

story proves the truth of that proposition, if it proves nothing else.

But nothing in this pamphlet should be taken as an argument against having an independent Black Caucus in any union or plant where whites predominate, or even in some plants where they do not. The long history of white racism in the U.S. union movement makes it all but impossible to function on a really equal basis with whites in a unified movement. Even where there is good will on the part of leading rank-and-file whites, as there was in the case described here, even where there is real struggle on their part to fight both company racism and white worker backwardness — Black workers often find that there must be special all-Black groupings for self-protection, if not for an actual substitute for the white-dominated union itself.

As a matter of fact, the Black furnace workers were not able to sustain the gains they had made in the years after the events described here, and they were compelled to form their own Black Caucus as a result. In a way, perhaps, they had already formed this caucus during the time of the story, but they didn't call it a caucus.

The caucus they formed in recent years went up and down and sometimes disappeared altogether. Unfortunately, it is now needed more than ever in Lackawanna, although the Black worker-leaders involved are extremely sensitive to the danger of polarizing white racism even more sharply than it is already polarized in such an explosive town.

Because there is a new flood-tide of white racism in Lackawanna, which corresponds exactly to a new low ebb of unionism, there is a new weakness of all the workers against the mighty power of the company.

A so-called "Rights for Whites" group has arisen in Lackawanna, and it is directed squarely against Black equality. It is much more powerful than the Black Caucus at the moment and it is extremely dangerous to the welfare of the Black-white majority.

This white caucus is aimed consciously and unconsciously against the existence of the union itself. In order to liquidate this danger, in order to destroy this organized racism and answer the needs of the Black and white workers in the plant, a somewhat greater struggle is needed than that of the Blast Furnace Brothers of years ago.

But even so, a beginning has to be made somewhere. And the Brothers did show that a beginning could be made.

It is also true that the events took place at a different period than the present, and that it may be very hard to gain back the precious ground that has been lost since those days. But then again, "those days" were not so perfect, either. The social situation was not so very wonderful then, even though the past often seems to be so attractive when viewed through the hazy spectacles of older warriors.

While the union movement was in better shape than now and it was easier to make the top bureaucrats take a formally progressive position if the workers pressed hard enough, things were not so easy in general.

The cold war had begun, and although the anti-radical witch-hunt had not yet gained national momentum, it wasn't the best time for fighting for social justice in Lackawanna. But the workers, Black and white, were hoping to improve their lot — as workers always are. And a hard, consistent, principled effort, along with the use of some tactical wisdom, did have a chance of succeeding.

Finally, I should comment on what is today a more pressing question than at any time in recent memory: what about the Blast Furnace Sisters?

The women of Lackawanna were at that time working at home, in laundries, in domestic service, or occasionally in office jobs. But several years *earlier* they too had worked in the blast furnace department, and not at the easiest jobs. This was during the Second World War, at a time when "men's work" was so often done by women, who have not had much of a chance to do it since.

However, much of the work in the blast furnace department should not have to be done by men or women.

The struggle for sexual equality may go through a period of getting more blast furnace jobs for women. But ultimately, there should be equality for all to *refuse* such jobs, just as there should be equality for men and women *not* to spill their blood in wars for Bethlehem Steel and its fellow corporations to take over the world. (The idea of women gaining equality by being soldiers, as men are compelled to be, is nearly always advanced by those who are most *against* women's equality.)

In spite of the colorful aspects of some of the work I have described in the story, I would, in the interests of human development, rather eliminate the work of the blast furnaces altogether.

But that is a task for later on.