

# Black Workers' Power

Fifth Estate Collective

1969

Another letter has been engraved on the tombstone of the dying United Auto Workers bureaucracy as 300 members of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers gathered outside Cobo Hall Sunday morning, Nov. 9, to protest the racist practices of the UAW leadership.

The demonstration was to coincide with the UAW special convention to be concluded on Nov. 9. UAW president Walter Reuther, however, in an attempt to avert a confrontation with the militant rank-and-file movement arranged for the convention to be terminated on the previous evening.

A caucus fighting for a program of retirement for workers after thirty years of employment met instead and listened to Reuther try to co-opt dissent within the union with desperate pleas, for unity. The move was expertly timed- and the convention hall was cleared by 10:30 am, one-half hour before the League demonstration was to begin.

The protest occurred as planned despite Reuther's maneuvering with black workers setting up a picket in front of Cobo Hall chanting "Black Workers Power" and "Behead the Redhead."

After 45 minutes of picketing at the convention site, it was decided that the demonstration would be moved to Solidarity House, offices of the international union where Walter and Co. were meeting.

John Watson, central staff member of the League, told the revolutionary union members that they must go to the union headquarters "to let Reuther know that there is no way he can escape the wrath of black workers in the UAW."

The picket reformed at Solidarity House, on East Jefferson and for an hour black nationalist flags flew at the entrance gate as black workers marched in front of the sterile office building where the pig bureaucrats hid behind tightly locked and heavily guarded doors.

While the demonstrations ended peacefully, pigs from the Detroit Police Force took the move from Cobo Hall to Solidarity House as their cue to isolate and harass individuals from the demonstration. The cops expressed their undying allegiance to the alliance between the union bureaucrats and the corporation bosses as they arrested Timothy Lasky on bogus charges of armed robbery and carrying a concealed weapon and searched and harassed Eric Edwards in a nearby parking-lot. Both men are members of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

Edwards said that the rollers "gave no reason" for the harassment and denounced them as "fascist honky pigs." Lasky was later released as no evidence was had to substantiate the contrived charges against him.

The UAW convention had been called under the pretext of raising money for strike benefits. Mike Hamlin, also a member of the central staff of the League, repudiated this as an attempt by the bureaucracy to squeeze more money out of the membership that they would never see.

He stated that "we are all in favor of higher strike benefits for brothers struggling against the tyranny of the auto bosses, but we know that Reuther and his boys really are not concerned with the welfare of their own rank and file. Quite to the contrary, workers who attempt to strike and carry on strong struggles against racism, for higher wages and better working conditions, find that they must fight their own union leadership as resolutely as they do the company."

In an open letter to Reuther, the League stated the specific objectives of Sunday's demonstration: to expose UAW racist. practices; to expose UAW sweetheart union practices (collaboration with the company); to expose totalitarian control of the UAW by the Reuther machine; to present a list of demands for the redress of grievances (end harassment of black workers, fight production speed-ups, fiscal responsibility to the black community); to unite all black workers in the struggle to dispose of the present union leadership.

The letter went on to reveal the racist history and practices of the UAW and to blast Reuther: "There is no doubt that the UAW is run by a gang of white racists led by yourself. After 30 years of struggle the UAW still has an executive board which is 92% white dominated, the skilled trades are virtually closed to blacks; the international reps are 95% white, and the international staff is 90% white. Black workers are still the last hired, first fired, rarely promoted and work at the hardest, dirtiest, noisiest, most dangerous jobs in the industry."



Fifth Estate Collective  
Black Workers' Power  
1969

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/92-november-13-26-1969/black-workers-power>  
Fifth Estate #92, November 13-26, 1969

**[fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net)**