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Black labor from chattel slavery to wage slavery

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Black August commemorates the Aug. 7, 1970, raid on the Marin County Courthouse led by young revolutionary Jonathan Jackson, and the Aug. 21, 1971, assassination of Black Panther prison organizer George Jackson at San Quentin Prison. Every year, revolutionaries use this month to uplift the Black liberation struggle, especially the cause of political prisoners.

In this spirit, Struggle-La Lucha presents this selection from Chapter 2 of Sam Marcy's ["High Tech, Low Pay: A Marxist analysis of the changing character of the working class."](#) first published in 1986. It explains why Black workers and the fight

against racism and national oppression are central to the class struggle in the U.S.

The scientific-technological revolution has affected and will continue to affect Black workers much more significantly than is commonly acknowledged by the capitalist press. Automation takes even more than its usual toll when oppressed people are concerned. It intensifies racist oppression and increases unemployment among Black people even when a capitalist economic recovery is said to be sharply on the rise, as in 1983-1984.

But the impact of the scientific-technological revolution on Black people is not only a recent phenomenon. It has historical roots that go back to the beginnings of the slave trade.

The compass and the slave trade

The speed and momentum with which the scientific-technological revolution has taken off in recent years has tended to shrink into insignificance inventions which exercised a profound influence on developing social relations in the early stages of the capitalist system. Take the compass, which is regarded today as a basic direction-finding device in navigation. It is not a capitalist invention. It is said to have been discovered as early as the year 1100 in China, and may have also been discovered independently in Europe somewhat later; it was used by Arab sailors in the early 13th century.

Its development and perfection over the years became indispensable to world trade. While not invented in a period of capitalist development, the compass and other navigational instrumentation were appropriated from earlier modes of production by capitalist shipping companies at the very crest of the period of colonization, what is called the “age of discovery.” It gave a tremendous impulse to world trade and commerce.

But what was the content of this trade? Why is it important in relation to our study here? Because as trade became a world phenomenon, it was essentially an international trade of slaves.

Millions upon millions of Black people were kidnapped, tortured and brought on slave ships to the vast new continents of the Western Hemisphere. The slave trade began in the mid-15th century, when Spain and Portugal began importing a significant number of Black slaves to their plantations on the Canary and Madeira islands. Most of the very same leading imperialist powers that are today concerned with maintaining the South African regime in the face of the revolutionary mass movement there earlier participated in, promoted and in fact fought ferociously to maintain the slave trade and obtain a monopoly over it.

Modern transnational monopolies differ fundamentally in their economic content from those days, but they still show the same greed and avarice, the utterly unprecedented cruelty and barbarous treatment which characterized the slave trade. This is what lay behind the flourishing of world commerce, and laid the development for what Marx later called the primitive accumulation of capital. The word primitive was not a characterization of the many millions of people captured as slaves. The term primitive was applied to the fiendish method by which the early capitalists accumulated the primary, original capital that was so indispensable for the development of their system of oppression and exploitation. Not only Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland, but also Denmark, Sweden and Prussia participated, garnering fabulous profits as a result of the slave trade.

The compass was one of the things that made the slave trade possible, but it alone can't be held responsible for the transportation of this vast number of human beings from one continent to another thousands of miles away — away from their homeland and loved ones to a strange new country where the whip and the gun held them at bay. Scandinavian people had made a transoceanic voyage earlier, in the 12th

century. They too may have had a compass of a sort, for it is well known that the Vikings undertook long voyages and established settlements in Iceland, Greenland and even Labrador.¹ But these voyages differed fundamentally in that they were oriented toward settlements in the northern part of the world in harmony with the climatic conditions of the Scandinavian countries.

Until the development and perfection of navigational instrumentation such as the compass, the Western world was mainly confined to the Mediterranean and the coastal areas of the Atlantic so far as maritime commerce was concerned. The new era of discovery and colonization opened up the Atlantic for the first time. This could not have been done without the necessary technological improvements in navigational instrumentation as well as in the design of ships.

By 1745, the English inventor Gowin Knight had perfected a method of efficiently magnetizing needles of harder steel. He designed a compass with a single bar needle large enough for a cap resting on the pivot to be screwed into its center. He thus greatly improved the compass.² This significantly shortened the time of voyages, increased the safety of the ships and, what is of greater social and political significance, increased the volume of slavery.

As Marx was to write, "It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that have created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance."³

The contract for supplying slaves to the Spanish colonies was called the Asiento. While British slave traders provided the necessary laborers for their own plantations, Spain contracted with the slave traders of other nations to supply its needs. The first Asiento was granted in 1518 to a Flemish company, and it specified that a certain number of tons (!) of slaves be delivered to the Spanish colonies.⁴

The Portuguese were the first traders to hold the Asiento, but the other rising capitalist powers were not to be outdone. The Dutch broke into this very lucrative form of trade around 1640 and Spain, France and Britain followed soon after.

The war for the Asiento continued until the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), when the English triumphed over their competitors. The English bourgeoisie from then on maintained control of the slave trade through the Royal African Company. This slave trade covered not only the English, French and Dutch colonies in America and the West Indies but also the vast land of Brazil. It was in this way that such a vast portion of the African people were uprooted and thrown into the vortex of capitalist slavery.

In connection with Holland it should be noted that earlier, in the years 1636-1637, the Dutch had engaged in a flourishing trade and development of tulips, for which they are still world famous today. But that trade attained extraordinary speculative proportions, so that at one period just one tulip was valued at thousands of dollars. Eventually, the market broke and the Dutch bourgeoisie turned from trafficking in “a thing of matchless beauty” to the slave trade, one of the most odious, foul and certainly the most inhuman forms of commerce ever seen in history. This illustrates with what ease and facility the capitalists can plunge from one area to another in their insatiable appetite for profits, without any regard for human values whatsoever. The latter are totally irrelevant in the process of capitalist production. Capital simply flows to wherever profits are highest.

The banks and the drug trade

The world slave trade has been superseded by the world drug trade. It has been widely reported that today marijuana, whose cultivation is illegal, has become the single most valuable cash crop in U.S. agriculture. This should not surprise anyone in light of the fact that some of the biggest banks have been fined millions of dollars

for laundering money, that is, disguising deposits from the criminal underworld engaged in the sale of not only marijuana but heroin and cocaine. The age of telecommunications has made it possible for the banks and the criminal underworld to work as partners.

The underworld, even if not part of the establishment, can't help but integrate themselves with the banks. They want the interest on their money! Drug busts used to yield amounts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This then escalated into the millions. Recently, some drug busts have netted loot worth more than a billion dollars! It has escalated because it is so lucrative — like the slave trade. And what is the interest on a billion dollars? At just 6 percent, it comes to sixty million dollars. The banks have to get involved in the drug trade, because it is a lucrative source of deposits which are then loaned out at a profit.

The summits of high finance are involved. Among the banks caught red-handed have been Bank of America, the biggest in the country, and the First Boston Corporation. Bank of America was fined \$4.75 million and First Boston half a million. Chase Manhattan, Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Chemical, Crocker National and Irving Trust Company have had to pay civil penalties ranging from \$210,000 to \$360,000 for reported violations.⁵ ... What are they hiding? The deposit of profits from the criminal underworld engaged in destructive drug trafficking which takes an especially great toll in the oppressed communities. Legality and illegality coexist under the capitalist system and always have. Even after the slave trade was outlawed, it continued despite harsh penalties, as does the drug trade.

At a time when the banks are so heavily involved in unrecoverable loans worth hundreds of billions of dollars in connection with the indebtedness of oppressed countries, how many would not resort to this most modern and technologically advanced artifice to support their credit positions?

The observations made over a century ago by a certain T.J. Dunning, and quoted by

Marx in “Capital,” ring all too familiar today: “With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. Smuggling and the slave trade have amply proved all that is here stated.”[6](#) †

The invention of the cotton gin

While the compass as a technological device in the field of navigation was appropriated by the developing bourgeoisie from an earlier mode of production dating back many hundreds of years, the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 belonged strictly to the era of capitalist development. Its invention was called forth by the development of capitalist trade and commerce. Its influence on slavery was stupendous.

A great deal has been written about Eli Whitney as the inventor of the cotton gin and as a great scientist, which he certainly was. However, according to some accounts,[7](#) the first cotton gin made in Mississippi was constructed on the basis of a crude drawing by a skilled slave. This was probably not very unusual in light of the fact that even among the first slaves brought to this country from Africa, many were skilled craftspeople. Also, in both the South and the North there were skilled free Blacks. Since the slaves were never recognized in law as persons, the slave owners could appropriate their property as well as any inventions they might conceive of.

The cotton gin has often been described as the very soul of simplicity. However, it should be borne in mind that cotton has been spun, woven and dyed from the earliest times. Cotton formed the staple cloth of India, Egypt and China. Hundreds of years before the Christian era, cotton textiles were woven in India with matchless

skill and their use spread to the Mediterranean countries. In the first century, traders brought fine muslin and calico to Italy and Spain. The Arabs introduced the cultivation of cotton into Spain in the 9th century. By the 17th century, the East India Company was bringing rare fabrics from India.

Before the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas, cotton was skillfully spun there and woven into fine garments and dyed tapestries. Fabrics were found in Peruvian tombs that even belonged to pre-Inca cultures. Cotton was first planted by the Europeans in Virginia's Jamestown Colony in 1607.

The so-called Cotton Belt in the U.S., where cotton has historically been the main cash crop (now marijuana is!), extends through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, west Tennessee, east Arkansas, Louisiana, east Texas, and south Oklahoma, and also in smaller areas of southeast Missouri, southwest Kentucky, north Florida, and southeast Virginia. But prior to the invention of the cotton gin, cotton production was at a very low level. It was almost insignificant in the prevailing Southern economy. The plantation system rested mainly on tobacco and to a lesser extent on rice and indigo.

Rarely has an important technological development taken place which was as simple as the cotton gin. It separated the seeds from the cotton through a process using a cylinder with bent spikes sharpened to form hooks. They were set in a ring and revolved through slots in a bar. The teeth pulled away the lint, which was then cleaned from the teeth by brushes. A hand crank operated the whole machine.

What did this machine accomplish? As Eli Whitney himself explained in a letter, "The machine makes the labor 50 times less without throwing any class of people out of business."⁸ Of course, the slave economy was not characterized by unemployment, unlike wage slavery.

The cotton gin tremendously increased the productivity of Black slave labor on the

plantations. The figures in cotton crop production speak for themselves. In 1790, before the use of the cotton gin, the cotton crop of the U.S. amounted to 1.5 million pounds. By 1800, it had risen to 35 million pounds. By 1810, it had soared to 85 million pounds, and by 1860, it reached the astonishing sum of 2 billion pounds.

The introduction of the cotton gin thus brought about a profound social revolution. A machine that could increase the productivity of labor 50 times was nothing less than sensational. It thoroughly revolutionized Southern agriculture as well as Northern production methods.

Furthermore, it was in response to the tremendous social transformation evoked by the Industrial Revolution in England, which had brought about a skyrocketing demand for cotton and a sharp price increase. As Marx explained it in broader terms, "A radical change in the mode of production in one sphere of industry involves a similar change in other spheres. This happens at first in such branches of industry as are connected together by separate phases of a process, and yet are isolated by the social division of labor, in such a way, that each of them produces an independent commodity. Thus spinning by machinery made weaving by machinery a necessity, and both together made the mechanical and chemical revolution that took place in bleaching, printing, and dyeing, imperative. So too, on the other hand, the revolution in cotton-spinning called forth the invention of the gin, for separating the seeds from the cotton fiber; it was only by means of this invention, that the production of cotton became possible on the enormous scale at present required."⁹

But how did it affect slavery itself, this "peculiar institution" as it was called at the time? Did the sensational, spectacular development in technology retard slavery or expand it?

From the time school children attend their earliest classes they are taught about the wonders of modern science and what a liberating influence it has. Did the cotton gin at the time help to weaken slavery, as the general conceptions cultivated and

promoted by the bourgeoisie maintain? As we shall see, it strengthened slavery. And this happened at a time when it appeared (although it was only appearances) that slavery was in a decline.

Here it is necessary to look at the currents of thought which gave political expression to this phenomenon. For instance, the Continental Congress of 1774 proposed that the practice of importing slaves be stopped. Rhode Island and Connecticut passed laws providing that all chattel slaves brought within their respective provinces be freed, and Delaware prohibited the importation of bondsmen in 1776. Later, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina and Maryland all forbade the importation of slaves.

The slave trade itself, of course, was finally prohibited in the U.S. more than a decade after the introduction of the cotton gin, in 1808. But it should not be forgotten that the Constitutional Convention of 1788 wrote a clause into the Constitution making it impossible as a matter of federal law to abolish the slave trade on a national basis before 1808.

The demise of the slave trade has to be viewed in the light of class interests, first of the slavocracy itself. Why would they, as slave owners, be interested in abolishing it? Why, for instance, would George Mason of Virginia, himself a slave owner and supporter of slavery, condemn the slave trade as “diabolical itself and disgraceful to mankind”?[10](#)

Only by piercing the veil of capitalist hypocrisy, only by going behind the political rhetoric and seeking out the materialist interests of any given class, only by applying the materialist interpretation of history and analyzing social and political phenomena in terms of class interests, can we understand the politics, the social and political values. Thus, the basic reason behind abolishing the importation of slaves even in the above-named Southern states and castigating the trade as a “disgrace to mankind” was the fact that there had been a huge influx of slaves. Like the excessive

influx of any commodity governed by the law of supply and demand, this cheapened the price of a slave. The reasons behind it were economic in origin, masked in moralistic phraseology.

A surplus of slaves in some of the Southern states motivated the agitation against further importation. Most of this agitation, it should be noted, was before the use of the cotton gin really took off on a mass scale, producing unprecedented profits.

But there was also opposition to the slave trade motivated by an entirely different set of circumstances. This was a thoroughgoing revolutionary development which is highly obscured in U.S. history, particularly as it relates to the early struggles of the Black people before the Civil War. This revolutionary development fired the imagination of the enslaved Black people in this country and frightened the ruling class, both North and South.

The Haitian Revolution and U.S. slave revolts

This inspiring event was the successful revolution in Haiti led by its famous hero, Toussaint L'Ouverture. This great revolutionary development overthrew French colonial rule and then defeated massive British, Spanish and French interventionist forces in one of history's really brilliant political and military upsets. Unfortunately, the significance of this great revolutionary development has been obscured and dimmed in this century, especially over the past few decades, by the existence of the U.S.-supported Duvalier dictatorship over the Haitian people. Now that the Haitian masses are once again rising to shape their own destiny, the significance of the Haitian Revolution is sure to be rehabilitated.

Both in France and here in the U.S., the master class referred to the Haitian revolutionaries as "Black Jacobins," after the most radical and determined party in the French Revolution, which had helped to inspire the Haitian Revolution. The Jacobins had attempted to go beyond the confines of the emerging capitalist system

in France.

The Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803 established the first republic in the vast colonized area of the Caribbean and Latin America. But it remained isolated. It wasn't until this century that the Mexican Revolution, the brilliant achievements of the Cuban Revolution, the developing revolution in Nicaragua, and the many national liberation efforts throughout the Western Hemisphere began the long-delayed overthrow of imperialist domination in this hemisphere. This struggle has yet to come to completion and finish the processes begun by the great revolution in Haiti.

The American Revolution itself had unloosed a progressive current against slavery as part and parcel of the independence struggle. Genuine revolutionaries like Thomas Paine and others, unlike many among the "founding fathers," opposed slavery from the viewpoint of real freedom of the people and were not beholden to either the Northern industrialists or the Southern slavocracy.

But the most basic reason why some slave owners and others among the growing bourgeoisie felt the need for restraint on the importation of slaves and even the elimination of slavery was fear of domestic insurrection. This important motivating factor behind the opposition to slavery has not been given the attention it rates. For many, many decades the heroic slave insurrections were completely minimized and given scant attention.

The insurrections given the most detailed accounts in modern literature were those of Gabriel in Virginia (1800), Denmark Vesey in Charlestown, S.C. (1822) and, most famous, that of Nat Turner in South Hampton County, Virginia (1831). [11](#)

However, a great many insurrections took place which are only beginning to be taken note of. The Civil War itself demonstrated many instances of insurrections by the Black people. The Black masses under slavery were not the passive, docile force

imagined by bourgeois historiography, especially in the literature predating the mass movement of Black people in this century.

Black rebellions go back in history to the very beginnings of slavery in this country. As early as 1687, “one year previous to the Glorious Revolution in the mother country,” the revolution in England that consolidated the power of the bourgeoisie as against the old feudal aristocracy, there was “widespread revolt throughout the colonies and at a time when the Negro population of the Old Dominion was about equal to that of whites. ... That was the attempted insurrection in Northern Neck.”¹² All were executed when the plot was discovered and the revolt was crushed.

How interesting, in light of present-day developments in South Africa, that the Virginia Council placed a ban on public funerals for the dead slaves in fear that they would bring out mass demonstrations and might even provoke another rebellion!

One thing to remember in connection with the early slave insurrections is that they were influenced politically by the English Revolution and, much more profoundly, by the French Revolution. The great revolutions of this century (especially in Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam and Angola, and now the emerging revolutionary struggle in South Africa) have also had the most profound effect among the exploited and oppressed masses everywhere.

The spectacular success of the cotton gin in raising the productivity of labor of the slaves tremendously strengthened the South, strengthened slavery and impelled the slaveholders to become not only more aggressive and bellicose but, far more important, more expansionist. Slavery drove into the Southwest and everywhere it could in order to expand its plantations and garner in unprecedented profits. Cotton production was extensive in character, appropriating more and more land, rather than intensively applying mechanical devices. It drove the slaves harder and harder, often beyond endurance.

But the very invention which had become such a tremendous advantage to the Southern planters, like all social phenomena, soon began to develop one of the sharpest social contradictions which ultimately would undo the slavocracy altogether.

Slavery vs. capitalist production

The South was a slavocracy based on an ancient mode of production within the geographical confines of a new world social order, the bourgeois social order with its own mode of capitalist production. One of the fundamental differences between the bourgeois mode and older modes of production so eloquently brought out in the “Communist Manifesto” is that “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.” [13](#)

How does this stack up with the Southern slavocracy? Marx continued, “Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was ... the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes.” The South tried to retain the old slavocracy not only in unaltered form but in extreme rigidity. It was, therefore, on a collision course with the new bourgeois order, with the process of capitalist production and its tremendous growth in the North.

Another and more flagrant contradiction was that one of the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist mode of production is wage slavery, which means a free proletarian, that is, a worker free to sell his or her labor on the capitalist market. Capitalist production and the extraction of surplus value in the interest of further capitalist accumulation is virtually impossible without a free working class, free to be exploited and oppressed, free to be unemployed. Chattel slavery was thus thoroughly incompatible with wage slavery.

Slavery as an economic institution has everywhere proved itself uneconomical. This

is especially true when it depends on one great crop such as cotton, with diminishing reliance on sugar, rice and other products. The South was turning into a monocultural economy.

Over all, the spectacular leap in technology on which the Southern planters depended so heavily to maintain slavery was only one of many scientific and technological developments in an era which was rapidly turning them out in greater and greater numbers. In this respect the South was falling far behind the North.

The North was making all the great strides in science and technology. It built up great universities which became centers for basic research. Whatever prominence the South had had in science in the earlier days, it was losing to the North. Seen in terms of the contemporary struggle in technology of the U.S. against Japan and Western Europe, the South was steadily losing ground to the North in what we would call today the technological race.

As a competing form of economic and social system compared to the social system based on capitalist production, slavery was hopelessly out of place and had no chance, save by the use of sheer force. Slavery was static, fixed and extremely rigid in its form of production. It was also characterized by the most outlandish forms of cruelty and brutality. The capitalist system, on the other hand, while certainly not characterized by either compassion or humanity, was nevertheless “revolutionizing” its means of production, that is, it was advancing science and technology. The change from chattel slavery to wage slavery was a profoundly revolutionary change, a tremendous social transformation. But historically it constituted a change in the form of exploitation, not its abolition.

Thus, we see that while the first phase of the scientific-technological revolution brought fabulous profits to the South and gave it the power to expand, it ultimately undid slavery. Just as technological change undermined the Southern slavocracy, so will it make obsolete the present industrial financial plutocracy with its system of

wage slavery.

Black scientists and inventors

It is beyond the province of this study to give an accounting of the many scientific inventions made, particularly during the last half of this century. The modern epoch in which the bourgeois system of production has predominated has been abundant in scientists and inventors whose contributions have laid the material foundation for present-day society.

However, there has been a systematic attempt in the U.S. to omit the very significant contributions of Black scientists. Popular science books available to the public contain the names of only a small number of Black inventors and scientists.

There are 14 Black scientists who are acknowledged to have made outstanding contributions to science, yet the Encyclopedia Britannica (1980 edition) lists only four. Conspicuously absent is Norbert Rilleux (1806-1894). He is one of three Black scientists who actually revolutionized an industry. In Rilleux's case it was sugar refining. By inventing the vacuum-pan evaporator, he transformed the sugar industry of the world.

That his name could be forgotten in a country which produces and consumes more refined sugar per capita than any other is hard to conceive of except on the basis of flagrant racist prejudice.

Until 1846, sugar cane juice was transformed into sugar by a very primitive, costly and slow process. Rilleux's invention replaced the manual operation with a mechanical one. As Louis Haber tells us in his "Black Pioneers of Science and Invention," [14](#) slaves had formerly transferred the sugar cane juice from one boiling kettle to another by means of long ladles. With Rilleux's device, a single worker could operate the completely enclosed machine through outside valves. It was

Rilleux and George Washington Carver (1860-1943) who rescued the South from being transformed into a hopelessly backward agricultural adjunct to the North, similar to the role played by the southern part of Italy until very recently.

Carver, however, is much too well known throughout the world for his reputation to be obscured. It was Carver's work in soil improvement and the diversification of crops which made him famous. He discovered hundreds of uses for the peanut, the sweet potato and the soybean, and thus stimulated the culture of these important crops. He also derived many products from cotton wastes and extracted blue, purple and red pigments from local clay.

Many industries sprang up as a result of the use of peanut products. It helped to stimulate the Southern economy to the extent that many farmers found it more profitable to engage in the production of peanuts than tobacco.

Carver also demonstrated that from the pecan, which grew well in the South, could be extracted 75 different products. When there was an overproduction of cotton, Carver showed how it could be used to make insulating board, paper, rugs, cordage and even paving blocks for highways.

Carver's achievements were perhaps best summarized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said upon his death: "The world of science has lost one of its most eminent figures and the race from which he sprang, an outstanding member. ... The versatility of his genius and achievements in diverse branches of the arts and sciences were truly amazing. All mankind are the beneficiaries of his discoveries in the field of agricultural chemistry. The things which he achieved in the face of early handicaps will for all time afford an inspiring example to use everywhere."¹⁵

A third great Black scientist who transformed and revolutionized an entire industry was Jan Matzeliger (1852-1889). Although much less known than his two eminent fellow scientists, he invented what at the time seemed an impossible feat — a

machine which would mass-produce shoes. Matzeliger accomplished for the shoe industry what Eli Whitney's gin did for the cotton industry of the South.

While it's true there were a number of machines in use in the shoemaking industry around the time of Matzeliger's invention, none seemed to have been able to connect the upper to the sole of the shoe. It was believed such a thing could not be done.

Matzeliger's machine did it. It could turn out a complete shoe. At first, the machine made a record run of 75 pairs of women's shoes in one day. Later Matzeliger's machine made as many as 700 pairs of shoes a day. It also reduced the cost of shoes by half and was soon being applied on a worldwide scale.

In industry, there were at least four more Black scientists who made very significant contributions to the development of science and technology but are little known. One was the man who invented the automatic lubrication of machinery, Elijah McCoy (1844-1929), whose work gave rise to the expression "the real McCoy." Before his time, a machine had to be stopped in order to be lubricated.

Then there was Granville T. Woods (1856-1910), who developed so many electrical inventions that he was known as the Black Edison. There was also Lewis H. Latimer (1848-1928) who advanced electric lighting and Garrett A. Morgan (1877-1963) who invented the traffic light.

In this century, a number of Black scientists have made outstanding contributions in the field of health and medicine. Charles R. Drew perfected techniques to preserve blood plasma, which made possible the use of blood banks. Percy L. Julian developed synthetic cortisone which, among other applications, is helpful in combating the pain of arthritis. Lloyd A. Hall found ways to sterilize foods and medical supplies. Ernest E. Just became a leading authority on cell physiology. Louis T. Wright made advances in critical antibiotic research, and Daniel Hale Williams performed the first open heart surgery.

There was, however, one early Black scientist whose special importance, aside from his inventive genius, was in the field of political struggle against oppression and for equality: Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806). In most texts he is described as the surveyor who laid out the city of Washington. But he was much more than that.

Banneker was a scientist, astronomer, mathematician, clockmaker and surveyor. Earlier we alluded to Samuel Slater, the Englishman who invented a textile machine and who, when prohibited from bringing his plans for the machine to this country, memorized the blueprints and then reconstructed the machine from memory. Benjamin Banneker was able to lay out the city of Washington after memorizing much more detailed plans to which he had had only limited access as an assistant.

Originally, a young Frenchman had been given the job of planning and laying out the capital. Banneker was one of his three assistants. The young Frenchman got into a dispute with Thomas Jefferson and as a result took his plans and left for France, leaving Jefferson in the lurch. Banneker stepped forward and volunteered to do the job on the basis of what he retained in his memory. That's how the city was finally laid out.

Banneker made the first clock ever built in the United States. He built it entirely of wood and carved each gear by hand. The clock kept perfect time, and people from all over the country came to see it. Banneker should also be remembered for the almanac he prepared in 1792 and each year thereafter for ten years.

What is politically significant in Banneker's history is that he was the only contemporary of Thomas Jefferson to challenge him on the issue of equality. Every school child is taught that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, which contained this famous sentence: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

But Jefferson was also a wealthy slave owner, and even though he sold off all his slaves toward the end of his life, his concept of equality did not extend to Black people. He had also written that “the Blacks are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind.” This was no chance statement. The collection of Jefferson’s works demonstrates that these sentiments appeared widely in his writings.

Even though the 18th century became known in history as the Enlightenment, especially the years following the revolutions in the U.S. and France, Jefferson held to his reactionary, racist view of Black people. None of the outstanding leaders at the time directly took Jefferson to task for the flagrant contradiction between the florid language he used in the Declaration of Independence and the ugly practice of slavery, which, in fact, was validated in the Constitution.

It remained for Banneker to use his almanac for this purpose. He attached to it an eleven-page handwritten letter that systematically took apart Jefferson’s lofty proclamation of inalienable rights while at the same time condoning the vicious practice of slavery. This was one of the few — perhaps the only — direct attacks on Jefferson, the man who to this day along with Andrew Jackson is honored by the Democratic capitalist politicians at their annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners as a symbol of democracy and freedom.

Banneker’s letter to Jefferson did oblige the latter to back off somewhat. In a letter dated August 30, 1791, Jefferson thanked Banneker: “I can add with truth that nobody wishes more ardently to see a good system commence for raising the condition both of their [Black people’s-S.M.] body and mind to what it ought to be. ... I do see such proofs that you exhibit that nature has given to our Black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colors of men and that the appearance of the want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence both in Africa and in America.”

Jefferson said he was taking the liberty of sending Banneker's almanac to the French Academy of Sciences because he considered it a document "to which your whole color has a right for their justification against the doubts which have been entertained of them." It is only because of Banneker's struggle for equality and against oppression that Jefferson, who held such an eminent position in U.S. history as a liberal, was forced to retreat somewhat from his racist views.

By way of acknowledgment, it should be said that Louis Haber in his book "Black Pioneers in Science and Invention" has done as much to popularize what was so little known about the achievements of Black scientists as Paul D. DeKruif did for biologists more than a half century ago in his lucid exposition, "Microbe Hunters."

The individual scientist in the modern era of the scientific-technological revolution faces a vastly different world than the one in which Banneker or even Thomas Edison at a later date lived and worked. The role of the individual scientist has been diminished by the emergence of capitalist collectivism in the big business laboratory. Today's vast laboratory complexes are organized and controlled by the mighty corporate giants and employ thousands of scientists. The giant corporations compel all scientific personnel to sign contracts that any inventions they may develop in the course of their work are the property of the company.

Superimposed on them is a labyrinth of laboratories directly controlled by the Pentagon. The great universities of today are intimate collaborators of the Pentagon and few have real independence as to how to allocate their scientific investigations.

One of the truly important scientific inventions of modern times was the transistor. True to the age in which we live, it was developed in the laboratories of Bell Telephone Company in 1948 by American physicists John Bardeen and Walter H. Brattain. How many hundreds of scientific workers helped lay the basis for it is not really taken into account.

When mass layoffs take place, such as we've described with AT&T, what happens to the laid-off scientific personnel? How does it affect the pursuit of their scientific career? In that highly significant layoff, no breakdown was given as to how it affected Black scientific workers, women or other oppressed people. There's not a word as to whether affirmative action has been a factor in the employment of Black, Latin, Asian, Native, Arab and women workers, or whether the layoffs took place in accordance with affirmative action guidelines.

The Third World brain drain

The scientific-technological revolution has had a deleterious effect on Third World scientific personnel and the development of science and inventions. Immediately after World War II, the U.S. embarked on a vast campaign to pirate both the technology and the scientific personnel of the other imperialist countries. It also started to drain the budding development of science and technology in the oppressed countries.

With respect to the imperialist countries, it is well known how right after the war the U.S. brought captured German scientific personnel here to work on rockets and space flight. But it wasn't only from Germany. The British government under Labor Prime Minister Harold Wilson finally restricted what was later called the brain drain by an agreement that limited U.S. pirating of scientists, at least from that area.

While U.S. government policy has been to restrict immigration and imprison and deport so-called illegal, undocumented workers, it has at the same time enticed Third World scientists to the U.S. On the one hand, imperialist policy through a variety of foundations like those endowed by the Fords, Rockefellers and others seems to be constantly exhorting the oppressed countries to modernize, to become innovative and inventive and thereby aid their industrial and technological development. But the truth is that every chance they get to entice Third World

scientists to the U.S., they do so, in complete contradiction to the proclaimed policy. They not only extend the stay of visiting students and professors and encourage them to become citizens but also offer them various monetary inducements.

It is one thing to defend the democratic right of individuals to choose their own domicile. It is another matter if this is part and parcel of a policy of monopoly capitalism to pillage and plunder the resources of Third World countries.

The scientific personnel of less developed countries are in many respects their most precious resource. The brain-drain aspect of the scientific-technological revolution has enhanced, not diminished, U.S. imperialism's intense exploitation of the oppressed people.

Black labor today

Extrapolating from the population figures provided in the 1986 annual report of the National Urban League on the "State of Black America," there are about 28 million Black people in the United States. That's larger than most African countries and larger than most middle-sized countries represented in the United Nations.

By always referring to Black people as a minority, the bourgeois press obscures the class significance of the Black population, which is overwhelmingly working class and which, therefore, especially when taken together with the Latin, Asian and Native population, adds a very significant dimension to the whole character of the working class here.

To regard the Black struggle strictly from the viewpoint of minority-majority is to lose much of its profound social and political implications. What should interest working-class students of the Black struggle, however, is that even these figures, which are probably understated, disclose a social viability which has strong revolutionary potentialities given the conditions we believe are developing that will

give a fundamentally altered social composition to the working class.

To understand the current state of Black labor in the United States, it is necessary to look first at the mass migration of Black people to the North which took on momentum early in the 20th century and reached considerable proportions at the end of World War I. Mass production industries in the U.S. like auto (especially Ford) and steel were in a period of high capitalist development. When this culminated in World War I, it opened the gates of some industries and fields of economic endeavor to Black labor, notwithstanding rank discrimination and entrenched racial barriers.

These were not relaxed. Instead artificial classifications were created so that Black workers doing almost exactly the same work as whites got far lower wages. Nor were barriers lifted in the skilled trades and American Federation of Labor craft unions. These were as rigidly racist in their approach as they had been before World War I. But Black labor continually found ways to gain skills and get skilled jobs despite government, employer and union racial discrimination.

It should always be borne in mind that even the first boatloads of slaves who arrived in this country from Africa brought with them useful skills which were developed even in slave times. In cities like New York and Philadelphia, before the mass migrations from Europe started, there were a considerable number of Black workers in industry who had developed skills. But as more and more white labor from Europe became available, Black workers began to be relentlessly driven out of industry.

These mass migrations from Europe undermined whatever leverage the Black workers might have had in industry, notwithstanding discrimination. Things got more and more difficult for them.

Capitalism as the involuntary promoter of the development of the working class also caused the mass migration of Black agricultural workers from the South to the

North. Notwithstanding the racial barrier or the unemployment as a consequence of the capitalist economic cycle, more and more Black workers got into Northern industry even as the pool of Black unemployed grew.

That most of the central cities of the North and now some in the South have a majority or a very large minority of Black people is objectively due to the transformation of capitalist industry with World Wars I and II. World War II in particular was a much longer war for the U.S. and entailed the construction of many defense facilities. In fact, the entire U.S. industrial apparatus was converted for war purposes and for the first time, full employment became an artificial phenomenon dependent on war spending.

These two objective factors — World Wars I and II — also found an echo beginning in 1950 with the Korean War. In the early 1950s and again during the Vietnam War, employment was artificially propped up by the continuing growth of the defense industries.

If today in cities like Detroit, Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia, New York, Atlanta, Memphis and Birmingham there are large Black populations with some political power, it is not due to any attempt by the ruling class to ameliorate the condition of Black workers or to lighten the burden of discrimination. Rather, it comes as a result of objective development arising out of the organic functioning of the capitalist system and the inevitability of imperialist wars and military interventions abroad. This is not to say that the whole industrial structure of the U.S. is due entirely to imperialist wars, but without them it is difficult to conceive how there could have been such a rapid social transformation in the condition of Black and also white workers.

The mass migration from the South — and back to the South, especially during times of unemployment — is among the objective factors affecting the development of Black labor. The subjective factors arise from the freedom struggle, especially the

struggle of the 1960s.

The Black freedom struggle

It is utterly impossible to understand the contemporary role of Black workers in this country and particularly their situation in the trade union movement without considering them in a broader political framework. A study of Black labor, especially over the last 25 years, that omitted the general political struggle, the freedom struggle of the Black people as a whole, would make for a very constricted and even distorted view of both the great achievements of Black workers in the trade union movement and the equally great if not greater drawbacks of their situation.

Racism has permeated every layer of capitalist society; the trade union movement from its earliest times up to the present has been permeated with chauvinism and vicious discriminatory practices. The trade unions are the most formidable working-class organizations in the country. Aside from temporary retreats and taking into account the long duration of the political reaction, they are bound to become organs of the great struggles for emancipation from both racist oppression and capitalist class exploitation.

But all of this has to be considered in the broader arena of the overall political struggle of Black people, in which the trade unions have certainly been a significant part, but only a part. In reality, what happens there is a reflection of what is going on in the Black struggle as a whole. The great battles of the 1960s and 1970s in particular must be considered in evaluating and analyzing how this reflected itself in the unions.

Just to take one example out of many: In April 1969, some 500 Black workers shut down production at the Ford plant in Mahwah, N.J., for several days. The workers walked out because a foreman called one of the workers “a Black bastard.” Although the official UAW leadership urged the workers to return to their jobs, they

nevertheless stayed out until the foreman was ousted from the plant. This was the famous so-called wildcat strike at Mahwah organized by the United Black Brothers, and it represented a significant victory for all the workers.

If this significant victory for the UAW at that period is seen only in the trade union framework, it could present an oddity. But when seen in the larger framework of the overall Black political struggle, one gets a far truer measure of its significance for the local struggle as well as nationally.

There were other significant developments in the UAW that came on the heels of the great 1967 rebellion in Detroit and ushered in a series of electoral victories for the Black workers in the UAW. "Suddenly the UAW leadership stopped the practice of mobilizing opposition to Black candidates in local elections. Within a few months after the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Black workers were elected as presidents of Local 900 (Ford's Wayne plant), Local 47 (Chrysler Detroit Forge), Local 961 (Chrysler's Eldron Gear), Local 7 (Chrysler), Local 51 (Plymouth), and even Local 1248 (Chrysler Mopar), where only 20 percent of the plant's 989 workers were Black. A Black was elected for the first time as vice-president of Briggs Local 21."[16](#)

Before the Mahwah struggle took place, there were a considerable number of political rebellions and insurrections of Black people. There was the Harlem rebellion, followed by Watts, Newark and Cleveland, to name only a few, and, of course, the largest of the mass insurrections took place in Detroit. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, there were a total of more than 500 rebellions throughout the whole country.

How then can the struggles of Black workers for equality be seen as strictly trade union struggles? Few if any of the very significant gains made by Black workers could have been attained without the so-called outside struggle, that is, the general political struggle put up by Black people. That was the real catalyst, the basic

generator for the trade union gains, many of which were not only vital but indispensable, considering the long and difficult task to attain equality which still goes on.

What is said about the Black struggle applies equally and to some extent even more to the Latin struggle, the women's struggle and the gay and lesbian struggle. Any gains made in the unions must be related to the broader struggles which generated them. It would, of course, be fruitful to speculate on how different it could have been had the struggles been initiated by the trade union movement rather than being forced upon it. But this is the music of the future, not of the past.

There are about 110 million workers in the U.S. today. In the mid-1980s, only about 17.3 million belonged to unions, as we've discussed earlier. However, there can be no doubt that the union movement will become the fundamental lever for working-class struggle. The anti-labor offensive which has been sweeping the country for several years is bound to produce one of the truly great upsurges of the working class, and this time the union movement will not be in the rearguard but in the vanguard of the struggle as regards Black, Latino, Asian, and Native people, women and lesbians and gay men.

The tardiness of the working-class response to the offensive of the ruling class in the face of such profound political and social reaction can be explained in part by the lack of a mass political party of the working class. The response from the working class, both organized and unorganized, is likely to come as the result of spontaneous outbreaks, which will take the form of trade unionism but not necessarily in the way the trade union officialdom presides over the union movement. What more concrete form it will take we have to leave for events themselves to reveal.

Suffice it to say that the very intensity of the political reaction, generated by the Reagan administration and prepared earlier by the Carter administration and its predecessors, has created the conditions for a tumultuous social upheaval, not a

controlled one that could be easily manipulated by contemporary bourgeois politicians and the trade union bureaucracy. The very tardiness in preparing a party of the working class, which in Europe and other areas has taken generations to build up, makes inevitable that the pent-up rage at the oppression and exploitation endured by all strata of the working class will break out in another form. It would seem to emanate most easily from the workplace and from the vast pool of unemployed. The special oppression of women, Black, Latin, Asian, Arab and Native workers will make them a magnet for one another.

A former science adviser to Reagan in late 1985 told a Cable News Network (CNN) interviewer that “unemployment in Western Europe constitutes the greatest danger to Western civilization.” Of course, it’s true! But not only in Europe. The capitalist “recovery” here in the U.S. has been taking place amidst some 15 million unemployed, if comprehensive calculations are made. Social peace cannot be maintained on such an explosive material base.

The impact of high tech on Black postal workers

In attempting to evaluate the impact of the scientific-technological revolution on Black workers as well as other oppressed people, it is best to avoid focusing our analysis on a narrow sector of industry. Also, while the influence of high tech has been most profound in industries such as auto, electric and steel, we have already dealt with these areas in some measure.

We are also deliberately avoiding areas where racist or sexist discrimination is most pronounced, or where Black, Latin and women workers still constitute only a very small portion of the workforce. A broad sector of the economy, where there are a significant number of Black, Latin and women workers, is more appropriate for this study.

By taking a sector of the economy where so-called optimum conditions prevail,

where racist and sexist oppression is generally regarded as less significant than in other areas, we are better able to illustrate our theme, namely, that high tech results in low-wage jobs and unemployment in all sectors of the economy. This explains why we have chosen what seems like an unlikely area, the U.S. Postal Service, for this study. Furthermore, it is probably the oldest service industry in the country, being created around the time of the U.S. Constitution in 1789.

Though racism may be a less significant factor in the Postal Service than in some other areas, nevertheless, this is the current situation for Black postal workers:

“Blacks appear to be concentrated in less future-oriented Postal Service jobs. When racial concentration versus dispersal of employees in the Postal Service is analyzed, Blacks appear to be concentrated in the lower range and low-paying jobs (levels 1-6). In contrast, in grade levels 7 to 38, 90 percent of the postal employees are nonminority. Thus, the mode of substitution in this case is by a targeted racial distribution in which Blacks are concentrated in the jobs most likely to be affected by technology, particularly the nine-digit zip code, automated mail processing and flat sorting technology and the electronic message systems.”¹⁷ The same is true for Latin and other oppressed people.

During the depths of the Great Depression, work at the post office was considered the best and most secure job for anybody from a working-class family. Even today, assuming there are openings, it probably offers more job security for a young person from a working-class family than other areas. However, a great transformation is underway here too, although it is not publicly recognized.

In 1970, during the Nixon administration, Congress enacted the Postal Reorganization Act (PRA). With this new law, the government took decisive steps that were to have far-reaching significance for many millions of workers. For the postal workers, it began a chain of developments concerning the dispatching, processing and delivery of mail, which ultimately resulted in a loss of almost 100,000

jobs as of 1983.

The PRA was the first early warning of what has become a virtual daily phenomenon, the so-called deregulation of industry, whose principal aim and function, despite claims of modernization by the ruling class, is to ditch restraining and protective labor legislation and to get into private hands anything they feel can be profitable.

The PRA made a so-called independent agency of the Postal Service, which had been regarded as a full-fledged arm of the government with representation in the Cabinet since way back in 1828. The act reduced the status of the post office and turned it into an agency of the executive branch with an eleven-person board of governors, nine of them appointed by the President with the approval of the Senate, and a Postmaster General who is responsible to the President.

The whole idea was to gradually shrink the vast and complex network of postal services, introduce a series of technological innovations and put it on a so-called business basis. The income and outgo of funds were to be equalized and eventually a net surplus was to be produced in the same way as in private industry.

What has really happened since the PRA went into effect?

Despite the decline in the number of postal workers from 756,000 in 1970 to 660,000 in 1983, the Postal Service has increased its piece volume by more than 20 billion. In 1981 alone, mail volume reached a record 110 billion pieces.

Despite this growth in productivity, however, in the last contract, announced on Dec. 24, 1984, the government through an arbitration panel imposed a notorious two-tier wage pattern on the American Postal Workers Union and the National Association of Letter Carriers. This meant a 25 percent wage cut for workers hired after a certain date. In time, this lower wage may apply to all workers unless a combined effort of all the unions, not only the postal unions, is mobilized against it throughout the

country. (The two-tier system of wage levels first got a foothold in none other than the Boeing company, one of the pillars of high technology in the aerospace industry.)

At the same time, notwithstanding the government's bold talk about private enterprise standing on its own feet, it has continued a long line of luscious contracts to the big corporations which supply the materials to the Postal Service. In addition, the government is trying to weaken the "no-layoff clause" in the postal workers' contract.

The unions have a real job on their hands whenever they have to face the government in high-tech negotiations, particularly with the restriction on their right to strike and after what the Reagan administration did with its vicious union busting against the air traffic controllers (PATCO).

The new relationship of the government, particularly Congress, to the postal workers can be seen in the drastic decline in postal appropriations and share of operating expenses over the fiscal years 1971-1983. A reactionary Congress and a reactionary White House have combined through the Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan years to steadily cut down the amount of appropriations for the post office and let the broad public carry the weight of financing postal operations.

Of course, in those years all other vital services by federal and state governments were also cut down. But what is necessary to distinguish here is that the entire strategy has been geared toward investment in the mechanization of the dispatching, processing and delivery of postal services. A significant portion of the appropriations has been devoted to the automation of mail processing — the installation of optical character readers and bar code sorters in major post offices. All this is bound to squeeze out more workers.

The aim of this automation is to save nearly a billion dollars a year in labor costs — which means that the jobs of many more workers, especially Black, Latin and women

workers, are at peril. An official history published by the Postal Service itself says that “after the introduction of ZIP+4 in 1983, the first delivery phase of the new OCR (optical character readers) channel sorters and BCS (bar code sorters) was completed by mid-1984. When fully implemented and used with the expanded ZIP+4 codes, the automated system will save an estimated \$960 million annually in labor costs alone.”[18](#)

What happened to the electronic mail delivery service is instructive for seeing how the big corporations allow new technologies to be developed at government expense only to take them over themselves. The U.S. government first developed electronic computer-originated mail (E-COM), which went into service in 1982. It allowed large-volume mailers to transmit messages via computer to selected post offices, where they were printed out, placed in envelopes and delivered by letter carriers. But then a group of large, private, multinational companies, including UPS, Federal Express and Western Union, instigated the antitrust division of the Justice Department to file a suit charging the Postal Service with unfair competition because of the low rates charged. Although the post office won, the so-called independent Postal Rate Commission then demanded that the E-COM rates be doubled, which finally forced the government to abandon that part of the delivery of electronic mail which pertains to domestic use. However, the government continues to maintain the service called Intelpost, which is an electronically transmitted international service.

The struggle by the big carriers to dismantle the Postal Service was foreshadowed by a big business-inspired article in the June 1979 Forbes magazine entitled, “Do we really need the postal service?”

Here it is necessary to demonstrate the close link that now exists between the Postal Service and the entire telecommunications industry. Real competition from any number of services in private industry operates as a goad to the Postal Service

management to follow suit with each and every new mechanical innovation showing promise of reducing costs and hence the unit cost of labor. Essentially, that is what really lies behind all cost-reducing programs.

In the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the PRA was passed, AT&T carried out one of its devastating assaults on the mass of telephone operators, which took a huge toll on Black, Latin and women workers especially.

What happened at AT&T has exceptional relevance to the situation of the postal workers. Even at that time, it had become clear that the telecommunications industry had tremendous influence in the government, and that the enactment of the PRA would begin active competition between private industry and the postal service, in the process liquidating many thousands upon thousands of jobs.

However, the postal workers saw the Postal Reorganization Act in an entirely different context. They had just gone through their first and most important strike, which, despite some concessions, had won legitimacy for their union. This was accomplished even though Nixon sent the U.S. Army into the post offices of the great metropolitan areas of the country in an effort to intimidate and break the workers' resistance. That the postal workers were able to survive this and grow in strength explains why they won subsequent gains and concessions from the government.

In all this, the historical background of the Postal Service should not be forgotten. Like other institutions of U.S. capitalism, it has been profoundly segregationist since the beginning. It was not until 1865, the last year of the Civil War, that the laws prohibiting — yes prohibiting! — Black people from carrying mailbags from stagecoach to post office were abolished.

Racism has continued during the many decades thereafter, partly as a result of outright discrimination by white organized unions. The founding of the National

Alliance of Postal Workers in 1913 marked a milestone in self-help organizational mediums by Black workers when the leadership of white organized unions would not open their doors to Black workers.

It was not until the 1940s that Black, Latin and women workers were more freely admitted to the unions under the impact of many profound social changes, most important of which was the civil rights struggle and the upsurge of the labor movement as a whole. This finally made it possible for Black, Latin and women workers to take advantage of employment opportunities in the Postal Service.

Even now, despite attrition and pending future layoffs, “minorities [since 1978] have steadily increased as a proportion of total Postal Service employment.” Thus, in the fiscal year 1981, a year of big layoffs as a result of the capitalist recession all over industry, “the Postal Service hired 10,064 Blacks, 2,765 Hispanics and 2,289 other minorities for a total of 15,118 or 27.6 percent of new employees.”[19](#)

Of course, with anticipated future employment reductions, the picture is not encouraging, particularly if one takes into account the direction the government is taking in pushing the replacement of workers with sophisticated technology. It is more and more geared to the telecommunications industry, of which the government is the principal supporter and promoter.

However, the future of women is a different matter. Female postal employment is predicted to rise while the proportion of Black workers as a whole is expected to remain constant.

The dispatch and delivery of mail are a component of the transportation and communications industry. Like railroad workers, truck drivers and waterfront workers, postal workers participate in the freight-handling process. Transportation facilitates the circulation of capitalist commodities and the scientific-technological revolution has accelerated this process. What automation has done in the Postal

Service is another form of what containerization did in the shipping and maritime industries. The postal workers must view themselves as part of the communications, telecommunications and transportation industries with whom they have so much in common.

The employers and the capitalist state have a sustained and abiding interest in artificially keeping the workers in these industries apart and separated. They do this all the more to divide Black and white. However, the scientific-technological revolution has forged a new link between a variety of industries which hitherto seemed to be very separated. It has opened up a new vista, a new horizon which lays out and broadens the basis for working-class solidarity.

The capitalist system in its early stages needed a government postal service in order to develop capitalist industry and communications as a whole. It could not have developed the productive forces without almost two centuries of a government-sponsored postal service. Now, with the development of telecommunications, the government wants to ditch that part of the service which is no longer lucrative for big business and high finance, and retain that portion which still facilitates big business, while holding a club over the heads of the postal workers through compulsory no-strike mediation and arbitration.

Union leaders must make particularly clear that there is absolutely no valid reason why the capitalist government should be able to dictate the wages and working conditions of the postal workers and at the same time deprive the workers of their right to strike. The Postal Service is but one segment of the telecommunications industry, as are RCA, GE or AT&T. It is really one connected industry and the demand should be made to remove the anti-strike clause against the postal workers.

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