

The spring strategy for breaking labor

by Leif Johnson

University-based organized labor controllers have revealed the outlines of a spring offensive against labor in the United States. On the basis of a highly specific union-by-union map, labor's remaining political and organizational power is to be undercut without destroying the outward institutions themselves. The unions will be allowed to remain as enforcers of new levels of austerity against the workers in their own industries—particularly in auto and rubber.

This is the outlook at MIT and other adherents of the Tavistock Institute approach to psychological warfare on behalf of de-industrialization, originally developed through Britain's World War II Special Operations Executive.

Traditional bargaining in every third year, such as 1982, would begin with construction. The results influence the Teamsters talks, which in turn affect the outcome of the September auto bargaining. This year the line-up will be broken, and the premise will be that scared workers will accept large cuts in their standard of living.

Building Trades: Talks begin in April. Homebuilding has collapsed. A 30 percent decline in state and municipal road and public works construction and a drop in office construction are expected. This comes on top of a decade-long open-shop and ostensible Affirmative Action attack on the unionized industry, and a tradition of grudging union acceptance of wage cuts and "double-breasted shops"—union firms that also run a non-union side.

Teamsters: The "double-breasted" pattern, as well as wage reductions, have spread in the trucking industry, which has been thrown into increasing chaos by the 1980 deregulation measures and the industrial effects of Reserve usury.

The main effort against the Teamsters is to wreck the Master Freight Agreement, i.e., nationwide work rules and pay schedules for over-the-road drivers. Once the Master Freight Agreement is shredded, an event that would grant final success to the Kennedy family vendetta against ex-Teamster president Jimmy Hoffa, the union locals will have to deal on a company-by-company basis with the truckers.

One top Tavistockian operative at MIT predicted that as soon as Master Freight is dead, the 70-hour weekly driving limit can be eliminated, and distinctions between over-the-road, short-haul, and city drivers, as

well as regulars and extra drivers, can be pushed aside alongside with other work rules. Harold Gibbons, the social-democratic chief of the Teamsters St. Louis-based region, has already publicly announced that the union will allow a bargaining away of the distinction between short-haul and over-the-road drivers.

Rail operating unions: Last month, the railroads allowed a relatively generous 32 percent wage settlement over 39 months to the rail clerks and other non-operating crafts as a ploy to win major work-rule abolitions from the operating employees, who have yet to settle.

Auto: The target here is quite different, focusing on direct wage cuts. General Motors wants to reduce the present average \$12 hourly wage to something close to \$8 and scrap as many of the health, pension, and other benefits (including vacation and sick leave) as possible, although American auto production would not be competitive with the more intensively capitalized Japanese industry even if wages were equal (see *EIR*, Nov. 10).

Blaming the auto production worker for the productivity gap with Japan and other foreign manufacturers is currently the goal of a formidable propaganda barrage in the U.S. press. Typical was an article in the Dec. 3 *Wall Street Journal* by John Schnapp of the Boston-based consulting firm Harbridge House.

Schnapp deems the 1982 auto negotiations the "last hurrah" for the stability of the UAW, which has concluded three-year pacts with the automakers since 1948. Schnapp's explanation is that UAW President Doug Fraser, the last of the 1930s-generation of UAW leaders, has ignored the fact that "U.S. auto workers are not conscientious about productivity, uncaring about quality, and have no sense of commitment to the interests of their employers."

According to a Midwestern academic who worked with the United Auto Workers leadership under UAW presidents Walter Reuther and Leonard Woodcock, GM will convince the workers to accept the wage medicine by passing up its fourth-quarter dividend—the first such omission since the Great Depression.

The UAW, which claims to have a close reading of the pulse of its more activist members, will emphasize a "small-is-beautiful" campaign, arguing that it is not wages that count but a spirit of union-management collaboration, to save the industry so the industry can save jobs. Former UAW Vice-President Irving Bluestone, now a labor controller at Wayne State University in Detroit, is a leading force in the Quality of Working Life movement designed to convince workers that (as Hitler claimed vis-à-vis Western Europe) workers and corporations together are really proletarians in common struggle against aggressive Japanese capitalists.

Once auto wages have been pushed down to the blue-collar average, steel can be picked off next year, according to the Tavistockian labor academics' plans.