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# Black Working Class Radicalism In Detroit, 1960-1970

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## **Black Radical Leadership**

Race and class struggles in the U.S.A. were concretely expressed at their highest levels in Detroit during the turbulent 1960s when Black nationalism was strong and the New Left was growing. The political confluence of these two movements produced the DODGE Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), which represented one of the most radical tendencies in America during that era.

This paper examines and explores the cultural aspects of radicalism among Black automobile workers in Detroit in the 1960s from the vantage point of autobiographical experience and a Marxian framework. It considers some of the cultural factors that accounted for the emergence of a revolutionary Black workers' organization. Among those factors were the history and lifestyles of the factory workers, and the roles that young Black Marxists played in building a radical organization.

Among the critical issues that DRUM addressed were the efficacy of an all Black union as opposed to a Black caucus within a White dominated union, and the effectiveness of various strategies for dealing with White workers, White union officials, and White managers of corporations. To provide a historical context and analytical framework to discuss these major issues, which were historic in origin, and to comprehend the depth of them requires us to review, however briefly, the history of organized labor in America and the attempts of Black workers to gain influence in the labor movement and equality in the workplace.

## **Early History of Labor Movement**

Since slavery Black workers have made collective efforts to better their condition through participation in the American labor movement. But this has always been difficult because of anti-Black racism. The anti-Black hostility in the American labor movement has deep historical roots. Contrary to the image of unions as promoters of interracial unity and class solidarity, their history demonstrates that they largely share the same racist values and attitudes as the rest of

American society. As we shall see, White workers, in general, viewed Black workers as lower-wage competitors who threatened the security of their jobs and the social status of their occupations rather than as working class brothers. And their labor unions either excluded Black workers or segregated them in subordinate structures or relegated them to secondary roles.

The first national labor organization, the National Labor Union which was founded in 1866, adopted a segregationist policy which provided for the subordinate affiliation of separate Black unions. Two other early unions formed in 1869, the Colored National Union which was organized by Black workers, and the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor which was White controlled, called for the unity of workers without regard to race or color. Although the Knights of Labor in some instances did attempt to unify Black and White workers in some struggles, Black workers remained subject to White chauvinism and control.

Succeeding the Knights of Labor in terms of prominence was the American Federation of Labor (AFL) which was established in 1881 and continues to be a major force in organized labor today. Like its predecessors, it too subordinated Black workers into segregated affiliates (Foster, 1973). Perhaps the only major White controlled union that made the sincerest effort to eliminate racial barriers in its structure was the Industrial Workers of the World which was founded in 1905 (Foner, 1974).

### **Black Unionism**

In the 1920s, the first influential national Black union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was established under the leadership of a Black socialist, A. Philip Randolph, and affiliated with the AFL. Although it had some successes in improving the conditions of its members, the edge of its militancy was dulled by the White leadership of the AFL.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Black radical unionists, some of whom were Communists, made several attempts to organize Black workers and influence White workers. In 1925 they organized the American Negro Labor Congress which called for "militant methods of struggle on the part of Negro workers and farmers, in alliance with class conscious White workers" (Alkalimat, 1984, p.134). However, its call for a united front against the segregated unions and the capitalist class went unheeded. Not surprisingly, it was also condemned by the AFL. Other attempts by the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the Unemployed Councils, and the National Negro Congress to establish radical Black working class organizations in the 1930s met the same fate (Alkalimat, 1984).

What at first appeared to be a White hope in the union movement in the latter 1930s turned out to be another illusion of interracial solidarity in class struggle. The emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1937, which included the most progressive White forces in the labor movement and Black workers, suggested that a significant segment of organized labor was ready to present a united front against conservative White unions and corporate power. However, as Alkalimat noted, during the 1940s and 1950s the most progressive White unionist in the CIO were labeled unpatriotic communist sympathizers and expelled. By 1955 a more conservative CIO merged with an even more conservative AFL (Alkalimat, 1984).

Realizing again the need for a militant progressive organization to advance their interest, Black workers formed the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC) in 1951 to fight against discrimination on the job and racism within the unions. When they used diplomatic approaches in dealing with White union leaders, they were rebuffed time and again. Furthermore, for advocating the election and appointment of Blacks to higher union leadership positions, they were denounced as advocates of reverse racism. In the political climate of the 1950s, which was marked by anti-communist hysteria, virtually any group that challenged the status-quo was automatically labeled a communist group. In 1956 the NNLC had to appear before the Subversive Activities Control Board to defend itself against charges that it was a Communist-front organization. Rather than allowing itself to be withered away by legal expenses, a common tactic used by the U.S. government to cripple or destroy progressive organizations, the NNLC voted to dissolve itself.

But the problems for Black workers did not fade away. Racism at the work site as well as in the labor unions persisted. However, a growing defiant mood was manifested in the Black community as evidenced by the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and the beginning of the student sit-in movement in February 1960. The fire of Black assertiveness spread among organized Black workers and in May 1960, Black AFL-CIO unionist at the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) created the Negro American Labor Council (NALC) to pressure the White leadership of the AFL-CIO to eliminate racism. Predictably, the White union leaders, using the time-worn tactic of blaming the victim, responded by charging the NALC with creating a division between White workers and Black workers.

Nevertheless, the NALC was strengthened by the rise in Black consciousness and militancy during the 1960s and it joined with the major civil rights organizations (NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) and led the 1963 March on Washington to demand full employment policies and an end to racial discrimination.

From this historical sketch of the history of the struggle between Black workers and organized White labor we should be able to comprehend the depth of the problems that DRUM had with the White controlled United Automobile Workers whose acronym UAW came to mean " You Ain't White" to Black workers. The White officialdom of the UAW was a foe of DRUM.

### **Racism and the UAW**

Although the UAW claimed to be the champion of justice and racial equality, its own almost exclusively White executive structure and racist practices betrayed just the opposite. In the 1960s, Walter Reuther, the head of the UAW, fostered the illusion that the UAW was a progressive union that was supportive of the civil rights movement by making it a point of personally participating in highly publicized demonstrations and marches led by Martin Luther King. But he did little to check the rampant racism practiced in his union or the factories. Thus Black workers had to confront racism on two major fronts.

## **Family Background**

Who were the Black workers and organizers who founded DRUM? Essentially, they were Black proletarians with southern roots. To answer this question more fully, I will draw upon my own experience to some extent. My family history was typical of the backgrounds of most Black workers who worked in the auto industry in the 1960s. My parents, who sought a better life, were part of the large migration of Black people from the South to the industrial North in the 1940s. My father worked in auto plants on- and-off depending on the fluctuations of the business cycle. As the son of an auto worker growing up in a working class family during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, I observed and experienced the life style of a significant segment of the Black working class.

The cultural background of my parents was Southern, characterized by fairly tight kinship relations, limited formal education--generally not exceeding high school, and manual labor. Most Black auto workers during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s were Southern born. However, significantly, in the 1960s there was an influx of the first generation of young Black workers who were raised in the North. It was these workers, less compliant and submissive to White authority than their parents, who became the backbone of DRUM. They were part of my generation who experienced and observed the humiliating racial segregation in our daily lives. We were routinely assigned to the lower academic track in the Detroit public schools regardless of ability or skills; we were not welcomed in many downtown restaurants; we were only offered the most menial jobs; we were harassed daily and brutalized frequently by a virtually all-White police force; and we were blatantly discriminated in housing and health care.

These oppressive conditions of daily life contradicted the golden image of a fair, democratic, equality based America, which was created and fostered by the media and the schools we attended. This contradiction was especially glaring to us during the height of the cold war. The cold war propaganda of the U.S. during the 1950s and 60s which negatively portrayed the Soviet Union and China as dictatorial police states in which people were devalued and their basic freedoms were denied seemed to some of us to be an accurate description of the life of Black people in the U.S. The hypocrisy of American style democracy intensified our anger and pushed some of us toward an activist orientation. If the U.S. government was willing to engage in nuclear warfare with the possibility of destroying the planet in the name of "protecting freedom" then why shouldn't we be willing to fight for our own freedom in America? This question reflected the sentiments of the first wave of activists of my generation.

A few of my working class peers and I were fortunate to attend college right after high school graduation. Generally, we were the first in our families to go to college. I began my college career at the end of the Eisenhower era of conservative conformity and status quo racism. I went through high school as an angry Black student who was interested in socialist ideas and social change. However, my socialist leanings did not come from exposure to socialist literature, but rather from my egalitarian values and my repugnance to capitalist values. In my first year of college in 1960, the Black college students in the South who led the sit-in movement served as the inspiration and the role model for me to become an activist.

At Wayne State University I was attracted to socialist groups, which advocated struggle against racism and capitalism. It was through my contacts with these groups that I met young people

who were interested in fighting racism through direct action. Together with a few of my Black friends whom I met on campus, we organized the Detroit Chapter of the Friends of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee in 1961 and participated in Civil Rights demonstrations in both the South and the North. However, most of us who were Black did not subscribe to the philosophy of nonviolence nor to the belief that racism and social inequality could be abolished within a capitalist system. Subsequently, we organized several radical student based organizations including the Black Action Committee and Uhuru. Our activities were directed mainly against racial discriminatory practices of businesses in the Black community.

By 1963, there was a core of us who strongly identified with the world-wide socialist revolutionary movement, especially in Cuba and China. Four of us in Uhuru, in defiance of the U.S. travel ban to Cuba, visited Cuba in 1964 to express our solidarity with the Cuban revolution. After our inspirational visit to Cuba we intensified our struggle against U.S. imperialism and racism. In the Black community, we led a militant anti-draft campaign against the Vietnam War , and we organized and led numerous demonstrations against police brutality and businesses that did not employ Black people or restricted them to low level jobs.

Through the 1960s, racial tension continued to build in Detroit until the great upheaval in 1967, which was the biggest and bloodiest Black rebellion in the 1960s. It was in the aftermath of this spontaneous rebellion that we radical Black activists established the Inner City Voice (ICV), a monthly newspaper designed to radicalize and organize the Black community. We wanted to build a broad based organization comprised mainly of workers and students. Our plan was to build a revolutionary political party based on organized Black workers for the purpose of struggling against racism and capitalism. Our vision was a revolutionary transformed America free of racism and capitalism, a society based on humanitarian and egalitarian values.

Our rationale for focusing primarily on Black auto workers was that we understood that the auto industry was vital to the U.S. economy, and that black auto workers played a critical role in production. Thus, we reasoned that an organized force of Black auto workers, by virtue of their strategic position and labor power, could effectively make political demands. Moreover, we believed that organized Black workers, more than any other segment of our community, constituted the force with the greatest power to pressure the ruling capitalist class for social change.

We also understood the significance of the material basis for Black consciousness and Black solidarity. Furthermore, we knew that residential segregation, industrial segregation, occupational segregation, and work-shift segregation had created the concrete conditions which dictated the range of effective strategies for organizing Black workers in our community.

The emergence of DRUM in Detroit in the 1960s can be partly explained by the characteristics of the city, especially its Black community. Detroit is an industrial city whose rhythm is influenced by the throb of the production of vehicles in the automobile plants. Industrial capitalism imposed an assembly line discipline on the city and fostered a concrete life of nuts and bolts: go-to-work, rest, back-to-work, party on the weekend, repeat. The physical intensity and monotony of assembly line work shaped the life styles and attitudes of Black workers and made them receptive to appeals for militancy and change.

## The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM)

Our first organization of Black workers was called The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). The principle organizer of DRUM was a ICV cadre member with a student history of radicalism who was employed at Chrysler's Dodge assembly plant in Hamtramck, a small city completely surrounded by Detroit. To provide a context for the emergence of DRUM, we should consider the concrete conditions that existed in 1968, conditions that generally prevailed throughout all industries.

At the Dodge assembly plant, Black workers constituted an estimated 60 percent of the work force, and virtually all were in low skilled and semi-skilled positions (See power structure figure). Black workers were almost invariably assigned to the most onerous and lowest paying jobs. Generally, as the proportion of Black workers grew in the factory, the working conditions tended to deteriorate. Tasks that had been performed by two White workers were assigned to one Black worker. Black workers characterized this as niggermentation.

These harsh conditions in the plant reminded Black workers of their legacy of centuries of oppression under slavery. It was common for Black workers to use the analogy of the plantation to describe their awful working conditions and servile Black workers (toms) who kissed-up to their White bosses.

<b>Plant power structure</b>
General Mangers
Middle Level Managers
Technical Experts
Administrative Support
<b>Production Boundary Line</b>
Plant Supervisors
Foremen
Skilled Workers
Semi-skilled Workers
<b>Concentration of Black Workers</b>
Low –skilled Workers

**FROM COTTON PLANTATION TO AUTOMOBILE PLANTATION: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

	<b>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL</b>	
<b>Social Aspect</b>	<b>Black Slave</b>	<b>Black Worker</b>
Labor rights	Legally none	Freedom to refuse work, but no right to work
Market value	Commodity	Labor power
Right to organize	None	Limited
Remuneration	None	Under paid
Autonomy	None	Little

	<b>SYSTEM LEVEL</b>	
<b>Social Aspect</b>	<b>Plantation</b>	<b>Industrial Plant</b>
Supervision	Close/Oppressive	Close/Oppressive
Political	Totalitarian	Authoritarian
Work	Monotonous /Hard	Monotonous /Strenuous
Racial	White dominance	White dominance

From the 1940s, when Chrysler began to hire significant numbers of Blacks as a result of a White labor shortage during WWII, to the 1960s, there had been virtually no vertical movement of Black workers in its plants. It was not until Chrysler felt the pressure of the civil rights movement that it began to hire a token number of Black men for white collar positions. And even then most of the positions were entry-level and non-supervisory.

The inception of DRUM can be marked by a specific incident. On May 2, 1968, a walkout occurred at the Hamtramck Assembly plant, which stemmed from a gradual speed up of the production line. This sparked a walkout and prompted some workers to set up picket lines around the gates. The company reacted by sending out photographers to take pictures of the picketers. These pictures were used as evidence against some of the workers who were discharged or disciplined for taking part in the walkout and picketing. Both Black and White workers were involved in the walkout. However, disciplinary action was primarily taken against the Black workers. The Black workers maintained that it was the company itself that was responsible for the walkout because it had violated the labor contract.

The ICV cadre member who worked in the plant and his fellow Black workers who were either dismissed or penalized moved to organize all the Black workers at the Dodge plant by using a weekly newsletter (the Drum newsletter) as an organizing tool. The contents of the newsletter dealt with very specific cases of racism and tomism on the job and stressed the necessity of united action on the part of Black workers to abolish the racial aspects of exploitation and degradation at the plant.



The workers' reaction to the first issue was enthusiastic acceptance. They were somewhat astounded to see the truth in print. Most considered the newsletter a move in the right direction. Predictably, the managers reacted with hostility. They were so blinded by their racist stereotype image of Black people that it was hard for them to believe that the DRUM newsletter was written by Black workers. In other words, management could not conceive of Blacks initiating and carrying out an intelligent program.

In the second issue of the DRUM newsletter several toms at the plant were exposed. The Black workers were impressed. The DRUM newsletter had gotten over in a big way. Thereafter, the Black workers eagerly looked for the DRUM newsletter every week. Amazingly, after each distribution, not one newsletter could be found thrown away or lying around.

After the third week, when Black workers began to ask about joining DRUM, the members of DRUM working in the plant began to systematically proselytize and recruit Black workers on the job. The strength and influence of DRUM grew tremendously in a short time. Around the sixth week, the more militant workers wanted to take direct action against Chrysler and the UAW. At this point the editors of the Drum newsletter decided to test their strength. Therefore, they called for a one-week boycott of two bars outside the plant gate because these bars did not hire Blacks, although they were patronized by a large number of Black workers.

The boycott was a great success; DRUM received about 95 percent cooperation. This was achieved without the use of picketers or picket signs. As a further test of strength, DRUM called for an extension of the boycott. Again DRUM received solid support. This indicated that the Black workers were ready to collectively challenge the company with a strike.

DRUM knew that most workers would be temporarily laid off the coming week because of preparations for a model change over, re-tooling for the production of new 1969 models. There was also a bill-out date at which time a certain number of units had to be produced. DRUM, therefore, planned to shut down the plant right before the bill-out date to back up the schedule of the change over period. The purpose of the strike was to demonstrate DRUM's strength and show Chrysler that DRUM had to be taken seriously.

DRUM began the first phase of its five-phased action plan by specifying in their newsletter the grievous conditions at Hamtramck Assembly where an estimated 60 percent of the work force was Black, and by putting forth several non-negotiable demands which addressed the following grievances:

#### **Phase I**

##### **THE DRUM NEWSLETTER - Volume 1, Number 2:**

1. 95% of all foremen in the plants are White.
2. 99% of all general foremen are White.
3. 100% of all plant superintendents are White.
4. 90% of all skilled tradesmen are White.
5. 90% of all apprentices are White.
6. That systematically all of the easier jobs in the plant are held by Whites.
7. Whenever Whites are on harder jobs they have helpers.

8. When Black workers miss a day from work they are required to bring two doctors' excuses as to why they missed work.

9. That seniority is also a racist concept, since Black workers were systematically denied employment for years at this plant.

## **Phase II: Mobilization of Forces**

On Thursday of the ninth week, DRUM implemented phase II of its strategy by holding a mobilization rally in a parking lot across from the plant. Various support groups from the Black community were represented at the rally including a conga group which set a Black nationalist tone. Their support had been enlisted by DRUM members who were well connected through friendship and kinship with different types of groups in the community.

Several DRUM leaders articulated their demands and called for action. They denounced the UAW for its racist practices and its collusion with Chrysler. One of their demands was that the seven workers fired from their jobs as a result of a walkout on May 2, 1968, be reinstated. Under pressure, the UAW got five of the seven re-hired. But the other two could not be reinstated, the UAW claimed, because of some technicality. However, the fact was that the two who were not reinstated were leaders of DRUM.

The leaders also rapped about the wretched conditions in the plant and their resolve to do something about them. The response to their raps was inspiring. After the raps about 300 of those attending the rally marched, chanting slogans, two blocks to the UAW local No. 3. DRUM had carefully planned the protest march to coincide with the local UAW executive board meeting. When the workers arrived at the local, they then proceeded into the building. One UAW flunky tried to prevent the workers from entering the room where the executive board was meeting. He said something about signing in, closed meeting, etc., but the angry workers ignored him and forced their way into a posh, air conditioned room where the meeting was taking place. The sight of a room full of greasy, hard-looking, angry Black workers shook up the "buttoned-down" executive board. The contrast was striking between the Black workers in their "slave" blue coveralls and their mostly White UAW "representatives" dressed in their expensive mohair suits.

The panic-stricken executive board immediately canceled their meeting and suggested that a general meeting be held in the auditorium. At the general meeting the DRUM leaders criticized the UAW for working hand-in-glove with the profit-hungry corporation and excoriated it for failing to address the workers' grievances. In response to the irrefutable facts they laid out, Ed Liska, the lame president of local 3, tried to defend the UAW by using a weak pro-capitalist line. He expressed resignation regarding the more powerful position of Chrysler vis-à-vis the UAW, but he praised Chrysler for providing good jobs for workers. Charles Brooks, vice president of local 3, who was characterized by DRUM as a sly uncle tom, attempted the impossible by trying to identify with the Black workers while backing up his White Boss. Seeing that the meeting was futile, DRUM served notice that they were going to fight the UAW and close down the plant.

### **Phase III: Operation Shut Down**

Friday, the next day, at 5 o'clock in the morning DRUM and supporting community groups turned the Black workers away at the gate. No attempt was made to interfere with the White workers. An hour later practically all of the Black workers on the 6 o'clock shift were milling around the gate listening to speeches by DRUM leaders and spying the few toms who went into the plant.

Most of the White workers reported to work after they saw it was safe for them to go through the gate. Those who remained out did so for various reasons. Some believed in honoring picket lines, a few were sympathetic, and still others simply did not want to work that day anyway.

### **Phase IV: Drum Leaders Challenge UAW Bureaucrats**

Before noon, six DRUM leaders went to the UAW local and met again with Ed Liska and his staff to negotiate from a position of strength and power. In this meeting DRUM again voiced their grievances and stated that racism must be erased both at Chrysler and the UAW. They pointed out that there were over 3,000 angry Black workers standing outside the gate because they were resolutely opposed to the racist policy of Chrysler and tired of the oppressive conditions in the plant. Liska promised that he would take the grievances and demands to the international UAW board and the local plant manager. The DRUM leaders said that they were being accommodating by coming to the local with their grievances, but warned Liska that if he did not get positive results from his meetings with the UAW international board or Chrysler, the only honorable thing left for him and his incompetent staff to do would be to respectfully step down.

### **The Foe in Blue**

After the meeting the DRUM leaders returned to the area where the Black workers were massed. They reported what occurred in the meeting with the UAW officials and read their demands which, were endorsed by a roaring applause. At this time the Hamtramck police started massing opposite the workers. After putting on tear gas masks and tightening their grip on their clubs they stood ready to attack. A tom detective then came forward and ordered the workers to disperse. DRUM leaders reacted by skillfully organizing the workers and supporters into car pools to transport them to Chrysler's headquarters which was located about five miles away in the City of Highland Park.

### **Phase V: Drum Leaders Confront Chrysler Captains**

When at least 250 Black workers and community group members, many dressed in their African attire, appeared on the scene in front of Chrysler headquarters, all paper shuffling in the building apparently ceased. The loud beats from conga drums and the strident chants from the demonstrators brought virtually every White person in the building to the windows. The expression on their White faces was probably the same as the one on the faces of the cavalry at Custer's last stand.

Gripped by paranoia, headquarters dialed 911. The Highland Park police showed at the scene armed with military-type weapons. However, when they pulled out their gas warfare gear, the Black workers were ready. They came prepared with their surplus army gas masks. There was a stand-off. During this confrontation, DRUM representatives went into the building and demanded to see the policy makers but they refused to meet. Believing that their mere presence made their point, the representatives returned to the demonstration and reported what had happened. Afterwards the demonstration broke up and the police left. DRUM had achieved its short range objectives. It had dramatically demonstrated its ability to organize Black workers and mobilize community groups. Moreover, by closing down the plant, thus bringing production that day almost to a standstill, it showed that it was a power that had to be taken seriously.

### **Reaction of the UAW and Chrysler**

The militant demonstration jolted the company and the UAW. Chrysler's newly created community relations department immediately launched a public relations campaign. The UAW also reacted. The Detroit Black Caucus of the UAW, which described itself as a citywide caucus of Black representatives from every UAW local in the city, cordially invited DRUM to attend its Sunday meeting.

Twelve leaders of DRUM went to the meeting expecting to find a group of young militant Black men. Instead they found the caucus to be made up of four elderly Black workers, who looked to be a minute away from retirement, and two young Black workers. One elderly worker from Local No. 7 rapped about what he did "way back then," and another old timer, who looked like Uncle Remus, reminisced on a "first Negro" theme. The DRUM leaders dominated the meeting, stressing the need for militant action to advance the struggle of Black workers. In the spirit of brotherhood, the meeting ended on a positive note. The caucus agreed to support DRUM in its fight against racism at Chrysler.

On Monday the following day, DRUM demonstrated again at the plant to underscore their resolve to continue their struggle against racism. In reaction, Chrysler officials attempted to identify and intimidate the demonstrators. Some perched themselves on top of the factory so that they could use telescopes, binoculars, and cameras to see who was participating in the demonstration. Others tried to serve John Doe injunctions to individual demonstrators. The demonstrators defiantly and contemptuously slapped the injunctions to the ground or ripped them up and threw them back in the face of the officials. Playing their role as a weapon of the corporation, the police arrived and broke up DRUM's legal demonstration. However, DRUM was successful in partially shutting down the plant. In the weeks following the demonstration, DRUM had received wide support from various organizations including many church groups in the Black community. Even more importantly, they had earned the respect of practically all Black workers not only at Dodge Main but also at other plants.

Several weeks after DRUM shut down Dodge Main, both the UAW and Chrysler's were still reacting to DRUM's actions. These racist institutions attempted to confuse the public. The UAW tried to shift the attention away from itself to Chrysler; Chrysler did likewise. On August 20, 1968, a story appeared in the Michigan Chronicle (a "Negro" newspaper) about the Black

workers' struggle. A UAW official was quoted as saying, "DRUM's main thrust was towards the company and not the UAW."

The mass media portrayed DRUM as an anti-White hate group.

Over the weekend of August 16th through the 19th there were several stories in the two major White newspapers, The Detroit News and The Detroit Free Press, which depicted DRUM as a group of flaming Black nationalists who were trying to pit Black workers against White workers.

### **UAW Attacks DRUM**

Fearing DRUM as a threat to its power, the UAW attempted to undermine and stop DRUM. Using slander, they aimed to discredit DRUM by branding it as a racist, illegitimate, hate mongering, communist organization. In a widely published letter they accused DRUM of creating racial divisions and pitting Blacks against Whites. Walter Reuther, the UAW president, denounced DRUM as a hate organization, and George Merrill, director of Regional I, which included local No. 3, made the absurd claim that racism did not exist in Dodge Main or local No. 3.

DRUM responded to the UAW's propaganda in their weekly newsletters. They presented facts, which showed that Blacks had virtually no clout in the UAW headed by Walter Reuther, who pretended to be a champion of racial equality. They pointed out that although Black workers paid about one-fourth of all the dues received by the UAW, there were only 72 Black representatives as compared with 1100 White representatives on the International Board. Reuther, they noted, was always present for photo opportunities showing him marching along side Martin Luther King, but he was conspicuously absent from demonstrations by Black workers demanding an end to the racism practiced by union and corporate officials. At the local level, they called attention to George Merrill's exorbitant salary of around \$50,000 a year and the fact that he managed the labor affairs of the workers in a large geographical area which was reported to be about 70 percent Black. Yet, both of his sub-directors were White and his staff was 97 percent White.

Addressing the charges of being an illegitimate, hate, and communist group, DRUM stated in their newsletter that: *The UAW calls DRUM illegitimate when its own legitimacy is granted by the company and supported by the courts rather than by the super-exploited Black workers. The UAW calls DRUM a hate organization when it is crystal clear to all that the Black workers are the victims of hate.*

In response to the charge of being a communist organization, DRUM leaders continued to praise revolutionary communists while they categorically condemned capitalism. DRUM recognized the charge as red-baiting and knew that the UAW was playing on the brainwashed psyche of the public. They also knew that a communist label on DRUM would not diminish its credibility with Black workers since, to most Black workers, DRUM represented the spirit of Black self-determination.

On the question of pitting Blacks against Whites, here is DRUM's answer, which appeared in the 13th edition of their Newsletter:

*In the recent letter put out by the UAW, they accused DRUM of pitting Black against White. The purpose of DRUM is to unite Black workers to fight the problems that Black workers face, and that problem is racism. Now the White workers are not victims of racism. If anything, they benefit from it. How do they benefit? It starts in the employment office. The White workers are usually sent to work in what is considered the easy areas. Now if one should happen to be unfortunate enough to get sent to the body shop, then the foreman will give him the easiest job he can find, even if it means moving a Black worker. When it comes to taking disciplinary action against workers you will find that White workers are given all the breaks. Also, when it comes to advancement, the Black worker is given all kinds of reason why he is not qualified for the job, while a White worker, qualified or not, will get it. Now according to the UAW, pitting the Black worker against the White makes a weak union. Either the UAW is too weak to fight racism, or it condones racism; for it is a fact that racism runs rampant throughout the auto industry. The pitting of Black against White starts with the power structure, for it is the power structure that controls the jobs, and the job you get is based on the color of your skin, not your background. If you are White you are in. If you are Black, and you want to get in, then you must first sell your manhood, because they don't want Black men. They only want Black boys. So who is pitting Black against White?*

### **Slick Toms Create Bogus DRUM**

As DRUM continued to struggle, the forces arrayed against it increasingly used more sophisticated and deceptive tactics. Late in August 1968, a group of opportunistic toms attempted to usurp DRUM. First they moved legally by filing incorporation papers and adopting the name DRUM which stood for the Detroit Revolutionary Union Movement. Next, they requested a meeting with the leaders of DRUM for the stated purpose of merging DRUM with the bogus DRUM. The genuine DRUM members were suspicious of the group and did not like the idea of another group adopting its name because it would lead to confusion. More importantly, they thought that the idea of a merger was rather ridiculous since the bogus DRUM had no following. Their suspicions were heightened when they learned that one member of the bogus DRUM was a Chrysler professional employee who claimed he had been fired from the company. They later learned that this person had been on a paid leave of absence and that he was currently back with the company. After several meetings with the Detroit DRUM, the genuine DRUM broke off relations.

One of the reasons the bogus DRUM said they formed was they thought the genuine DRUM leadership was incompetent and needed direction. They pointed to the fact that DRUM had no legal recognition. They also criticized DRUM's methods of organizing.

They said that they would show DRUM how to organize. In their effort to build a membership, they used White conventional techniques. Despite the friendly advice of DRUM that their techniques were inappropriate, the leaders of bogus DRUM distributed membership envelopes to workers which were to be returned by mail with a membership fee. The DRUM members knew that Black workers were not inclined to respond to solicitations involving mailed envelopes and especially fees. The number of returned envelopes proved DRUM right. Out of

several thousand envelopes passed out, only three were returned, and two of those did not have the membership fee.

Demonstrating again that it was they who did not know how to organize Black workers, the bogus DRUM ,next, tried to set up classes and teach the Black workers about unionism by using UAW organizing manuals. That flopped too because virtually no one showed up for the classes. DRUM had cautioned them about that approach because they knew that exhausted Black workers were not going to sit in classrooms studying irrelevant UAW manuals after slaving for the capitalists all day. After all of bogus DRUM's "brilliant" organizing methods failed, they simply faded away into irrelevancy.

### **Consolidation of the Structure**

However, DRUM learned a lesson from this experience. In order not to be co-opted or misrepresented, it had to move immediately to formalize its structure and tighten up its organization. Originally in May 1968, DRUM consisted of eight Chrysler workers who constituted an editorial board which met formally every Sunday. By September 1968, DRUM had developed into a fairly large organization whose structure was not well-defined, and whose procedures were rather informal.

In the middle of September 1968, DRUM submitted its constitution and theoretical structure for acceptance at a general meeting. Both the constitution and structure were accepted unanimously. During the following weeks, the main task of DRUM was consolidating the structure. The various unit structures first had to be filled with workers who were committed to progressive changes in the factory. Secondly, they had to be functional. This was imperative since the corner stone of DRUM was the unit structure.

After DRUM had formalized its structure, they found it much easier to recruit new members. When a member expressed interest in DRUM, he/she could be referred to the persons in charge of membership who would run down what DRUM was all about and how he/she could become part of it. A new recruit could become a functional member almost immediately upon joining by serving in some capacity in the unit structure in his/her department. Commitment and membership increased noticeably shortly after the structure had been established.

### **DRUM Frustrated by UAW Sham Democracy**

Drum was often left frustrated when they as active union members tried to get the UAW Local No. 3 to address their grievances. One example was their effort to get two leaders of DRUM reinstated at Dodge Main. At a meeting held on the last Sunday in August 1968, the Black workers packed the Union Hall. One of DRUM's early demands was that seven workers who were fired from their jobs as a result of a walkout on May 2, 1968, be reinstated. As noted before, under pressure, the Union got five of the seven re-hired. The other two were not reinstated, the Union said, because of some technicality. Since the UAW officials seemed incapable of getting the two workers back on Chrysler's payroll, the Black workers at the meeting motioned that the two workers be put on the Union's payroll. A vote was taken and the motion was passed. The UAW bureaucrats then invalidated the motion claiming that all those present in the Union Hall were not UAW members since some workers had their wives with

them. Rancorous arguments ensued about proper parliamentary procedures according to Robert's Rules of Order, and what constituted a quorum. Nothing but frustration resulted from the meeting and the Black workers left in an angry mood. Meeting after meeting, the UAW bureaucrats used parliamentary tactics and flimsy excuses for not handling the worker's demands.

### **DRUM Enters Union Politics**

A strategy question arose over whether or not DRUM should participate in UAW politics. This question was very concrete and it thrust itself upon DRUM unexpectedly because of the sudden death of a trustee of UAW Local No. 3, which left the post vacant. The UAW constitution required the holding of a special election to fill that position.

DRUM was in a quandary. Some leaders argued for it while others argued against it. The arguments against participation in UAW politics were, (1) since DRUM is resolutely opposed to the UAW, it would appear to be compromising if it began to work within the UAW; (2) furthermore, there was the likelihood of opportunism arising; (3) and finally some members of DRUM were reluctant to engage in a campaign which they felt they could not win.

The arguments for becoming involved in the election of a trustee was that (1) the election would serve to raise the visibility of the leadership of DRUM; (2) in addition, most members saw that the most important thing was not winning the election but rather the demonstration of DRUM power and Black solidarity; (3) lastly, the election campaign, many thought, would serve as an excellent means of raising the consciousness of the workers and strengthening the membership drive.

The pro-argument prevailed and DRUM launched its campaign. In the 13th issue of the DRUM newsletter, the position of DRUM concerning the election was printed as follows:

*Due to the death of an employee and trustee at Local 3, there will be a special election soon. We all were witnesses to the last election and we must not fall in to the same political trick that we did before. The time and date of this election is not set at this time, but the time is now to prepare ourselves for the coming election. Political pirates, Black and White, will be at their best to show you why the rank and file should vote for their candidates.*

*DRUM feels the election is very important. Not only in that it is a vital position, but it will be the beginning of the complete political takeover of Dodge Local 3. Therefore, DRUM is presenting a platform that must be upheld. This platform is:*

- 1. The complete accountability of the entire membership to the Black majority.*
- 2. All union decisions will coincide directly with the wishes of that majority.*
- 3. Advocation of a revolutionary change in the UAW, including a referendum vote and revive the grievance procedure.*
- 4. Public denouncement of the racial practices within the UAW, Hamtramck Assembly and the entire community.*



5. *Refusal to be dictated to by the International staff of the UAW.*
6. *Total involvement in policy by the workers as opposed to dictatorship by the executive board.*

*DRUM had always advocated a complete political change in our subordinate position at this plant. Now is the time to show concern about our future (BLACK FUTURE) and place a worker at Local 3 that will help his own people*

#### *Support DRUM candidates*

*DRUM did not want to place its faith in any candidate who did not belong to it. Therefore, it chose Ron March, one of the founders of DRUM, to run for trustee, and it circulated this announcement:*

*DRUM (The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) is supporting a candidate for the office of trustee this coming election on September 26, 1968. We of DRUM recognize the importance of having revolutionary Black Brothers running for office and exposing the true nature of the racist union through the election campaign. As we all know, when Black workers begin to rally around revolutionary Black candidates, it won't be long before Black Workers take over the local. What we need is Black representation, and we all know it.*

*The campaign served to focus attention on the corruption in UAW Local No. 3 and to expose financial fraud which appeared to be the norm. Here is an exposé appearing in the 14th issue of the DRUM newsletter:*

#### *“GRAFT AND CORRUPTION”*

*Dodge Local #3 is one of the largest Locals in the country, second only to Local #600. It's a surprising fact that our Local does not have any entertainment facilities except Bingo, a self supporting operation. Also the condition of our local building is a disgrace to the workers in the plants as well as Hamtramck city, and the UAW. The last picnic outing or any affair for the children was ten years ago. The local officials claim that the reason for these conditions is a lack of money, despite the fact that we are the second largest local and have a membership of ten thousand workers paying on the average of \$8.00 per month.*

*In the past election our president and vice-president have put great efforts behind the trustee positions,. Why? We of DRUM do know that before any money leaves our local the trustee must sign for it. Without casting doubt on our officials, DRUM says the money has been taken out for causes not accountable to the majority of our membership. We also know that with three trustees and the entire local officers having a voice and a vote on the Executive Board, they can overrule the executive members (7 total) and take the money legally.*

*These are ugly truths that have been going on in our local for some time. And DRUM says the time is now to support a candidate that will remain accountable to you, the membership. Above, we have given the importance of this vacant position. Also we have*

*expressed the necessity to place a Black brother in this position that will remain loyal and accountable to the entire Black majority's platform.*

#### *SUPPORT DRUM's CANDIDATE*

### **DRUM vs the Establishment**

The election campaign did more than point out the treachery of the UAW; it also revealed the systemic nature of the relationships among the UAW, the City of Hamtramck, and Chrysler, and how they conspired to defeat DRUM. Appearing in a DRUM leaflet, the following graphic description of the events that occurred during the election reveals the real nature of the system DRUM challenged:

#### *DRUM*

#### *VICTORY VICTORY*

*In the election for trustee held yesterday at UAW Local 3, DRUM's candidate Ron March won a resounding victory; never before had there even been an election in which the Hamtramck Police Department has moved to openly harass, hamper and completely frustrate the efforts of our Black brothers as in this election.*

*At 5:00 A.M. in the morning when the trucks and cars, with Ron March posters on them, arrived to carry workers to and from the union hall, the cops immediately began to give out tickets--this was a delaying tactic used by the cops attempting to frustrate our efforts. Many brothers were constantly harassed by the cops--but all the delaying tactics of the cops failed. No other cars and trucks supporting other candidates were touched.*

*As far back as the beginning of the week, Chrysler corporation stooges were seen tearing down our leaflets and posters supporting Ron March and leaving all of the rest of the campaign literature up. The Hamtramck Police were also put on special detail to rip down DRUM posters up and down Joseph Campau and even in the alleys behind the bars. When our Black brothers stormed the Union hall to find out why from the UAW Local 3 officers, they received no answers.*

*Even with this harassment from Chrysler corporation, UAW and the police, Ron March and DRUM were victorious. Ron March, according to honkies who controlled the election committee, tallied 563 votes, which was more than that of any of the rest of the candidates. Brother Ron will now have to be in a run-off election next Thursday, with Joe Elliot who ran second with 521 votes. DRUM also finds this very hard to believe since almost every car loading and unloading at the Union hall was a Ron March supporting car.*

*It is obvious and it goes without saying that since Chrysler corporation, the UAW and Hamtramck Police Department were all conspiring to defeat DRUM, then there was definitely some cheating going on at the polls. White Racists can't stand defeat. The polls closed at 5:30 p.m. and at 6:00 p.m. the final tallies came in with Brother Ron March out in front despite all of the harassment and intimidation. At about 6:15 p.m. the fascist Polish pigs of the Hamtramck Police Department received the word that in spite of their outright racist tactics all day long, Brother Ron March, DRUM's candidate had*

*won. The Polish pigs of the Hamtramck Police Department jumped into their cars and rode to the back of the bars on Jos Campau and Clay to wantonly beat Black brothers with double edged ax handles and spray them with deadly mace.*

*The pigs had lost at the polls; therefore, they chose to win with brute force. They stormed through George's Bar beating and dragging our Black brothers out of the bar and arresting them on trumped up charges. At this point, a group of about 50 Black workers moved to the Hamtramck Police Department to demand an explanation of the attack and to clamor for the release of the brothers who were arrested. The Hamtramck Gestapo squad forced the group of Black workers back away from police headquarters. We Black brothers then retreated to the Union Hall to further discuss the matter amongst ourselves.*

*Once in the Union Hall, to our surprise, in walked the Mayor and the Police commissioner of Hamtramck--two of the most notorious Polish pigs that have ever stalked the face of the earth. These pigs entered under the pretext of "explaining things," as though Black workers were naive enough to listen. Once inside the Union Hall the set-up was operative. With the Mayor and Police Commissioner in the Union Hall, supposedly unprotected with 50 enraged and angered Black workers, Cannon Ball (a notorious racist) ran outside and led a police charge into the Union Hall. The Polish Pigs entered the Union Hall spraying mace and swinging ax handles. The pigs smiled as they sprayed mace in our Black brother's faces.*

*The attack was unwarranted and inhuman. The union hall is supposed to be a meeting place for all Local 3 members and not a training ground for fascist pigs of the police department. The union has allowed this to happen--a union official (Cannon Ball) led the police charge. DRUM's position is to re-double our efforts in our just struggle at Hamtramck Assembly and Local #3.*

*DRUM says we shall never be cowed or bullied by trickery, deception or brute force. And that the Chrysler corporation, the UAW, the Hamtramck Police Department, and all other parties involved in this conspiracy shall be held completely responsible for all the consequences arising from this and other attacks launched upon Black people.*

**DRUM STRATEGY IS, WE REPEAT:**

**DARE TO RIGHT. DARE TO WIN. FIGHT, FAIL; FIGHT AGAIN, FAIL AGAIN.  
FIGHT ON TO VICTORY.**

### **DRUM's Candidate Victimized by the System**

Having failed to defeat DRUM's candidate, Ron March, in the first election, by using fascist tactics, the system, as represented by the UAW, the City of Hamtramck, and Chrysler, changed its tactics and used more devious means in the run-off election between Ron March and Joe Elliot, a White UAW loyalist, to deny victory to DRUM. The insidious methods used by the system against DRUM were described in an interview with Black workers, which appeared in the South End, the Wayne State University student paper.

## **Interview with Black workers from Dodge Main**

### ***Question: What is the function of a trustee?***

- *Black worker 'A': He signs away union monies. He has direct control over how the monies are spent.*

### ***Question: Why were there not more Blacks running for trustee positions?***

- *Black worker 'A': There are only three trustee positions in Local 3, and only one was open.*

### ***Question: What do you feel were the effects of the election?***

- *Black worker 'B': The election polarized the plant further around racial lines and provided a forum for Black workers to further expose the corruption, graft, and fraud which have been taking place under the "Polish control" of Local 3. It also provided another test of strength for Black workers. It taught the majority of Black workers at Dodge Main that we cannot achieve any type of justice by legal means. Thus, it exhausted another legal channel.*

### ***Question: What was the reaction of Local 3 officials when the preliminary elections showed a strong possibility of Ron winning the election?***

- *Black worker 'C': They united to move against the Blacks by giving their support to the White candidate, Joe Elliott.*

### ***Question: Have there been any suspensions or dismissals, as a result of the election?***

- *Black worker 'C': No.*

### ***Question: How much support did Ron March have for the election?***

- *Black worker 'D': There was an overwhelming amount of support for him. There was complete unity among the Blacks. There are only two Blacks known in the plant not in support of Ron.*
- *Black worker 'A': Black workers here have never approached any election with such enthusiasm. From 7:00 a.m. until closing time, 5:30 p.m. there was a constant and complete show of Black workers' power. At times the line of Black workers stretched from the voting booth, inside Local 3, around the main hall inside the local, outside the door into the street and around the corner on Joseph Campau.*
- *Black worker 'B': The election was obviously stolen from the Black workers. Sixty-three percent of the workers at Dodge Main are Black. Final tallies showed not only that Ron March had lost, but that he had lost by 700 votes, which is ridiculous. They also showed that he did not carry a single voting machine or department, which is even more ridiculous, since Department 9190 and Department 9170, days and afternoons, are 99% Black.*

### ***Question: What do you think the election revealed in regard to the tactics of union officials?***

- *Black worker 'D': "by the brutal attacks launched upon Black workers during the primary election, by the constant harassment all day long by the notorious Hamtramck police department, by the tearing down of Ron March posters by Labor Relations representatives, and by the taunting received from UAW local officials, there was a conspiracy to defeat DRUM by these parties: UAW local officials, Chrysler Corporation officials and the Police Department officials of Hamtramck. Knowing that such a conspiracy was, in fact, in existence, coupled with the fact that there was no overt harassment at the run-off election, only leads us to believe that the conspirators*

*merely changed their tactics from open and flagrant harassment to the art of underhandedly cheating and manipulating the vote count at the machine. Let all those who are foolish enough to think that the election was not a race issue check back and remember what happened. Do not forget the continuous harassment by the police. Recall the 15 tickets given to all vehicles with Ron March posters. Remember the brothers who were beaten in the bars and in the Union Hall. Most of all do not think that the racists did not get together and combine their votes, and do not ever believe that this was a fair election.*

In stealing the election, the UAW was especially manipulative. The union bureaucrats used scare tactics to mobilize retired workers, who did not pay union dues but did have the right to vote in any union election, and transported them to the union hall to cast their votes. It was rare for retired workers to be actively involved in local union politics. However, the UAW bureaucrats spread lies among the retirees that the DRUM candidate represented a threat to their retirement benefits. Furthermore, on the day of the election they picked up and carried the retirees to the election hall. These retired workers, most of whom were White racists, invariably voted the way the Reuther machine told them to vote.

After the election campaign DRUM again concentrated its efforts on strengthening the organization internally. From the various types of responses DRUM got from the Black workers, it was decided that the best way to form the broadest possible base for support was to define different categories of affiliation on the basis of how workers related to DRUM. Therefore, three major categories were established: 1) Active members, 2) Supporters, and 3) Financial contributors.

The election, however, was still a significant victory for the Black workers. It was DRUM contention that the unions are inherently undemocratic, and that even with the overwhelming support of the workers, the union bureaucracy cannot be broken through peaceful democratic methods. However, as a result of this struggle, thousands of Black workers had gained practical experience in a reform movement, and had seen its limitations. Consequently, many were radicalized and saw the need for revolutionary changes.

### **DRUM: Vanguard of the Black Workers' Struggle**

The enduring strength of DRUM was its well-conceived program, which addressed itself to workers' concrete social realities. By operating on the basis of the knowledge and the understanding of these realities, DRUM was able to effectively organize Black workers. This explains DRUM's initial success and its ability to assume a vanguard role.

The unprecedented example set by DRUM inspired Black workers in other plants to establish DRUM-type organizations. These Black workers attended DRUM meetings to discuss the situations at the plants where they slaved and to learn the techniques of organizing. DRUM described this development in the 15th issue of its newsletter:

*More and more Black workers are finding it necessary to take the DRUM road. That is the road of Black independent revolutionary action in addressing the terrible conditions*

*under which they labor on their respective jobs. Since DRUM has been in existence, Black workers have come to us from all over the state with their stories of murderous conditions in the plants, seeking our help in launching DRUM type organizations where they work.*

*This situation has developed because Black workers realize that only through this kind of movement can relief be obtained from the oppressive conditions that take such a heavy toll. The Black workers are reporting that, at Ford, conditions are so bad that the toms are holding prayer meetings on the assembly lines. At the Pontiac plants, Black workers are being forced to fight back because the work is so hard and degrading. Of course, it is widely known that conditions at the F.M. plants are monstrously inhumane. The D.S.R. bus drivers have also contacted us for assistance to help them do something about their plight. And this is going on all over the country as more and more Blacks are finding themselves in intolerable situations.*

*The only thing needed is a program that can unify all these workers and channel this rage into a confrontation on a massive scale with the beastly super-exploiters responsible for our plight. DRUM has such a program. Our program evolved out of the experience that we gained working on the auto production lines. It recognizes and identifies racism as the common denominator that will unite all Black workers, but it also goes further and identifies our enemies as the racist U.S. Government, the greedy racist owners and operators of the means of production in this country, the racist union bureaucracy, as well as the complacent White worker himself.*

*Our struggle, because of the gigantic might of the enemy, has been slow in developing. But at this point it is accelerating rapidly because of the push for super profits and the increased consciousness of the Black workers. The Black workers know that something must be done, and it's only a matter of time before they realize that the DRUM road is the only road.*

DRUM's program was not only adopted by Black workers in other plants and supported by the Black community, but it was also supported by White radical groups on Wayne State University's campus. On October 24, 1968, several White groups joined the Detroit Black Panthers in a demonstration in support of DRUM at Chrysler's administrative headquarters in Highland Park.

### **DRUM goes to the Black Community**

As DRUM expanded its operations its financial burden increased dramatically. Therefore, a means had to be devised to raise the necessary funds to carry out its operations. The two main sources of finances were dues assessed on members and pocket contributions from the workers. But these sources could not provide the necessary funds for DRUM's immediate needs. Therefore, DRUM decided to engage in fund raising activity that would simultaneously raise the class consciousness of the workers and inform the Black community. With the help of the progressive Black clergy, DRUM was able to secure a church to hold a public rally. Prior to the rally, raffle tickets were sold. The selling of raffle tickets, in addition to providing money, served

to inform community people about the struggle of Black workers. The first prize offered was a new M-1 Rifle, the second prize was a new shotgun, and the third prize was a bag of groceries. These prizes were chosen because they dramatically communicated DRUM's determination to fight on to victory, and they graphically symbolized the means that were ultimately necessary to bring about revolutionary change.

The rally which was held on November 17, 1968, was successful in attracting a large number of community activists and enthusiastic supporters. The speakers delivered inspiring speeches on topics relating to the historic role of the workers in the Black liberation struggle. The theme of the rally was reflected in articles appearing in the 19th issue of DRUM's newsletter:

*TO BE ATTACKED BY BOTH THE UAW AND CHRYSLER IS NOT A BAD THING BUT A GOOD THING: REPORT FROM HUBER AVENUE FOUNDRY.*

*The Black salute is rising with the Black workers struggle for the liberation of Black people. Black workers are surging forward. They realize and proclaim that only through a struggle led by Black workers can Black people triumph over racism and exploitation.*

*Why is it that DRUM has become famous all over the country? Because of all the anti-racist organizations, it is the most revolutionary, the most progressive, and the best fighter for the liberation and social emancipation of Black people. DRUM is revolutionary and progressive because both its membership and leadership and its program are revolutionary and progressive. Without this character it could never lead the Black workers and win the praise of revolutionary people in this country as well as abroad.*

*Both the UAW and Chrysler Corporation have attacked DRUM; they are racist and do not want to see Black workers united. This only goes to show that DRUM has a most revolutionary and progressive philosophy, or otherwise they would not attack it. The attack at the local union hall by the racist Hamtramck police--put up by both Chrysler and the UAW--testify to DRUM's revolutionary nature.*

*We hold that it is bad, as far as we are concerned, if a Black person, a Black political party, or a movement is not attacked by the enemy; for in that case, it would mean that we have sunk to the level of the enemy. It is good if we are attacked and wildly painted as utterly Black and without a single virtue, since it demonstrates not only that we have drawn a clear line of demarcation--a line of separation between the enemy and ourselves, but also that we have achieved a great deal in our work as well.*

*The educational policy of the program of DRUM is to cultivate a firm and correct political orientation, an industrious and pure style of work, and flexible strategies and tactics. These are three essentials in the making of an anti-racist revolutionary worker. It is in accordance with these essentials that the leadership of DRUM teach and the workers study.*

## **DRUM Challenges the Black Bourgeois Reformists**

The same week that DRUM held its rally and denounced the exploiters of Black workers, the Black bourgeois leadership of the National Urban League honored and praised the exploiters at their banquet in Detroit. The National Urban League sponsored a luncheon commemorating the anniversary of President Lincoln's hypocritical Gettysburg Address. It used this occasion to present equal opportunity awards not only to three of the largest racist industrial corporations in the world but also to an arsenal complex that built weapons that were used against Black people in America and the peoples of the Third World. The recipients of the awards referred to above were the Chrysler Corporation, the Ford Motor Company, the General Motors Corporation, and the U.S. Tank-Automotive Commands. These racist, slave-driving firms were cited for their "pioneer efforts in furthering the concept of equal opportunity" within their establishments.

DRUM immediately moved to expose, what it considered to be, the farce of the year. While the National Urban League leaders and their ruthless capitalist honorees were grinning at each other and mouthing hypocritical platitudes, some overalled, greasy, loud, militant Black workers demonstrated at the buttoned-down luncheon held in the plush Statler-Hilton Hotel. As the Black workers marched between dining tables holding their hard slogans aloft, the "bourgeoisie" crowd choked and went through some paranoiac changes. After registering their protest, the workers left.

These events illustrate the fundamental differences between the moderate integrationist strategy and goal of Black bourgeois leadership and the militant radical strategy and goal of Black revolutionary leadership. The bourgeois moderates attempt to ingratiate themselves with powerful White institutions with the hope of receiving some crumbs from the table. They make humble requests and issue desperate pleas for financial help. Their goal is White acceptance and approval. Essentially, they depend on the financial resources and pity of the very same White establishment that is the main source of the problems faced by Black people.

Black revolutionary leaders are just the opposite. They denounce and struggle against powerful White institutions; they expose their racist nature and their oppressive practices; and they make demands and issue ultimatums. For meaningful social change, they see power in the unity and collective action of the masses of Black people, especially Black workers.

### **Factory Health Services or Pain Inc.**

The ruthless, callous nature of the corporation was, perhaps, best exemplified in how sick Black workers were mistreated by the health service unit in the plant. In the 21st issue of their newsletter, Drum reported several cases of medical abuse and called for Black workers to take action. These abuses indicated that the company viewed Black workers as merely brutes of labor.

#### ***BUTCHER SHOP***

*The Hamtramck so-called hospital is no better than your butcher shop. The butcher shop will kill an animal quickly, but the pigs' doctor will prolong Black people's pain forever if they could. It is very similar to a German concentration camp hospital. These pig so-called doctors are no more than stooges for honky general foremen like Wild Bill Jimmy*



*Briggs, Dick Gutis, and Joe Sharen. These off-beat, cast-off, pig quacks are coming very close to add maiming or murder to their crimes against Black people.*

*There are many complaints coming to DRUM. A typical example is our Black brother in Department 9160, who had Hong Kong Flu. His foreman, claiming he was short of help, refused to let him go to first aid for over an hour. After the nurse took his temperature, she sent him to see the doctor. The doctor simply sent him back to work. When the brother got back, he told the foreman he just could not make it, and he had to see his doctor. Our brother left work and went straight to his doctor's office where he fell out on the floor. The doctor told him that he had the new flu, and he was close to having pneumonia.*

*Another Black brother went to first aid one day to have his swollen ankle checked out. On this day there was only one nurse on duty. She told one of our Black sisters who was suffering from pains in her leg and stomach that this is a factory first aid unit, and she should quit coming to first aid every time she got a pain. When she got to our Black brother, she couldn't figure why his ankle had swollen up, even though he told her he was a truck driver, and the long hours of standing aggravated a cut on his foot. She called for the butcher. The fat pig stuck his head out of the door, looked at the ankle and said, "put some medication on it and send him back to work."*

*Last week when a Black sister fell down the stairs., the stupid honky foreman didn't want her to go to first aid. The Hamtramck first aid unit sent her to Ford Hospital for an X-ray. When she got back, she said that the X-ray revealed that she had a slightly fractured wrist and a bruised leg and hip. The nut at the so-called hospital sent her back to work and put her on slip, doing left-hand work on a sit-down job. Another sister, who has sugar diabetes and who works in cut-and-sew, accidentally took an overdose of medicine. Despite her illness, she was sent back to work.*

*There are many other cases that could fill this whole paper. We Black workers can no longer bear the brunt of the outrageous medical practices carried out by the White racist doctors, nurses, and corporate policy makers at the medical centers here at Hamtramck Assembly plant and Huber Foundry. Let's prepare to move in mass against this medical policy. We would be better off treating each other rather than being toyed with by these White racists.*

*Remember that we have come out against racism and the end of the mistreatment of Black workers. The racist doctor has got to go--sign the petitions for his removal and let us redouble our efforts in joining.*

**SUPPORT DRUM.  
DOWN WITH RACIST DOCTORS  
DOWN WITH RACIST NURSES  
DOWN WITH RACIST MEDICAL PRACTICES  
JOIN DRUM**

## Categorizing and Dealing with Toms

Historically, one of the main obstacles to the Black liberation struggle has been uncle toms. In the course of its struggle, DRUM came up against a host of toms of various types. To combat tomism in every form, Drum constructed a classification scheme to properly identify different types of toms so that people would know who they were and how they operated.

DRUM defined toms and tomonettes as "Negroes" who willingly and consciously helped the White oppressors maintain control over Black people. Toms serve the White oppressors in several ways. Many toms mainly spy and snitch; some spread damaging rumors about those fighting for Black liberation; and others perpetuate destructive divisions in the community.

In the 22nd issue of their newsletter, Drum presented their Tom Chart and described how and where toms operated.

<b>UNCLE TOM CHART</b>			
<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>OUT OF SIGHT</b>	<b>OFF THE WALL</b>	<b>SNEAKY</b>
<b>Community</b>	Francis Kornegay, head of Urban League	Nelson Jack Edwards, union flunky	Horace Sheffield, and Buddy-ass Battle, union flunkies
<b>Plant Level</b>	Andy Hardy	Charlie Brooks	Ed Benford
<b>Department Level</b>	Flying Saucer Hopkins and Lawyer Harvil	William Young and B. Goins	John Smith and Earl Harper

### ***LAP DOGS ON THE RISE***

*We must move forward. DRUM has been in existence for about 6 months now at Hamtramck Assembly Plant. Our overall program as outlined previously is to destroy racism at Hamtramck Assembly plant and in UAW Local 3. Our method for carrying out our program is to expose the truth and to forge Black unity. With a body of united Black workers, we shall be able to wipe out every vestige of racism wherever it may exist.*

*The foremost obstacles standing in our way at this time are the notorious uncle toms in our midst. It must be understood that in our history most of the revolutionary struggles of Black people failed because of the traitors from within. Therefore, uncle toms present an ever present danger to DRUM, to Black workers, and to the Black community at large. They even present a danger to themselves because they obviously are unaware of the seriousness with which we have launched our just struggles. Since DRUM has been in existence, we Black workers have suffered many abuses; we have been fired on trumped-up charges; we have been attacked in the parking lot behind the bars by the fascist Polish pigs of the Hamtramck Police Department; we have been locked in the Union Hall and beaten and maced in the eyes by those same pigs; our Black workers have been run down by those same pigs on motorcycles; we have been intimidated by White racist plant protection guards; we have had an election stolen from us; and we have had other forces making undercover moves in our name.*

*Black brothers and sisters we have remained patient and disciplined in the face of these abuses and sufferings. We have relied upon you to decide our course or action, understanding that our suffering helps you to understand the vicious corrupt elements whom we are struggling against. We must prepare to obtain “new guards for our future security.” We must prepare now and become psychologically set to deal with uncle toms in whatever manner the masses of Black people so deem. Uncle toms are traitors. They will sell us out for 30 pieces of silver and help keep us divided. They give substantial aid to our enemies by speaking out in the honkies behalf.*

*As DRUM attempts to flush out all of the uncle toms, it becomes more and more difficult all of the time. For by exposing uncle toms, we have forced some of them to go underground and, at the same time, we have forced the honkies to pay top dollar to have some of our own so-called Black workers denounce DRUM.*

*Because of these facts, uncle toms are now so diverse, that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to keep track of them. We have uncle toms toming in the Black community and snitching on the plant level. We also have toms snitching at so-called solidarity house. We have toms snitching on the plant level at Hamtramck Assembly Plant, Huber Foundry, and Local 3. We have toms snitching on the department level inside the plant. We have out-of-sight uncle toms who stand up out front as saviors for White racism. We have off-the-wall toms who stand up and support some off-the-wall philosophy (it takes time) designed to stifle the Black struggle. And we have sneaky toms, who are in many ways the most dangerous toms. They go around with natural hair speaking about Black unity and thereby gain access to information which they could not get normally.*

*It is obvious that with such a large number of different types of toms operating in various settings at different levels, it is difficult to keep track of them. In order to simplify this problem, DRUM has devised a method--a Tom Chart. We suggest that all of our Black brothers make a copy of this sample Tom Chart so that when one of these names pop up, you will know just what kind of bag he is playing out of. You may also find it necessary to add names to it. Furthermore, when some of these toms come up missing, you will know what happened to them and why.*

*JOIN DRUM*

## **Getting our History Straight**

Providing Black workers with a broad education, with an emphasis on their own history, was an important function of DRUM. DRUM realized that Black people had been pathetically miseducated in a way that would ensure their subordination and oppression. They, therefore, attempted to stimulate interest in and critical thinking about the true history of Black people by publishing relevant historical pieces along with their own interpretation and analysis. To enlighten Black workers of their true history, DRUM carried this article in the 23rd issue of its newsletter:

### *HISTORY OF "HIS STORY"*

*The day the slave ship landed in America, our history ended and "his story" began. Like everything else, the White racist power structure has lied about the true history of the Black worker. 'Negro' history leads us to believe that some of us were field Negroes, the ones who did the hardest work (picking cotton, etc.,) wore the raggediest clothes, and ate the worst food; and the rest of us were house Negroes, the ones who received the lightest jobs (cleaning the master's house, etc.,) wore the best clothes, and ate the best food. This is far from the truth.*

*Negro slaves were employed in foundries as foremen, blacksmiths, and founders. They were used to mine both coal and ore. They worked along the water front as longshoremen. With the exception of conductors, they worked on the railroads in every capacity including that of locomotive engineer, and they piloted the steamboats that plied on southern waters. They were even used to some extent as hands in the textile mills and formed a large portion of the workers in the tobacco factories. These facts can be found in the *Black Worker* by Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris. This is not all; in the same book it says, "a number of Blacks worked in the skilled crafts such as: carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, and the other mechanical trades." Why would the honky permit slaves (Black workers) to obtain jobs that sometimes his fellow honky couldn't get? The answer is very simple. In the *Black worker*, the answer is spelled out. The masters found it easier and cheaper to have their slaves trained in carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing and the other mechanical trades than to depend upon outside free White labor. The honky even got farther out than that. Many masters regarded their skilled slaves as a profitable source of income, and instead of keeping them on the plantation to serve the mechanical needs of the establishment, they sent them to practice their trades in the cities.*

*History is best qualified to reward all research, Black workers should be able to see in 1968 that "his story" is repeating itself in the racist UAW. It is a fact that Black people did work on so-called good jobs then. But we must keep in mind why. The only reason the honky permitted Blacks to do these jobs was because it was more economical, for him to do so. It was not because he loved Black people. If you doubt what the writers say, check this out. During slavery the honky insisted on employing his slaves in whatever manner he found profitable. If Blacks were too weak to stand the strain of working in the fields, they were sent to the cotton mills to attend to the looms and the spindles. In racist America, Black workers have 'progressed' only when it was profitable for the honky or when world pressure was put on America during a time of war. Black people can work when the honky is at war, but as soon as the war is over, we're right back out in the street. Black brothers and sisters, things are not getting better, things are getting worse, Black workers unite with DRUM or perish.*

### *QUIET AS IT'S KEPT*

*1. Black workers pay about one-fourth of the dues to the racist UAW, but there are only about 75 Black International Representatives out of a total of more than 1,000.*

2. *The Afro-American, his mind still torn by the welts of slavery, was first forced to enter the country's major industries as a strike breaker. He had no genuine choice and could hardly have foreseen the tragic consequences. In the early 1880's, Afro-American's were imported from the south to help break steel strikes in Pittsburgh; they were later employed as strike-breakers in Kansas and Illinois coal mines. In 1894, they came to the Chicago meat packing plants as strikebreakers. Thus, the only way Black workers entered major industries was as strikebreakers.*

3. *It is a fact that Black workers could not get into the auto plants largely because of the opposition by White auto workers. For where strikebreakers were not needed, Blacks were seldom if ever wanted.*

4. *The UAW has always been racist. The only reason the UAW lied and pledged themselves to non-discriminatory policies was that they feared Black workers might again be used as strikebreakers, not because the racist UAW wanted to uplift Black workers as they would have you believe. These are just a few reasons why Black brothers and sisters must unite and take the DRUM road. Historically, the auto industry has betrayed Black workers. Black workers must unite with DRUM now or perish.*

### **Chrysler uses Gestures to Dupe the Black community**

Big corporations often orchestrate media-grabbing, high profile events in their attempt to foster images of themselves as benevolent, socially-concerned institutions. Of course, such images are fabrications. In the 24th issue of their newsletter, DRUM critically analyzed the public relations schemes of Chrysler. They exposed how Chrysler's well-publicized economic development program for the Black community was a sham which would, at most, only benefit a few small Black capitalists. They also condemned Chrysler for its public praise and gifts to the Detroit Police Department. Exposing Chrysler's glaring duplicity, they showed that while Chrysler was giving spurious support to the Black community, it was giving genuine support to the police.

#### *THE CARROT AND THE STICK -- DECEMBER 11, 1968*

*Last week while Chrysler corporation executives were in Atlanta smiling and shaking hands with Rev. Ralph Abernathy and expressing their satisfaction with a "miraculous agreement" on a program which would "pour one million dollars into colored-owned banks in three cities (Atlanta, Los Angeles, Detroit)," another Chrysler executive, Gwain Gillespie, general manager of Dodge Truck operations, was also smiling and shaking hands with Police Commissioner Johannes Spreen in Detroit and expressing his satisfaction with another "milestone agreement," namely, the gift of two Dodge Executive Suite Vans to the Detroit Police Department.*

*We of DRUM feel that the Chrysler corporation plan to "pour one million dollars" into the three Black communities is indeed a milestone--in bullshit and nonsense--because the combined population of the three communities is roughly two million Black people. This means that Chrysler's rate of investment in these Black communities is an impressive 50 cents per Black head. The mini-brained executive pigs of Chrysler corporation should devote more of their not-too-valuable time to correcting racist practices in its plants in*

*Detroit and elsewhere, instead of using it to devise bullshit pacification programs that are nothing but rank insults to the Black community.*

*We would also like to comment on that other “milestone”--the gift of two vans to the Detroit Police Department. We agree that this, too, is indeed a milestone--in honesty. It clearly demonstrates the contempt that Chrysler corporation in particular and big business in general have for the Black community. The vans were given to the Police Department to aid them in recruiting because, according to Gwain Gillespie, “Recruiting good police officers is important to us at Dodge, too, because police work is in our best interest.”*

*We know goddamn well that police work is in your “best interest”, since you have used the police repeatedly to harass and intimidate Black workers in general and DRUM members in particular in recent walkouts and demonstrations; and you have used the police to write unjustified parking tickets; and last but not least, during the election of union trustee, you have used the police to physically attack DRUM members and other Black workers on the street and inside the union hall with Mace and ax-handles.*

*Further, we can only hope that these so-called “good” policemen won’t be recruited from the same pig-pen that produced ‘defenders of law and order’ like those who attacked the Black students at McMichael Jr. High School when they staged a walkout, or those who savagely beat Black youths at a dance in the Veterans’ Memorial Building, or the homicidal psychopathic White cops who murdered Black men in the infamous Algiers Motel case.*

*DRUM maintains that both so-called milestones are nothing more than perfect examples of the honky’s ‘carrot and stick’ policy where he offers the carrot (one million dollars) to the oppressed Black community with one hand, while with his other hand, he threatens the community with the stick (the police force). The Chrysler version of the ‘carrot and stick’ policy is doomed to fail as all other versions have failed, specifically, the attempt to use it in Vietnam. The Black community is not for sale and will not be intimidated by pig policemen, “good” or otherwise.*

*As the year 1968 closes DRUM can point to several achievements since its inception. Here are a few:*

- 1. DRUM has achieved its stated objectives as outlined in the first editions of DRUM which was to expose the truth and bring about Black unity.*
- 2. DRUM has ended brutal and physical abuse of Black workers by the racist thugs in supervision.*
- 3. We instilled a new measure of pride in the Black workers to the point where they won’t tolerate any bullshit from any Whitey under any circumstances in the plant or elsewhere.*
- 4. We have put pressure on the union to the extent that they can no longer let Black workers’ grievance fall by the wayside.*
- 5. We have made the Black union officials produce in the form of carrying out their responsibilities.*

6. *DRUM has closed the communication gap between Black workers in that any outrageous act committed against one brother in one part of the plant is immediately brought to the attention of Black workers throughout the plants.*
7. *We have forced the company and its main tool, the union, into all kinds of desperate moves in an attempt to buy off DRUM.*
8. *We have raised the level of consciousness of the Black workers at Dodge by exposing the role of Chrysler corporation in racist South Africa.*
9. *We have aided in establishing Black workers organizations in Ford Rouge, Wixom, Huber Avenue Foundry, Chevrolet Livonia, Chrysler Jefferson and now at Eldon.*
10. *Finally, we have forced Walter Reuther and Lynn Townsend to work overtime trying to figure out how to press their racist tactics.*

## **Summary**

It is remarkable how well the history of DRUM reflects the historic pattern of the struggle of Black workers. Like Black workers before them, DRUM had to fight against racism in the union, in the company, and in the government. Furthermore, like liberation fighters before, DRUM had to fight enemies in the Black community, including an assortment of toms and bourgeois leaders.

The strength of DRUM was its working-class, grass-roots character, both in terms of membership and leadership. DRUM emerged during the most militant and rebellious phase of the Black Liberation Movement in the 1960s. Some of its founders and leaders had been Black radical student activists who were influenced and inspired by both the Black Liberation Movement in America and the socialist revolutionary movements abroad. They were committed to building a revolutionary political party based on organized Black workers for the purpose of struggling against racism and capitalism. Their vision was a transformed America free of racism and capitalism, a society based on humanitarian and egalitarian values.

Most rank and file members of DRUM were Black young workers who were inspired by the Black Liberation Movement. The level of Black consciousness among them was above the norm in the Black community. They were angry with the system, and they believed in taking action. Some of their anger also stemmed from the legacy of slavery. They were painfully aware that they were just two life-spans away from the cruel period of their enslaved forebears.

DRUM's style was militant and confrontational. It reflected the extent to which DRUM repudiated the values of White capitalist America and its system of oppression. DRUM believed that the system was unredeemably anti-Black, therefore, Black people had to defiantly take their human rights.

DRUM struggled against the UAW because the UAW was racist, corrupt, and undemocratic. Most Black union officials were relegated to low-level flunky positions. The leadership positions in the UAW were dominated by Whites. Blacks were tokens. The UAW did not fight for the interests of Black workers, especially when they clashed with White workers' white-skin privileges. It was only interested in controlling Black workers. When it was unable to do that. It acted in concert with Chrysler and the police to stop DRUM.

Chrysler, as well as other capitalist, treated Black workers as brutes of labor. In the factory, the degree of exploitation was directly related to the proportion of Black workers. Super exploited Black labor was the source of super profits. The policy of white-skin privilege consigned Black workers to the worst jobs.

The role of the government was evident. The government used its repressive apparatus, the police, to intimidate, harass, and brutalize DRUM. It was clear that it operated in the interests of Chrysler and against the interests of Black people.

Tomism was a serious obstacle to Drum. Toms were present at every level from plant workers to professional bourgeois leaders. They served the White establishment by spying, snitching, sabotaging plans, and defaming Black liberators, while praising and providing cover for the corporations. DRUM's strategy of dealing with toms was to publicly identify and scorn them.

## **Conclusion**

DRUM's achievements can be partly attributed to dynamism of the Black Liberation Movement. There was an interactive dynamic between DRUM and the movement; DRUM contributed to the dynamism of the movement, while simultaneously, the movement energized DRUM.

Through struggle Drum learned many lessons. It learned that it had to take advantage of whatever legitimate space the system allowed, and that to be effective it had to develop tactics for struggling inside as well as outside of established institutions. It found that as organizations grow, more structure and routines are necessary, along with greater discipline. It discovered the tremendous power of a regular publication. The weekly DRUM newsletter was an amazingly effective organizing instrument. It was a good means of communicating issues and mobilizing forces. DRUM learned to greatly appreciate the value of their newsletter.

Perhaps no other radical organization had as much success in organizing Black workers as DRUM. Its success can be largely attributed to the leadership skills of dedicated radicals and militants and the programmatic strategy of organizing Black workers around their concrete daily realities at the point of production.

DRUM evolved into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. The rich experience gained by the leaders of Drum provided the knowledge and skills necessary to build a larger more complex vehicle to carry the revolutionary struggle forward. The history of DRUM underscores once again the historical truth that progress toward Black liberation requires bold, militant, effective leadership and the support of the masses.



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