and regional unions' delegates. The founding convention voted not to run candidates in the upcoming elections in 1996 and 1998, for fear of damaging the Clinton government!⁴¹ So, almost immediately, the party was undemocratic, a creature of the union bureaucracy and politically compromised by an invisible alliance with the Democrats.

Now, years later and under pressure from more militant elements, the Labor Party is starting to stand in local elections, with a new state-wide party set up in South Carolina, one of the poorest and most multi-racial states in the US, with 19 local unions, the state AFL-CIO and the Charleston and Columbia central labour councils endorsing the founding meeting.⁴² As Moody says, the potential in the South for organising not just unions but a political, working class alternative to the big business Democrats, is huge.

The refusal of the Labor Party to stand in elections against the Democrats, or to campaign to get the big unions to break from them, is a clear signal that it is fundamentally not serious in its self-proclaimed aim. All of the founding unions continue to support Democratic candidates. A labour party which does not challenge the capitalist parties on this most elementary terrain, even though it talks about aiming to win political power, will not take the first steps. Another major problem is that its programme is not in the slightest anticapitalist or socialist, indeed, it never uses the terms even in a reformist manner. While it has positions like calling for 'full labour rights and civil rights for immigrants,' a free health service for all and is opposed to the Iraq war and occupation, its programme remains a very limited list of reforms within capitalism. It has no notion of transitional demands to fight for in these everyday struggles and link them to the socialist goal, ultimately seeking to turn them into mass revolutionary challenges to capitalism.

Despite its issue-based campaigning (adopted originally as an alternative to standing in elections), the Labor Party has not fomented the kind of struggles that a party representing six national unions comprising two million workers could. In fact, it is not a party of struggle and combat against the capitalist system and union bureaucracy at all. It is an attempt to create a reformist labour party on the British model, a safe political tool of the union bureaucracy and an obstacle to building a revolutionary party.

True, Moody is critical of the Labor Party but with characteristic pragmatism argues that it remains to be seen whether or not it can 'provide a framework or support for experiments and efforts toward independent labour-based political action'. Here he recognises that a new workers' party will take more than the unions: 'It must appeal to the working class as a whole.' But he believes that, before any such initiatives take off, there must first be an upsurge of working class action:

'It seems most likely that the beginnings of an upsurge in direct action in workplaces and communities by a variety of groups will be a prerequisite to independent electoral action... What is required is an increase in actions and their convergence into the bigger stream that amounts to a social movement inside and outside of unions by the active elements of the many pieces of the working class. Leaders and unions cannot manufacture such an upsurge. But neither can they wait for it to happen. The actions of organisations and leaders today can help to lay the basis for bigger things to come, just as inaction, timidity, bureaucracy, or 'more of the same' can stifle them.'⁴³

The idea of creating a movement for a workers' party, though Moody does not use that term, is absolutely correct but,

because he downplays the importance of non-workplace oriented movements and of the radicalised youth, he misses the potential for a political break from the Democrats. Indeed, the Progressive Democrats of America is a backhanded recognition of this danger. It was founded in 2004 precisely to channel the antiwar movement, along with working class discontent on economic issues, back into the Democrat fold, just in time for the presidential campaign of John Kerry, who voted in favour of the war!

Establishing an open, democratic movement for a workers' party that took the lead in the antiwar movement could have won thousands of young supporters and activists and engaged with many different organisations; antiwar, immigrant, youth and anticapitalist, along with previous initiatives such as the Labor Party. The task of militants in the unions was to get the unions and all other campaigns to support the mass antiwar movement, agitate for strikes and for a new party to come out of it; all political questions.

A focus on struggle, not just elections, and real democracy, would have given revolutionaries the best ground on which to win support not only for the tactics necessary to win, but also for the whole programme for the overthrow of capitalism. This potential was not limited to the US but existed in several other countries where mass antiwar struggles (US, Britain, Italy) or working class upsurges (Venezuela, France, Italy) have taken place in the context of discredited popular or social democratic parties.⁴⁴ While we cannot 'manufacture' an upsurge, we have already seen significant political upsurges, the antiwar movement, the Day without Immigrants, and these are the raw material for building a new party just as much as the unions, and both tasks must go hand in hand.

While Moody himself is a socialist, he makes not the slightest comment on what programme and key policies such a party should be founded on. A party is posed here as an organisational tool, an assembly of the various movements, campaigns and unions to stand in elections, with its programme not rising above the average level, reformism, of the constituent parts. Its purpose is to add to, and ultimately crown, their efforts by standing in elections. What is completely missing is the idea of a revolutionary party whose militants seek to build and win leadership of all the mass organisations and movements of the working class and the oppressed and seek to win workers to militant forms of struggle and transitional demands, such as workers' control, that point⁴⁵ to the overthrow of capitalism. The last thing the US working class needs is a reformist party like the British Labour Party! That would not be an advance but an abortion of such a movement.

'Regulate the flow of surplus' or revolution?

All these questions of class, union and party raise the larger question, what is the goal these organisations should fight for?

Kim Moody says the unions need to go beyond the 'line of least resistance' orientation of the current organising drives, focused on 'landlocked' service industries, and to build in manufacturing and logistics that are still growing in the Southern states and outside traditional industrial areas. This way, he argues, workers can bring stronger 'social and economic forces... to the equation of power' which lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation by the big multinationals.⁴⁶ We can start with the workers' centres, immigrant organising efforts and already established pockets of unionism, to create an organising 'equation' of how to begin. There are flaws and omissions in this strategy, as shown above. However, the book ends lamely when Moody concludes that the goal is to build union power to 'regulate capital':

'Membership involvement, leadership accountability, and union democracy are indispensable elements of a power that can be exercised by millions in a place and manner that impacts capital. The occasional recognition or contract strike is important but not enough. The hand and mind of labour must not only be removed from the making, moving and providing of the nation's goods and services at certain times, but must be there to regulate it at any time. This is a regulation in conflict with capital not in partnership with it. It is a power to regulate the flow of the surplus which is capital's lifeblood. This throttle cannot be controlled from insulated headquarters hundreds of miles from the scene. So, strong and vital workplace organisation is the first principle of union revitalisation and new organisation.'⁴⁷

But this sort of power, outside of the temporary upward trajectory of US capitalism during the long post-war boom, is

impossible to maintain, either in a workplace or national strike movement. Workers cannot deal such blows to capital that they hospitalise it, then passively sit back and 'regulate' its lifeblood; they need to drive a stake through its heart by overthrowing it. Capitalists would never tolerate such power for long, and power achieved by struggle in one sector needs to be rolled out to others in a conscious movement for goals that necessarily challenge US capital. On that scale, a revolutionary confrontation is inevitable. This would bring in the armed state, which remains invisible in Moody's account. The history of the US working class, from the Great Upheaval of 1877 through to the recent case of the Charleston Five, black longshore workers arrested in 2000 after a police assault on their picket line, is one of state intervention, once the local bosses lose control.

Moody's book gets ever more vague as it moves towards its conclusion, losing the clarity of his critical analysis demonstrated in the first two thirds. His calls for membership involvement, workplace organisation and so on are like imprecise lenses fixed on a problem, they can't burn a hole through the union bureaucracy and its obstruction 'any 'insulated headquarters' still in existence will do everything they can to stop workers 'regulating the surplus' and upsetting their partnership with the bosses. A rank and file movement, a movement for a working class party, the struggle for a revolutionary transitional programme to become the basis of such a party and to guide the inevitable upsurges of struggle against oppression and exploitation, all this is necessary alongside union organising. Against the examples of Brazil and South Africa as to how unions and class should relate, socialists can place the better example of the Russian revolution, where the struggle developed not only through unions, but primarily through factory committees and councils of delegates from unions, workplaces and working class areas (soviets).

In the current situation of a serious recession, against the backdrop that Moody ably paints of profits squeezed for capital and intense global competitive pressures, struggles will be hard fought, explosive, and must go beyond the workplace and unions to draw the working class in behind them. When movements take off around political questions and spark mass, militant mobilisations, unions must dive into them and seek to back them up with strikes. In this context, some upsurges will have the potential to become revolutionary. Socialists, union militants and activists in the social movements need a strategy to make them so. While it is true that we cannot manufacture upsurges, this is a time of preparing for those that are surely coming, both organisationally and politically.

Moody refers to the 'limited vision of the militants and rebels' of the 1960s labour upsurges and hopes for a clearer vision, but he does not provide it. Instead, he offers a semi-syndicalist solution. His vision of a working class party is, as we have shown, essentially as a co-ordinator of already existing, spontaneous struggles and organisations, rather than the unity of the most far-sighted and dedicated militants around a programme of action to transform these organisations and create new ones to achieve a radical change in society.

The formation of a democratic, combative workers' party, even before it had established its programme, could act as a catalyst for the creation of rank and file movements, labour councils, solidarity committees and militant social movements. Of course, if such a party gelled into a reformist organisation, it would ultimately expel its left wing and become a bloc to a revolutionary party. The point to stress here is that there is no set stage of the class struggle, where workers can limit their tasks to those of militant trade unionism and single-issue campaigning. On the contrary, the current economic crisis will impel workers to form a new party, or go under. The role of consistent socialists is to fight for that party to adopt a revolutionary action programme and an internationalist outlook through force of argument, leadership by example and unity in struggle.

Appendix: Moody and the 'rank and file strategy'

The key to understanding Moody's approach to the question of rank and file organisation is not to be found in US Labour in Trouble and Transition, which presents the tactic without the strategy behind it, but elsewhere, in his paper The Rank and File Strategy: Building a Socialist Movement in the US, written for Solidarity, a non-reformist open network that aims to build 'a broad regrouping of the US left'.⁴⁸

In this paper, he lays out a 'rank and file strategy' to rebuild workplace organisation and militancy, as well as overcome the divide between socialists, with their high level of theory, and workers, especially working class activists organising resistance to bosses and bureaucrats alike. The key to overcoming this gap is the rank and file strategy

which, for Moody, simply means building workers' grassroots organisation, be it a workplace strike movement, a workers' centre in the community organising against low pay, or an oppositional grouping challenging the bureaucracy in the unions from below.

Moody cites the theories of class consciousness of the classical Marxists, Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin. He notes Marx's concept of the working class 'in itself', a class of exploited wage-earners that exists as an objective fact, as opposed to as a class 'for itself', a class that has become conscious of itself, of its true, exploitative relationship to capitalism, and of the consistent alternative to this, a complete overthrow of the conditions of society and its transformation into a society of producers, without classes and state and with the economy democratically planned by producers for need not profit; in a word, communism.

Lenin's equally sharply presented dichotomy of class consciousness flows from Marx's concept but focuses it further. He noted that struggle showed that trade union consciousness does arise spontaneously in the working class but, as it does not ultimately present a programme to overthrow capitalism but an ideology to work within it for reforms and concessions on wages, hours, pensions etc., this spontaneous consciousness is reformist, not revolutionary. It does not break the membrane of bourgeois ideology and is still, no matter how self-identifying of class or militant in action, a bourgeois consciousness. Only a party committed to the armed, revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and a workers' state based on workers' own bodies of struggle, factory committees, councils (or soviets, as they were called in Russia), militias, can develop a consistent socialist programme. Its fight for this programme in the working class and in its struggles, therefore, brings socialist ideas into the working class, 'from the outside'.

Centrists have always rebelled against this formulation by Lenin's formulation of this in his major work *'What is to be Done?'* and Moody is no exception.⁴⁹ He states (wrongly) that Lenin rejected his own formulation, and then seeks to improve Marx and Lenin. He turns the 'class in itself' into a lower level, intermediary type of class consciousness, where workers are conscious of class but not revolutionary. So, according to Moody, most US workers are not even class conscious at this level, there is not even a Labour or Social Democratic Party in the US, unlike many imperialist countries, but at some third level of total non-class consciousness, hence the isolation from socialists:

'The task of socialists in this situation is not simply to offer an alternative ideology, a total explanation of the world, but to draw out the class consciousness that makes such bigger ideas realistic. The notion of a transitional set of ideas is key to this strategy. The socialist analysis of capitalism and what capitalism is doing to workers today relates directly to the daily experiences of more and more working class people. But the fact that the vast majority of working people lack even a consistently class conscious way of looking at the world makes it difficult for socialism to get a hearing. The gaping lack in the US at this time is the lack of a sea of class conscious workers for socialist ideas and organisations to swim in. How do we help create that sea (with all due respect to Mother Nature)? Socialists can build transitional organisations and struggles that help to raise the class consciousness of activist workers, in order to enlarge the layer of workers in the class who are open to socialist ideas. The existence of a strong current of active, class conscious workers is a precondition for the development of a strong current of socialist workers ' and a socialist party. We need to be, at the same time, bringing our socialist ideas directly to workers who are already ready to hear them, and also helping to create the struggles that produce more such workers. Such struggles and such organisations are expressions of worker self-activity and self-interest. But capitalism attempts to demobilise and disempower workers; our experience is that it often takes people trained in organization, with a commitment and perspective of worker organisation ' that is, socialists ' to take the lead in pulling ongoing organisation together.

'Transitional organisations include rank and file reform movements and caucuses rooted in the workplace and the unions.'⁵⁰

These paragraphs provide the key to Moody's centrist strategy. On a three-stage schema of consciousness (non-class consciousness, class consciousness, socialist consciousness) that breaks with the conception of Marx and Lenin, Moody erects a theory; the task of the rank and file organisations and class struggles is to raise workers' struggles and organisations to the point where more and more are class conscious, creating a pool of workers that can grasp and accept socialist ideas. In practice, this means dropping revolutionary socialist ideas. US Labour in Trouble and

Transition is clearly a guide to class conscious activists on how to build unions and class organisation on the road to 'workers' power', without mentioning revolution once!

Of course, it is a sign of the backwardness of sections of the US working class and the terrible degeneracy of its unions that these stress that workers are middle class! Although it is true that a 'current of active, class-conscious workers' (or vanguard to use the Marxist term) is necessary, socialists need to argue openly with them for the tactics and forms of organisation that can transform their struggles, and that link these to the struggle for socialism. Such 'transitional demands', as Trotsky called them, are part of a revolutionary strategy and flow from it. According to Moody:

'This strategy starts with the experience, struggles, and consciousness of workers as they are today, but offers a bridge to a deeper class consciousness and socialist politics. Most of all, it is a strategy for ending the isolation of socialists and socialist organisations from the day-to-day struggles and experiences of the organised sections of the working class. It is not a panacea, a quick fix, nor guaranteed of success. The strategy does not assume that socialist consciousness flows automatically from 'economic' struggles. If it did, no strategy would be necessary.'⁵¹

Moody takes Trotsky's term 'transitional' and his analogy of the 'bridge' to workers' reformist consciousness, just as he uses Marx's and Lenin's concepts, but then guts them of their original meaning and radicalism. Transitional demands start from an everyday struggle of workers, job losses, price hikes, attacks on rights and so on, and link them to the need for new forms of workers' organisation and the transformation of old forms in order not just to generalise struggles but also to fight for workers' control over some aspect of the capitalist system. In its programme, the League for the Fifth International puts it like this:

'The immediate struggles of the working class need to be transformed, so that they address immediate needs and challenge the power of the capitalists as a whole. They need to attack the fundamental pillars of the bosses' power - the 'right to hire and fire', 'business secrecy', the 'right of management to manage', control of the work process, ownership and disposal of workplaces and resources... The programme of transitional demands acts as a bridge between the daily partial struggles of the working class and the struggle for socialist revolution. These demands are both the most effective way to resist the capitalists and a challenge to the essence of the system itself... Transitional demands promote the formation of new organisations of working class control, directly challenging capitalist ownership and management. They help transform the organisations of the workers' movement and the consciousness of the workers. Each transitional demand embodies a fight for some element of direct workers' control over the workplace and society as a whole.'⁵²

Demands that meet our needs and provide a class solution, whether 'radical' or not: so nationalise firms going bankrupt without compensation to the bosses, and under workers' and consumers' control. Fight for a sliding scale of wages when inflation threatens, and price committees to set prices and enforce them in shops.⁵³ Struggles that adopt such means and seize control of what is normally under the capitalists' control will cause further crisis and, in the words of the Communist Manifesto, 'will compel the proletariat to go further and further until private property has been completely abolished, in order not to lose again what it has already won. They are possible as preparatory steps, temporary, transitional stages towards the abolition of private property.'⁵⁴

The task of Socialists is not just to work with other activists in united fronts in the workplace, in strikes, in social movements and in the unions around restricted gains but, simultaneously, to argue through a revolutionary party for such transitional demands, agitating directly to the class, in its organisations and struggles. The revolutionary programme is a guide to action linking today's struggles to its goal with the aim of educating the vanguard of activists in what is necessary immediately and in the need for socialism, along with the tasks to achieve it.

In reality, there is not a single transitional demand anywhere in Moody's US Labour in Trouble and Transition. A rank and file movement is a demand in the transitional programme, certainly, but the various campaigns, including the unions and caucuses that Moody outlines, are united fronts, not transitional organisations. There is nothing automatically transitional at all about them, as the experience of union reform caucuses in the 1960s shows; without a conscious transitional approach, won by revolutionaries openly fighting for such demands, these organisations end up

reformist and fail to achieve their goals of transforming the unions, or even defending their members from capitalism's attacks.

Endnotes

- 1 Kim Moody, 2006, Table 6.2, p. 100m, Labour in Trouble and Transition
- 2 Table 3.3 'Real value added in Manufacturing: South and US?', p. 44 Moody shows 13.2 per cent in 1947 rising to 30.7 per cent in 2003; as employed workers 34 per cent in 2003 on p. 46; union density figures p. 245
- 3 Moody, 2006, pp 24-25
- 4 'Inequality in America?', Economist, Jun 15th 2006
- 5 Moody 2006, pp. 34-35
- 6 2.9 million manufacturing jobs since January 2001. 'The Bush Administration's FY 2007 Budget, AFL-CIO, <http://www.aflcio.org/issues/bushwatch/2007budget.cfm> [1]
- 7 Moody 2006, wages Table 5.1 p. 80, benefits p. 81
- 8 'UNION MEMBERS IN 2007?', Bureau of Labour Standards. Table 1. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by selected characteristics, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t01.htm> [2]
- 9 Moody 2006, pp 72, 76
- 10 Moody 2006, p. 48
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- 26 Moody 2006, pp. 87-8
- 27 Moody 2006, pp. 212-213
- 28 Reforming the Orange State?, Trotskyist International No. 13/14, April/Sept 1994: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/reforming-orange-state> [8]
- 29 see 'Preface to French and German Editions' and Chapter VIII. 'Parasitism and Decay of Capitalism' in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin 1916 ? <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/index.htm> [9]
- 30 <http://www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/why/uniondifference/uniondiff17.cfm> [10]
- 31 'Justice for Cleaners?', <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,1186,0,0,1,0>; [11] The unions passing a No Borders position are the National Union of Journalists and previously the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) which however has now merged with another union to form the University and College Union, it is unknown whether the new merger has retained this position.

32 As the Clinton and AFL-CIO quotes show above, 'labour' is the preferred term to the US ruling class and union bureaucracy because, besides reflecting the institutionalised nature of the unions in modern day capitalism, it allows the US use of the term 'middle class' to describe better paid workers and divides the working class ideologically.

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34 Moody 2006, p. 237

35 Moody 2006, p. 236

36 Organise against the war ? and the TUC leaders, Workers Power 274 ? April 2003, Teachers strike against the war Workers Power 274 ? April 2003, <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?wp274> [12]

37 The situation after April- with an all out general strike everything is possible! 07 April 2006, statement by League for a Fifth International, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/situation-after-april-all-out-...> [13]

38 Moody 2006, p. 236-7

39 Robin D.G. Kelly, 1990, p. 144, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression

40 Kris Maher, 'Unions Bolster Election Budgets', Wall Street Journal, September 22, 2007

41 Moody 2006, pp. 241-3

42 South Carolina Labor Party Founding Meeting, www.thelaborparty.org [14]

43 Moody 2006, p. 245

44 'Let's not bottle the fight for a new workers' party?', Workers Power 319 ? October 2007; <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,1430,0,0,1,0> [15]

45 'The nature of transitional demands?' in From Protest to Power: A Manifesto for World Revolution, League for a Fifth International, 2004: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/protest-power-manifesto-world-...> [16] For a more in depth examination of the Transitional Programme, see The Transitional Programme fifty years on, Permanent Revolution No. 7, Spring 1988: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/transitional-programme-fifty-y...> [17]

46 Moody 2006, pp. 229-231

47 Moody 2006, pp.234-5

48 <http://www.solidarity-us.org/rankandfilestrategy> [7]

49 Centrism is a definition coined by Trotsky to describe those socialist groups that vacillate between revolutionary positions and reformist actions in practice. For a typical example of a centrist rejection of Lenin's ideas on consciousness, see 'What is to be done? The question economism cannot answer?', in The Socialist Workers Party: A Trotskyist critique: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/node/1026> [18]

50 2000, Moody

51 2000, Moody

52 'The nature of transitional demands?' in From Protest to Power: A Manifesto for World Revolution, League for a Fifth International, 2004: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/protest-power-manifesto-world-...> [5]

53 'Marxism, nationalisation and expropriation?', Workers Power 312 ? February 2007, <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=141,1243,0,0,1,0;> [19] Spotlight on the fight against inflation, Workers Power 322 ? February 2008, <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=158,1522,0,0,1,0> [20]

54 p.32, 'Programme in the Imperialist Epoch?', Permanent Revolution, No. 6, Autumn 1987.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.aflcio.org/issues/bushwatch/2007budget.cfm>

[2] <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t01.htm>

[3] <http://www.labornotes.org/node/513>

[4] <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>

[5] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/protest-power-manifesto-world-revolution>

[6] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/key-documents/marxism-and-trade-unions>

[7] <http://www.solidarity-us.org/rankandfilestrategy>

- [8] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/reforming-orange-state>
- [9] <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/index.htm>
- [10] <http://www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/why/uniondifference/uniondiff17.cfm>
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- [16] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/protest-power-manifesto-world-revolution;>
- [17] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/transitional-programme-fifty-years>
- [18] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/node/1026>
- [19] <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=141,1243,0,0,1,0;>
- [20] <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=158,1522,0,0,1,0>
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