

cellor, Otto von Bismarck, American unionists are still far from achieving that goal.

3. In real dollars, workers' living standards have been declining recently for the first time in four decades. After a steady rise, in good times and in bad since 1938, the trend was reversed in 1979, 1980, and 1981; the decline will certainly continue in 1982 and, perhaps, for years to come. We are in the midst of a Government-managed depression in which President Carter forced real wages down by decreeing "voluntary" wage guidelines that fell short by 5 per cent of meeting price increases in the past three years. President Reagan has created an adverse climate for wage improvements by the sharpest attack on the poor in a half century. Moreover, there is an increasing tendency on the part of management to demand "give-backs" — the surrender of wages or benefits previously won by labor.

There is a partial solution to these reverses: a return to the principles of solidarity and militance. A certain degree of solidarity still distinguishes the labor movement — teamsters, for example, usually (but not always) respect the picket lines of other organizations. But it is a limited solidarity that stops at the borderline of illegality. Clothing workers could have added to the pressure on J.P. Stevens — and perhaps forced the company to yield — by refusing to weave its cloth, but that would have been against the law. It is unlikely that the rest of labor's leadership would have supported officials of the clothing workers' union who engaged in such a boycott. The steel workers could have shortened the recent coal strike, or prevented it, by announcing they would not handle scab coal. And the auto workers could have helped the rubber workers to victory during the tire strike a few years ago by refusing to put scab tires on new cars. But it is no longer labor's style to violate repressive laws.

In a choice between what is legally permissible and what is morally correct, the movement of the 1930s chose the morally correct — and made its greatest strides. The auto workers who occupied General Motors property in 1936 and 1937 were obviously breaking the law — but if it had not been for the sit-down strikes, the CIO would not have flourished, nor would the movement have attained its present dimensions. The sit-down strikes were acts of civil disobedience in the face of a gross injustice — the denial by business and government of the workers' right to bargain collectively. They were just as morally sound as Martin Luther King's marches for civil rights.

The Taft-Hartley Act, the Landrum-Griffin Act, and other anti-labor laws have cut into union solidarity by prohibiting such practices as "secondary boycotts." But union officials who now draw high salaries for their soft, safe jobs are no longer inclined to challenge unjust laws by refusing to obey them. Having won job and financial security, they protect their prerogatives by clinging to moderate policies and dampening the militancy of the rank and file.

But this state of affairs won't last forever. A mood of desperation is already building in the rank and file, and it evokes the mood that sparked the labor revolt of the 1930s — especially as real wages decline.

Some months ago, I spoke at a conference of some 600 local union stewards, shop committee members, and dissidents in revolt against their organizations. The level of political discourse was higher than any I've heard in the labor movement for many years. It was evident that growing numbers of unionists are willing to build coalitions with groups — even radical groups — outside the labor movement, joining in energy coalitions, in antiwar demon-