

To **REORIENT** the I.S.

The recent national convention of the I.S. has made it clear that there are serious political differences which, however, were left unclarified. It showed, in our opinion, that the comrades who now constitute the main section of the national leadership are moving in the direction of a sterile sectarianism and abstentionism from genuinely revolutionary activity in the working-class movement; and this without even presenting in writing the theories and politics that they have apparently adopted. The result has been disorientation on the part of the membership who, in the absence of adequate written discussion of the issues, remain confused as to what the differences are all about. We believe the course of the comrades in the national leadership, which makes sense only as a means of insulating the I.S. from the real working class, if carried out will ensure that the I.S. remains just another middle-class radical sect without a future. Against this, we propose that the I.S. start turning the helm toward becoming a *revolutionary workers' vanguard group*. Our immediate aim is an educational one; and this series of papers represents a start toward bringing all issues out into written exposition and debate. We look to the political education of the membership to reorient the organization and re-arm our cadre.

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"Reorient" Papers • No. 1

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PROMISES, PROMISES...

The Editorial Committee is planning to put out more issues of the "Reorient" Papers as fast as they can get written, on a number of important questions which, we are well aware, are not yet adequately covered in the contents of this first number. Some of the subjects on the fire are:

*Labor Party or "Workers Party":
What's the Point?*

The Labor Party as a Transitional Demand.

The Theory of the "Statification of the Trade Unions."

The Abracadabra of "Struggle Groups."

Trotsky & Trade Unions.

"Industrialization": How to Make It a Serious Perspective.

What to Learn from the Peace & Freedom Experience.

The Problem of Stalinism in the Trade Unions.

New Tendencies in the Labor Movement.

The Case of the British Labor Party.

COMING IN SEPTEMBER: A STUDY CLASS FOR MEMBERS, FRIENDS & THE REST OF SOCIETY
ON

Trade-Unionism & Revolutionary Marxism ... in Theory and Practice

To be given by Hal Draper & Anne Draper

The class will be divided into two parts (series of sessions): the first on more theoretical problems of trade-unionism from the standpoint of Marxism; the second series emphasizing the problems of working in the trade-union movement as a socialist. Details (time, place, auspices, etc.) will be announced in good time before the start of the class.

REVOLUTIONISTS in TRADE UNIONS

(THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST EXPERIENCE)

This will be Independent Socialist Clippingbook No. 8, due before the beginning of September. It is a compilation of documents and discussions from the intensive trade-union work carried on during and right after the Second World War by the then Workers Party (Independent Socialist League)--discussing such matters as: how socialists should function in the trade unions and shops, what to fight for, factory committees and extra-T.U. formations and their relation to trade-union work, and many other problems that the I.S. has still to run into.

INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST PRESS

TURNING-POINT:

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The Nature of the Crisis in the I.S.

Hal Draper

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The political crisis of the I.S. is a natural consequence of the impact, on the I.S., of the political, ideological and practical debacle of the New Left milieu to which it has mainly related up to now. The roots of this I.S. crisis can be easily seen, without censure or querulousness--objectively. But they must be *seen*, and understood, so that we know how to make a turn.

The disintegration-crisis of the New Left has in turn produced our crisis in two ways:

Firstly: the I.S. could not help being influenced by the characteristic notions and patterns of that typically middle-class radical development, precisely because the I.S. properly plunged into it in order to influence *it*. It would have taken a cadre of great political stability to avoid the back-drag of that political milieu; just as a red-hot iron, plunged into water in order to heat the water, achieves its end only by losing its own redness. The I.S. did not yet have a cadre that was strongly enough armed--through no fault of its own, to be sure, but it is suffering the consequences. The immediate problem is to alleviate the suffering, and to re-arm the cadre.

Another avenue of this counter-influence has been precisely the I.S.'s achievements: its recruitment from the best elements of the New Left milieu. But this too, typically, has a two-way impact, for both good and ill. Again, especially for a young organization without social roots, it takes a political cadre with the solidity of steel (spring-steel) to withstand some of the reciprocal effects.

The second element in the crisis is a direct result of the disintegration of the New Left as a milieu. The former milieu is no longer there; at any rate, it isn't the same thing; there is now something of a vacuum. More and more, the I.S. stares at the political void in the radical scene as the New Left rots away. Our warnings and exhortations to that movement were 100% sound, as events have proved; but a movement does not blossom merely by being proved right in its predictions of doom (as the history of Trotskyism has abundantly demonstrated). Faced with nothing where yesterday there was something, our inadequately experienced cadre has become disoriented.

Disoriented on what? On *the* paramount question that makes or breaks a revolutionary group, or a group aspiring to become a vanguard of revolutionists. That is: the relationship of the as-yet small revolutionary vanguard to the broad masses of the *class* whose vanguard it aspires to be -- in a period when those masses are still far from revolutionary consciousness as a class. There is a gap, a gulf, and sometimes what looks like a disheartening chasm.

For us, however, this is not just another void to stare at. This is the basic challenge for which we exist, the basic challenge of building a revolutionary working-class vanguard. *This* gulf is the one that we have to bridge across, or else we condemn ourselves to irrelevance--and therefore to the extinction that has brought a blessed quietus to about 27,354 other sects that have proclaimed themselves to be indubitably revolutionary but have been unable to orient themselves on *this* question in a revolutionary Marxist fashion.

Bridges are dangerous to inexperienced vanguards without solid political moorings in revolutionary Marxism. That is because they bear traffic both ways, as we have already mentioned. The I.S. devised, advised, and revised various types of bridges to the movements of the New Left, and in direct proportion to its achievements, left itself open to reciprocal influences from

the two-way traffic on those bridges. There is no advance without dangers; and the I.S. will show that it has a right to survive the debacle of the New Left only if it can consolidate its positive gains and go forward with a re-armed cadre, while at the same time throwing off (like a healthy body) the deleterious influences it had to encounter.

Now the I.S. has to make a turn. It has to orient toward *building bridges to the working-class movement in the sense taught by revolutionary Marxism.*

This is far harder than building bridges to middle-class radical movements of a composition much like that of the I.S. itself, where like attracts like, and like understands like. In the next period, the I.S. has to start going through a moulting; it has to begin transforming itself. It has to moult out of its still middle-class-intellectual life-style, where *only* students or ex-students or case-hardened intellectuals can feel comfortable.

But hasn't the I.S. always had a "working-class orientation"? Is this something new? Hasn't the I.S. been the earliest and best advocate of a "working-class orientation" in the student and New Left movements?

Yes, this has been absolutely true--from the beginning, energetically. And that is what sets the nature of the problem. Because a *working-class organization* doesn't beat drums about a "working-class orientation." In fact, it doesn't *orient toward* the working class at all! Because it is an organic part of the working class. It *thinks* naturally as an organic--if very advanced--part of the class; and not as a band of raiders on the working class. That is: not as a band of outsiders, alien to the working class, which "orients" toward the working class.

Again, we must emphasize that there is no thought of criticizing the I.S. because it has not yet become the type of revolutionary vanguard which is an organic part of the class. Such criticism, in view of radical history, would be utterly ridiculous; and it is not at all at issue. In fact, the point is that the I.S. has made enough strides so that *this reorientation, this turn, can be realistically put on the agenda.*

We are merely explaining why the I.S. finds itself in a crisis--a crisis of development. No turn, however necessary and evident, has ever been made unanimously and in perfect marching array, except with a column of goosesteppers. Yet, with all the unavoidable difficulties, the turn *has to be made.*

The coming test for the I.S. is whether it can make this turn toward building its bridges to the working-class movement *without the slightest turn to the Right, politically speaking.* At this turning-point in the I.S.'s development, the dangers before us are classic, familiar from the experience of those 27,354 other sects that went through the same dangers, with varying results.

It is the problem of self-adaptation, re-fitting: historically a murderous problem for would-be revolutionary vanguards. On the one hand, the group has to--*has to*--readapt itself in many ways in order to re-fit itself to attract and assimilate worker-recruits. At the same time, this must be accomplished without changing our own politics, our own revolutionary program, in order to make this hard task easier; that is, without making political-programmatic concessions of adaptation.

At this point, we do not *yet* have to argue that we have to readapt ourselves in the ways mentioned precisely in order to bring left-moving workers to *our* politics; and as soon as we start on the road of moving rightward to meet their political prejudices half-way, we are through as a revolutionary Marxist vanguard. Not yet "at this point" do we have to argue this, we say, because it is probably not until we get very serious about the "*turn to the class*" that such trends will arise as a natural problem.

That is tomorrow's problem, but there need be no illusion that it will not be a problem. If the lessons of experience and history are still working, the worst cases of opportunist adaptation of our *politics* will come from the ranks of those who are most scared of making the turn now.

The reason for this recurrent pattern is very simple: the sectarian wants to avoid the dangers of temptation by staying away from the dens of iniquity. It is (to steal an example) like the weak man who, in a rage, yells to his friends: "Hold me back, I'm going to do something terrible!" *Hold me back from getting closer to that sink of corruption, the reformist working class, because sure as hell I'm going to get contaminated, I'm going to catch some opportunist germs from those people...!*

So the immediate problem, at this point, is the other side of the danger, namely, the fear that results from it. So far, most of the I.S. membership have been very well insulated from the germ-carrying working class. (We mean the class that actually works, not the "Working Class" which is merely the subject or predicate of Marxistical sentences.) It is true that before anyone from the middle-class radical milieu can survive in that germ-laden territory, he has to be well inoculated--that is, he has to arm himself with a solid political education and well-moored principles. Not in order to be able to quote *Capital* in the shop but in the first place to keep his own perspective on what he is doing. In fact, if the I.S. survives this test, our comrades will start demanding study classes of a somewhat different nature than previously...

In any case, the immediate problem is not as yet the danger of rightward adaptation, but rather of *sectarian reluctance to make the turn to the class*. That statement is put carefully with an eye to its scientific accuracy.

The trouble is, as is well known, that "opportunist" and "sectarian," which have quite precise scientific meanings in Marxist theory, are words usually used as mere cuss-words, and their meanings are blurred. The two terms have a precise meaning within the framework of the basic question we are now discussing: the relationship of the vanguard to the class.

Marx's conception--which he and Engels put forward unremittingly, especially in denunciation of the German-American and British "Marxists"--was that the first, and most elementary, task of the vanguard was to work to get the class *moving as a class*, and that every real step forward in this direction was worth a hundred flourishes of rhetorical radicalism. But what is a "step forward"? At any given time and place, it depends on where the class *is*, to begin with.

---Item: If the two million farm workers in the country are unorganized, then it is a great step forward to organize them simply into a trade union...*even if* that trade union is organized and led by class-collaborationists, *in spite of* everything we and other militants may try to do to press the momentum of organization to a higher level of trade-unionism. Yes or no?

---Item: If the auto workers are already solidly organized in a trade union, then clearly a "step forward" for them has a different meaning, above all something more advanced than mere trade-union consciousness: for example,

political class action, independent of the bourgeois parties.

---Item: In Britain (which is not the same country as the U.S.) that step forward, the organization of an independent working-class party, the Labor Party, was achieved a very long time ago, and has been an accomplished fact for a long time. Therefore, the "step forward" which Marxists work for in Britain is the *revolutionization* as a class of that same mass of workers who already accept the idea of a class party. At this end of the 20th century, it is certainly possible that such a revolutionization might eventually march on over the back of the British Labor Party as an outlived organization. Such is the nature of "steps forward." But what we want to stress is this: At the other end of the 20th century, was the organization of a class party of the British proletariat a progressive "step forward" then or not...*even though* it was organized and led by reformists, and some other quite detestable types, *in spite of* the efforts of good revolutionists to start it off in life on a higher level...?

Now, the scientific Marxist definition of sectarianism is this: the politics of *counterposing* the hegemony of the vanguard group (however small, naturally) *against* the basic task of getting the working class moving *as a class* for a real step forward. It is not a question of what we advocate: we advocate far more than a step forward. But Marxists do not counterpose the full program of the vanguard to the movement of the class.

Contrariwise, the scientific definition of opportunism is this: giving up (adapting, compromising, shelving) one's own political views and program *for the sake of* achieving an immediate "step forward." What Lenin liked to stress in his definition of opportunism was that it gives up long-range aims for short-range (and therefore illusory) achievements. Why illusory? Because the "step forward" is of significance in the long run only *insofar as* it contributes to the revolutionary goal; but the way to ensure that it cannot possibly contribute to the revolutionary goal is by giving up your revolutionary goals in advance in order to achieve the immediate step!

In sum: the Marxist conception proposes a policy which gears our advanced revolutionary goals with the immediate class struggle, that is, the struggle for every *class movement* forward. In contrast: sectarianism counterposes the revolutionary program to more elementary class movement; and opportunism sacrifices the revolutionary program to short-range class movement or interests.

Now we can come back to a consideration of the turning-point problem in the I.S., that is, the problem of sectarian reluctance to make *the turn to the class*. There is, alas, not the slightest mystery why this arises so strongly at this time.

In the U.S., which has one of the most politically backward working classes among the major countries, we face the "gulf" already mentioned. True, the distance across varies considerably from situation to situation (depending on the industry, union, shop, region, type of worker, etc.). But nowhere is it an easy jump.

Building those bridges, as any partially experienced or knowledgeable comrade knows, is going to be a long-perspectived and arduous business. Perhaps some of our comrades did not intend to sign on for that stint: better to find out now. This work is notoriously less exciting, usually, than an ad-hoc campus rally where "history" can be made with a ripsnorting speech. (There are many wonderful aspects to student work.) It is usually not as visibly rewarding as a swinging demonstration worked up in 24 hours (after which the students can go back to studying for exams). One of the nice things about the campus arena is that it is easier to pepper the Establishment with smartly hurled

stones (metaphorically speaking). We have properly cheered the student movement for the great things it has done. But--still metaphorically speaking--it is in the shops that there are huge boulders to be moved, massive bodies that lie there at the foundations of society. And (short of earthquakes, which happen too) they can be started rolling mainly by an arduous and time-consuming process of implanting levers, organizing boulder-rollers here and there, and sometimes straining to get an inch of movement. To be sure, when the boulders start rolling, the earth trembles for the first time...

This is the basic job of revolutionary working-class politics, the one that broke most of those 27,354 sects.

It is easy to find reasons for turning away from that gulf which has to be bridged. Like: *Who needs a bridge anyway, there's nobody but Sinners over there...* Or: *Why try to get across, all the Angels are already on our side...*

These are two of the standard, ready-made rationalizations for the pious germ-fearing sectarians; only they must naturally be couched in political terms. It is not surprising to find these standard reactions cropping up in the I.S., like weeds after a storm.

They appear now in the following political forms:

(1) *Down with the trade unions, which are now nothing but statified agents of imperialism and running-dogs of capitalism.* That is, the trade unions are read out of the "Working Class," banished from that pure and untainted Concept. Unclean, unclean!

This very much simplifies the task of turning to the working class. For it turns out that the "Working Class," after all, is...*us*, plus a few friends with carefully checked credentials. To turn to the "Working Class" is to turn to...*us*. This has the charm of equating it with an inward turn toward revolutionary chatterboxing which has always been an instinctive refuge for sectarians from unpleasant reality. As for mere workers, they must prove their bona-fides to us by at least going out on a wildcat...

There is an alternate way of reading the working class out of the "Working Class" (the holy Concept). If one way is to retreat from the unpleasantly opportunist world to the coziness of a Big Red Kaffeeklatch, another way is to try to stay in the wider world by convincing oneself that it is not this planet but Mars: (2) *The "Working Class" is not really reformist--that is an anti-Marxist slander; only the labor bureaucracy is reformist or conservative; the rank and file are already revolutionary-minded, straining at the leash for a revolutionary word, ready for nothing less than our 100% socialist program, from which it is held back only by the Evil Bureaucrats...* Or perhaps this is the vanguard's report of life on earth as seen from the stratosphere. At any rate, it represents the retreat to fantasy.

One line of sectarianism may lead to abstentionism from real struggles, to preserve us uncontaminated. Another line of sectarianism may lead to infantile-leftist "adventurism" in the self-created fantasyland (if it leads to anything, which is dubious). Since neither is based on any thought-out analysis or consistent theoretical view, they are just as likely to waver into each other, or into nothing. Their only real function is to make it unnecessary to build bridges across that gap, to the real working class. The working class has been disposed of: one line finds it simply non-existent, and the other line finds it unbearably repellent.

Marxism means the theory and practice of linking the revolutionary vanguard to the class movement as-it-is, in order to change what-it-is. The various varieties of sectarianism arise in order to *insulate* the revolutionary vanguard from the class-as-it-is, out of fear of very real dangers -- dangers to which these sectarians often point with acute and instructive correctness, which should be attended to with respect.

The turning-point in the life of a socialist group (or "sect") comes when it has to decide which of these turns to take, in order to develop further. To institutionalize the life-style of the sect, with appropriate political rationales and supporting "theories," is the line of least resistance, the easy downward path, the opportune escape from reality. This is the built-in "opportunism" of the sectarian flight from a confrontation with the real working class.

All this is part of the context for the development in the I.S. of the only fullblown "theory" which the sectarian tendencies have so far managed to fabricate for their purposes. We refer to the Geier-Parker theory that the trade unions have been "statified" into agencies of imperialism primarily functioning as instruments for disciplining the working class on behalf of the ruling class, and that they are not--or not any longer, since some unspecified time--primarily the elementary organizations of class struggle which Marxism regards them as being.

Note that this is a theory about the *trade unions*, not about the trade-union bureaucracy. Naturally, for in the latter case it would be neither a new contribution to theory nor a rationalization for sectarianism. The role of the "labor lieutenants of capitalism" has been known to Marxists for quite some time before the Geier-Parker discovery, and the tasks of the I.S. would not be affected by an iota by any amount of harsh language heaped on the hapless heads of the bureaucrats in I.S. mimeographed bulletins. What is new--or rather, new to our tendency, since it is otherwise mildewed with history--is this theory which *places the existing trade-union movement as such on the other side of the "class" line.*

The oddness of the post-convention situation in the I.S. is indicated by these facts: This theory has been invented and held by comrades who now constitute the framework of the national leadership. But these same excellent comrades have, to this day, not written down a word in defense or explanation of this interesting theory which merely turns upside down the Marxist view of the working-class movement. In fact, they did not present it to the convention. In fact, they did not mention it to the convention until their fresh point of view was smoked out of them, before the rather surprised eyes of other varieties of sectarians who had not bothered to concoct a new, fresh world theory at all. Finally, what makes the situation most anomalous is the fact that the Haberkern motion *condemning* their theory, which at last smoked out their views, was thereupon passed by a large majority.

We are not unthankful for the fact that the freshly smoked out theory was repudiated. But surely nobody fails to understand in what an equivocal position this leaves the politics of the I.S., precisely on the question which means the life or death of a revolutionary vanguard.

It would hardly be wise to wait till the sectarians, who are presently merely completely disoriented, become hardened enough to put forward their fantastic theory brashly rather than bashfully; till they figure out one or two more fresh theories to insulate us from the working class, or at any rate till they fish such theories out of the scrapheap left by the history of revolutionary sects; till the most disoriented elements in the organization push the sectarian logic of the bashful theoreticians to new heights...till it is too late to turn the helm in the opposite direction.

The process of drawing logical conclusions from the new shadow-of-a-theory — or more accurately, from the same wells of inspiration that the Geier-Parker theory itself was drawn from -- already came out loud and clear virtually the day after the convention; that is, at the Bay Area membership meeting to hear a convention report. For the first time in our history, a member (Barry of S.F.) arose to say that it was the duty of revolutionists to "smash the unions."

Will we be told: That's the view of only one confused member, not to worry...? But that is only today. Yesterday the Geier-Parker mess of confusion would have been greeted with incredulity in the same way (and momentarily was, at the convention itself). But it is not Barry Unionsmasher himself we are primarily concerned with; nor are we really scared that he is going to "smash the unions."

We are concerned about these theories smashing the I.S., as they are bound to do, *even if they are not actually adopted but merely accepted as one interesting "legitimate" point of view in the organization among others.* "Smash the unions? M-m, let's see, should we, shouldn't we, should we? Well, no-o-o, that would be going too far..."

Indeed, too far; but if the I.S. drifts in that *direction*, then it will smash itself to smithereens, and deserve its fate.

Or isn't that the *direction* of our bashful theoreticians--the same direction in which Barry Unionsmasher is going too far?

There is an easy way to start finding out. We propose that Comrades Geier and Parker explain educationally to the membership why it is incorrect (not to speak of disastrous) to *smash the unions* that are statified agencies of imperialism straitjacketing the proletariat. Why *not* smash agencies of the ruling class as sinister as all that? After all, these freshly smoked theoreticians will explain educationally, any day of the week in classes on Marxism, that they are for *smashing the state apparatus*. Well, are these statified ex-trade-unions part of the state apparatus now, or aren't they?

Or is this the kind of fresh theory which is pulled out of the back pocket only at very revolutionary conventions where one is talking to oneself?

Or is it simply that Comrades Geier and Parker have only put a big toe over the edge of this abyss, and need some time before they can work themselves up to take the jump off into the blue?

Or will they pull back from the brink when they see their theory in Barry Unionsmasher's modest proposal?*

In point of fact, we do not really expect the Geier-Parker tendency, and the section of the national leadership they now represent, to either respond to Barry Unionsmasher effectively, or, on the other hand, to forthrightly adopt his disconcerting conclusions. For example, it would be embarrassing to have to expel all our trade-union militants, the only comrades who are carrying on revolutionary work among workers, because they are persistently building these agencies of the imperialist state apparatus...

The bashful theoreticians cannot possibly think their theory through.

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* Of course, we would make the same helpful suggestion to Barry Unionsmasher too: write down this viewpoint of yours and exhibit it to the membership, so that we can discuss it, i.e. root it out of the organization as a reactionary anti-working-class view. At the meeting, there were possible qualifications added in a coda whose import escapes us: e.g. do we "smash the unions" insofar as they are agents of the imperialist state, but *build* them insofar as they serve workers' needs? At the same time? But only Barry can adequately present his idea. Go to it!

SECTARIANISM OR MARXISM?

A Review of Issues in Dispute

Ernie Haberkern

Ever since its founding a year ago, there has been a serious tendency towards sectarianism in the I.S. This tendency, which is simply a reflection in milder form of the general growth of sectarianism in the New Left, is perfectly understandable given the general predicament of the country. The explosion of a number of militant protest movements with their base in the petite bourgeoisie or lumpen proletariat at a time when the mass organization of the working class has remained relatively inactive politically could not result in anything but the growth of increasingly radical and alienated left-wing currents whose attitude toward the organized working class would be at best sectarian.

In the I.S. itself we do not have to deal with the openly anti-working class politics of the PL or Weathermen. In our organization the isolation from the working class which we share with the rest of the New Left has manifested itself in the reappearance of ultra-left politics. The main character of these politics is the refusal to adopt a [transitional approach toward the existing mass organizations of the working class]. In the name of "socialism from below" the existing organizations are denounced because they are so obviously under the influence and control of a parasitic bureaucratic caste. What is forgotten in the analysis is the fact that in a capitalist democracy such as the United States the continued dominance of this bureaucratic caste is only possible because it reflects the political conservatism of the class itself. It is not simply the ill-will and Machiavelian political skills of the Meanys, Hoffas and Reuthers that keep them in power. From a Marxist point of view, the difficult task that it is the duty of socialists to perform is to fight to build a political opposition within the existing mass institutions of the working class. Nothing could be further removed from the sectarian phrasemongering which consists of ritualistic denunciations of the labor bureaucracy *as a substitute* for seriously attacking the real base of the bureaucracy's power, the reformist politics and perspectives of the overwhelming mass of the working class itself. In fact, these denunciations amount to nothing more than an *adaptation* to the present consciousness of the rank and file and the power of the leadership of the trade unions.

The politics of ultra-leftism did not manifest themselves in the I.S. at first in an abstentionist attitude toward the trade unions. Instead, the first manifestations of sectarianism began with the breakup of the PFP. As long as that organization continued viable very little criticism was directed at it. The fact that the PFP was the only serious attempt on the part of the New Left forces to reach out to the broader political public made it very difficult to attack. Nothing succeeds like success and even confirmed sectarians like the Spartacist League were forced to recognize the potential of the PFP to reach out to those sections of the population that had not yet been involved in the anti-war and other radical movements but who were in political ferment as a result of the war and the Black Liberation upheaval.

Prominent among the sections of the population who were opening up to the radical movement around the elections of 1968 was -- the working class. For the first time in some twenty years workers were willing to listen to attacks on the Democratic Party from the left and in several states, notably California and New York, a serious party existed capable of speaking to this unrest. Precisely at this time a number of ultra-left currents began to surface within the PFP. These tendencies were composed overwhelmingly of elements who had been unable to organize anything on their own and, as a consequence, had drift-

ed into support for the attempts, like the Scheer campaign, to channel this unrest into the Democratic Party. They began to arise, once someone else, namely the ISC, had organized what they could not, the demand that the PFP become an explicitly socialist party.

The ISC resolutely set its face against this attempt to turn a broad radical party of opposition into the sect that these "revolutionaries" were unable to build for themselves. This position of the ISC, presented in its paper, *The Road Forward*, was not irrelevant to the pro-working class orientation the ISC had consistently urged on the New Left. The proposal that the PFP base itself on a minimum radical program of opposition to the war, defense of Black Liberation and the right of armed self-defense and the repudiation of the two capitalist parties was, in the first instance, designed to appeal to those middle class elements moving into opposition over the war. However, it was also the *only possible program* for a party that hoped to appeal to the opposition to the war crystallizing in the labor movement. The demand for an explicitly revolutionary or socialist program for the Party, made by such diverse groups as the Yippies and the Spartacist League, would have, and did, confine the organization to the alienated petite-bourgeois elements who are currently involved in blowing themselves up, politically and physically.

The collapse of the PFP, in itself simply one small aspect of the self-liquidating tendencies in the New Left, left its imprint on the ISC. When the present I.S. was formed, incorporating the anti-Stalinist tendencies in the SDS, the comrades were forced to clarify and defend the politics that lay behind their activities of the last few years. The result was a political fight over transitional versus ultimacist approaches to the petite-bourgeois protest movements in which the comrades had operated for the last few years and from which most had been recruited. The fight ended in victory for the position of the old ISC.

Unfortunately, at the same time that the I.S. rejected sectarian approach towards petite-bourgeois movements, it fell, without thinking much about it, into the very same approach towards that institution which is the only organized working class movement that exists in this country - the trade union movement. The rest of this statement covers our position on the trade unions, the role of socialists in them, the sectarian implications of the "struggle group" thesis and the more important thesis that lies behind it, namely the notion that the trade unions have become simply instruments of the capitalist state for the disciplining of the working class. We wish to point out here that the question of our attitude toward the trade unions is not simply one "question" among sixteen other "questions". Since trade unions are the only mass organizations of the working class in this country, what is involved is the whole Marxist approach toward the working class as the conscious agent of a socialist reconstruction of society. While a Marxist position on mass movements of a petite-bourgeois character is important and sectarianism must be defeated in this field, a sectarian position on the question of the working class itself and its institutions is more fundamental.

Given our present isolation from the labor movement, it will still be possible for us to maintain ourselves as a tendency in the mass movements of petite-bourgeois protest. We are all for the I.S. playing an aggressive role in such movements. Nevertheless, as the crisis of American capitalism increases, and above all as the working class begins to enter the struggle through its trade unions, our position as a pro-working class tendency will become more and more untenable. If the National Committee majority maintains its present position will become more and more abstract, our stalinist and proto-fascist opponents in the New Left being more consistently anti-working class will take the initiative, and those of our comrades who are industrialized will find the organization more and more irrelevant.

From our point of view, the failure of the I.S. to face up to the question of the role of socialists in a period when the working class has not begun or is just beginning to challenge the political arrangements of capitalism calls into question its whole reason for being. We are not necessarily pessimistic about the outcome of the struggle within the I.S. A significant number of comrades have had experience in operating in mass arenas in a serious way which avoids both ultimatist and opportunist errors, significant numbers of our comrades are beginning to do serious work in unions and, what is most important, we are entering a period when the union movement will be a more important source of oppositional politics than has been true for the last few years. That is all the more reason, in our opinion, to begin the ideological and practical re-orientation of the I.S.

I. THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The trade union movement, with close to 20 million members, has been the only mass organization of the American working class. The American working class, like the British working class in the 19th century, has enjoyed a privileged position with respect to the working class of the world as a result of the economic and political supremacy of its bourgeoisie. In addition to the immediate, even though temporary, interest this has created for the American working class in the continued success of American imperialism, it has encouraged an extremely parochial and narrow point of view in the working class even among militants. As long as a prosperous economy held out the hope of continued gains from militant, reformist, "bread and butter" struggles, the political and social perspectives of trade unionists tended to be bounded by the immediate interest of their union, their local or, even, of their shop.

This thesis has been vulgarized to explain the supposed passivity of the American working class in the 1950's and 1960's. However, the working class was not passive in this period. Instead, its often bitter struggles were confined to narrow and immediate issues which tended to fragment and depoliticize the struggles. (There are exceptions to this rule. In the 1958 Congressional and state elections where Republicans made right-to-work legislation a major issue, the recently united AFL-CIO was able to organize a massive campaign in support of liberals whose success raised false hopes of a movement in the direction of political independence. In general the struggles that took place were led by shop militants who ignored not only the struggles going on outside the labor movement, but even similar movements in other unions.

To the middle class observer who was not in industry himself, the failure of the working class to engage in a broader struggle such as the mass organizing drive of the thirties or the class political action of the European labor movement appeared as passivity and contentment. The fragmented character of the union struggles of the last two decades also encouraged racist and other reactionary attitudes among workers. To the extent that purely economic struggles pit the organized against unorganized and in general strategically better situated workers against more vulnerable workers, to that extent oppressed sections of the population such as women and racial and ethnic minorities will find themselves fighting the better organized white male workers. This is especially serious when we consider that only about one-third of the working class is organized in trade unions.

Despite these limitations, trade union struggles in the fifties and sixties, whether led by the official leadership or against them, were the main form the class struggle took and the union was the major institution of class struggle that existed. For socialists to have remained outside the trade unions would have been to remain outside the organized working class. The capitalists, their

government officials, and the majority of trade union leaders also understand that. That is why they cooperated in driving socialists and radicals out of the trade unions:

Today, America's economic and political institutions are in ferment as a result of the war and the declining ability of the U.S. to dominate the rest of the capitalist world economically and politically. The working class is being forced by hard economic reality to abandon business as usual. What is more, the unionization of the unorganized majority has become an economic and political necessity for the trade union movement. Organizing the unorganized, however, requires an appeal to class solidarity that is not easily fitted into the bureaucratic routine. The trade union is the arena in which the political conflicts that are the product of this economic pressure are being fought out. It is possible and even likely that these conflicts will lead to a split or splits in the trade union movement. Splits, however, are not led from outside an organization.

As Marxists, we continue to emphasize that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself. It is only through the struggle to build its own institutions of democratic control that the working class can achieve the political development necessary for its liberation. Any attempt to artificially bypass these institutions leads not simply to tactical and strategic mistakes, but to the repudiation of the fundamental premise of Marxism.

II THE LABOR BUREAUCRACY AND OUR ROLE IN THE TRADE UNIONS

The Permanent Arms Economy and the relatively high level of employment it has created has made the American trade union movement one of the most powerful and stable in the world. It is by no means limited to an aristocracy of labor since its most important base is among semi-skilled and unskilled production workers. It has not, in the last twenty years, been subject to the wide oscillations of the business cycle which undermined the stability of the earlier trade union movement in this country before the rise of the CIO and confined it largely to a more or less stable labor aristocracy. While large sections of poverty-stricken, unorganized and periodically unemployed workers remain, the power of organized labor has not, so far, been threatened by them. These factors have created a large union apparatus whose solid material base is its ability to win serious gains at the bargaining table. In return it disposes of large funds in the form of dues often collected directly from the employer in the form of a dues checkoff. This apparatus has a vested interest in the maintenance of social peace. Without the existence of the permanent arms economy and the relative scarcity of labor it creates their positions as lawyers and business agents in a relatively peaceful bargaining process would be undermined. The inflationary tendency of the permanent war economy, however, has become more serious as the American economy faces more serious competition. The corporations and the state find wage demands, even when compensated by greater "productivity" less and less open to bargaining. Strikes become more frequent, more bitter, and longer. If the strikes are lost, the influence of the bureaucracy is threatened, but they can only be won by appealing to militancy and class solidarity. For leaders who have built themselves a reputation as business unionists or labor statesmen inside the union and out this requires some effort. Internally, this creates tension for the leadership since it opens up the possibility for newer fresher leaders whose appeals to class consciousness can be made with less embarrassment if not necessarily with more sincerity.

While all of this creates a conflict between the leadership and the rank and file, it does not change the fact that the bureaucracy depends on the existence of the union, an instrument of the workers in the class struggle, as

the base of its own privileges and power. What keeps workers in unions and following, more or less suspiciously, the leadership is not the legal machinery of the NLRB, the union shop, dues checkoff and so on. It is rather the ability of the unions to deliver the goods. The power of the bureaucracy is very important in disciplining militants and trouble makers. Without the ability to isolate the militants politically, however, these disciplinary measures would blow up in the face of the leadership. The impotence of this enormous bureaucracy in the face of wildcat strikes is clear evidence that it is the economic influence of the bureaucracy that is key. When the leadership is unable to deliver and loses its ability to persuade the membership to follow its lead all the NLRA legislation, all the contracts and even all the goon squads are useless. The rash of strikes by public employees who have even fewer legal and internal union rights than those provided other workers by the NLRA is further evidence of this.

From this it follows that militants who operate on the thesis that trade union office and the machinery of collective bargaining *in themselves* integrate the trade union movement into the capitalist system will isolate themselves and save the leadership a lot of trouble. As Marxists we make a distinction between the role of the trade union in society and the role of the bureaucracy in the trade unions. The trade union is an organization whose purpose is to lead the class struggle at its most elementary level. The bureaucracy is a top stratum in the trade unions acting as the channels and transmission belts (agents) of bourgeois influence and pressure, and in this manner it acts in the interest of the capitalist system. At the same time, even the most reformist or corrupt leaders are time and again forced to maintain their "credibility" by leading strikes and in other ways objectively fighting the class battle - a function they cannot abandon without destroying their own base and their own function.

One role of the I.S. and other radicals and militants in unions is to prove in practice that trade unionists who are for pushing the unions to participate in and lead the broader movements of social and political protest, who demand that unions take the lead in building a political movement of opposition to capitalism are more effective organizers and fighters for trade union demands. We have to demonstrate that the mass confrontation tactics of the Black Liberation and anti-war movements are also effective against such reactionary restrictions on the trade unions as the provisions against secondary boycotts and the prohibition of strikes by public employees. Only radicals will be willing to point out the similarities between these different movements because it is only radicals who are interested in making political alliances between them. Those sections of the labor movement who want to remain respectable and maintain their distance from the new movements can only be embarrassed by such similarities. In fact, we will only be building on the tradition of the wildcat and illegal strikes that have characterized the trade union movement in recent years. To the extent that the permanent arms economy continues to undermine rather than prop up the living standards of the organized section of the working class to that extent the unions will become a base for a new political movement instead of a stronghold of conservatives like Meany.

We say socialists must prove their ability to lead rank and file workers in practice. For us this means that socialists must be willing to organize the unorganized into unions and lead caucuses in established unions on the basis of their transitional program. Without concealing their politics or affiliation (except to the degree that official persecution makes it necessary) socialists can organize and lead union struggles together with other militants regardless of political disagreements on a number of questions.

One of the consequences of leading struggles that win may well be the responsibility for assuming organizational leadership as a result of gaining the support and confidence of the rank and file, i.e. taking office as a result

of a successful struggle. It would be stupid and sectarian to draw an arbitrary line at a certain level, say shop steward, of the union apparatus above which no socialist would go. The politics we raise will determine the level to which we rise. If our political activity helps to organize a militant left pole in the rank and file we may have to go as far as the strength of that opposition will carry us.

If we have confidence in the correctness of our program as a guide for action now in the mass organization then it would be irresponsible to refuse office on the grounds that not everyone who was supporting the caucus understood the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat. An organization that raises a political perspective and then refuses to carry it out only discredits itself.

Of course, it is quite likely that, having taken responsibility and leadership on the basis of a certain set of concrete proposals, new developments will make it necessary to take a position in opposition to what was our base. We will then lose, for principled reasons, our earlier support. Given the fact that the consciousness of workers develops unevenly (just like yours and mine) there is no way of avoiding this eventuality except by refusing to act at all.

III THE LABOR PARTY SLOGAN

Any detailed program for the working class can only come out of actual trade union work. Especially now, when we are fighting to get a toe-hold in the working class, our work will be concentrated on building a base in individual shops. The actual struggles we fight will be over the practical day-to-day questions which are the basis of any serious shop or local organization. Hopefully, our press will reflect this struggle in terms of articles and pamphlets on specific union struggles our comrades are engaged in. Only out of this kind of concrete struggle will we gain the experience and knowledge necessary to a serious political tendency in the working class. Nevertheless, there are some general slogans that point a direction for the more immediate struggles. It is around these slogans that we organize.

Given our position, that unions are elementary organs of class struggle against the capitalist class and that the struggle is constantly undermined by the political, social and economic ties of the bureaucracy to the capitalist parties (ties which are tolerated or endorsed by the rank and file) the focus of our agitation has to be the proposal for an independent party of the labor movement. We would want this party to be led by radicals and militants. Even if led by elements of the present leadership, however, this would be a progressive step because it would be a step in the direction of *class* independence.

This demand for a labor party is more sharply posed than the formulation for a "workers' party." The latter slogan does not address itself to the fact that the rank and file of the union movement politically agree with the need to rely on the Democratic Party "friends of labor." When used agitationaly the slogan "for a workers party" assumes that a clear political split between the rank and file and the reformist leadership already exists. In fact, such a split between the rank and file and the reformist leadership is at the end not at the beginning of the road of independent political action on the part of the working class. The labor party slogan is a transitional demand precisely because it raises the perspective of independent political action in a way that *does not require* the worker who accepts it to *first* accept the revolutionary position. It is a step which *we* understand, and publicly explain, cannot be taken by the trade union movement as presently constituted. For a worker who is not yet a revolutionary, who does not think of the bureaucracy as a parasitic caste, there appears to be no reason why the trade unions cannot take such a step without an

internal shakeup. The "workers party" slogan, on the other hand, means something only if it calls for a party to be built in opposition to the trade unions. That is, it does require the worker to first understand the limitations of reformism. If it doesn't mean this it is simply a more vague and general slogan which does not address itself to the workers as they are presently organized in their unions - in fact, it does not address itself to the working class at all.

The objective situation of trade unions in a permanent war economy raises the question of an independent class party. The combination of inflation, high taxes and deteriorating social services with a level of employment that is managed and "planned" by the state makes collective bargaining over wages relatively ineffective. Even from the point of view of "business unionists," teamster officials, for example, the lack of a labor party is bad for business. If your "business" is the sale of teamsters to the capitalists and the demand for your "product" depends on political factors you cannot ignore political parties, and if Democrats fail to produce as they increasingly do then you may have to find someone who can produce. In fact such non-ideological types often are more willing to back a new development than "progressive, labor statesmen" who have thought things through and are aware of the possible consequence of such a radical break. It would be hard to find a more hardened bureaucrat than John L. Lewis at the time he led the split that ended in the founding of the CIO.

At the same time, however, that this step is an objective necessity for the further progress of the trade union movement *in its own terms* it is also one that creates problems for the leadership. In the first place, the mere fact of disturbing the political inertia of the rank and file, of raising new perspectives and possibilities sets in motion a dynamic that may go farther than the bureaucracy wishes. In the second place, by placing the interests of the class as a whole in the forefront, it undermines the role of the bureaucracy as the social broker between the working class and the capitalists. It is not that the process of bargaining and wage struggle becomes less important. Other things being equal, a serious political challenge to the capitalist class softens up the individual capitalist by undermining his confidence in the stability of the political institutions that protect his power, and by destroying his confidence in the political leaders who guarantee the unity of his class. What a political crisis indicates is the extent to which successful economic struggles are dependent on the political climate of the country. It indicates the extent to which the bureaucrats' ability to confine the struggle to the narrowest possible goal to prevent independent political action by the class makes those very goals harder to win. From our point of view the wall between the "economic" and the "political" struggles is an artificial one which is erected by pro-capitalist ideologues inside and outside of the labor movement. This division, far from being normal, has only occurred under certain conditions which permit the capitalist class for a time to make economic concessions which will satisfy most of the workers most of the time without risking their profits. We do not, therefore, counterpose economic and political struggles. We do not in an ultimatic way demand that workers accept a political program before they begin to struggle but we do point out that the refusal to become political hinders the struggle over wages and working conditions. Such arguments will only be taken seriously if they are made by people involved in the daily grind of organizing the economic struggle.

For us, the labor party slogan is raised (1) to get the class moving *as a class* - to raise in a transitional way the necessity for a further step in the direction of class independence, (2) to demonstrate to the rank and file the conflict of interest between it and the apparatus and give it some sense of its own strength, (3) to divide the bureaucracy politically and undermine it as a cohesive social force by forcing it to choose between its desires for social peace and legal bargaining and the necessity of preserving its political base in the working class.

Given the fact that the struggle for a labor party will polarize the present labor movement there is no necessity that the polarization take place along clear political lines. The leadership will only split as a result of their increasing inability to control a rank and file they have led into an economic dead end. There is no automatic guarantee that this political fact will be clear to the ranks themselves. In the absence of a conscious revolutionary tendency in the unions the split almost certainly will be attributed to a conflict between the good bureaucrats and the bad bureaucrats. Unless we are there to organize the discontent, the working class may never come to realize that it is its activity which has broken through the routinism of the past. It is the job of revolutionaries to make sure that in such a political crisis the lesson is driven home to the ordinary worker that he can intervene in and control his own institutions.

Closely connected with this question is the program of any new party of labor. Obviously, without a break with the capitalist parties all programs remain mostly window dressing. But organizational independence will grow hand in hand with programmatic independence. The boldness of the program of a new political party will depend, like the sharpness of its break with the old parties, on what forces within the unions impel that break. It is not ruled out that an independent party of the working class will be formed mainly by rank and file workers in opposition to all sections of the leadership, but such an abstractly "logical" development of class consciousness is not very likely. What is more important, even that kind of development will come about after a fight *within* the union movement. How, precisely, a split will take place cannot be predicted. What is clear is that the tendency of an independent political party of the labor movement will be to strengthen the confidence and independence of the ranks and undermine the power of the bureaucracy.

We see the slogan of independent political action for the labor movement as a programmatic weapon to be used by militants in the unions against the bureaucracy. We are for militants who enjoy significant support in the shops initiating independent campaigns without waiting for the leadership to accept the idea. (It is very unlikely that any section of the bureaucracy will accept the idea until motion in the direction of political independence has begun). The slogans of such a campaign must orient around the demand for a break with capitalist parties and capitalist politics by the working class as a whole. The demand must be directed to the working class as it is presently organized in unions. That is, the militants in their campaigns will be calling for an independent party of labor based on the trade unions.

IV. THE ORGANIZATION OF RANK AND FILE CAUCUSES

Socialists cannot organize simply as a propaganda group which preaches the good news of the gospel to workers actively engaged in the struggle against the capitalist class. The abstract call for political action cannot come from people uninvolved in the immediate struggle. Neither can socialists function simply as "good union men" who happen to have certain peculiar ideas just as some militants happen to be religious fundamentalists or health food fadists. Politics is important even in the day to day struggle over immediate shop floor demands. Often such differences will appear, as they have in the student, black liberation and anti-war movements, as differences between "hards" and "softs," between "militants" and "moderates." In general, however, it will become clearer as the political and economic crisis in the country and in the trade unions develops that there is more to the struggle for a militant democratic union with its base on the shop floor than simply replacing "bad leaders" with "good" or just "fresher" leaders. We want to build rank and file caucuses of militants who are committed to the fight for a democratic militant union. It would be ul-

timatistic of us to demand as a condition of our cooperation in building such caucuses that militants understand and accept the necessity of forming alliances across shop and industry lines and for that matter with anti-war and anti-racist struggles going on outside the ranks of labor as well as within it. It would be sectarian to demand ultimatically that militants understand and agree with us on the necessity of independent political action on the part of trade unions. Likewise, it would be opportunist of us to conceal our own belief in the necessity of such a broader struggle. We take responsibility and leadership on the basis of our long range political goals as well as our immediate program. We do not demand that the membership of a caucus or organizing committee agree with us on our political goals, but they must realize that as these politics become relevant in the course of the growth of the caucus or organizing committee we will raise them and act on them even if that leads to political conflicts and divisions in such caucuses. In fact, we will emphasize from the beginning that political conflict is itself necessary, that its absence in the union movement as a whole is a sign of stagnation and decay and that a democratic openness to political debate and division can only strengthen an organization which depends on its ability to mobilize the ranks. Only with this approach can we avoid the two dangers of submerging ourselves in the immediate fight and reducing our politics to the least common denominator on the one hand, and, on the other hand, raising demands in such a sectarian way that our "caucus" consists only of ourselves, our contacts and the crackpots that any "anti-establishment" movement invariably collects.

Any such caucus or organizing committee will meet with hostility from the international and/or local leadership. How much hostility will depend on our success in organizing. In many unions this will mean that we will enjoy only semi-legal status. Even in relatively democratic unions we are concerned more with the solidarity, militancy and political consciousness of the rank and file than we are with the legal electoral apparatus which in the union, as elsewhere, is merely the more or less accurate reflection of the relation of forces in the rank and file. We participate in such electoral activity as there is in the union because to the extent that the militancy that does exist is not reflected in the formal apparatus, to that extent the militants are less organized and less confident of their strength. We reject, moreover, in the union, as elsewhere, the blanket anti-electoral stance which invariably conceals a lack of confidence by the militants in their ability to defeat politically the apathy and conservatism that does exist in the union movement and which provides the bureaucracy with its political base. In a crisis, of course, the change in consciousness of the ranks is more often than not met with resistance by the elected officers. That is why such a thing as a wildcat strike is possible and necessary, and why we support them.

But we must emphasize that such "illegal" demonstrations are, while necessary, *not* sufficient. Especially in a movement where a major problem is the isolated, fragmented and "anti-political" character of the struggle we must emphasize the need to organize politically around a long term perspective. In the absence of any other representative institution the only place such a perspective can be raised may be in electoral activity around union office. What is more, the immediate day-to-day conflict with the company over grievances and shop floor issues is often as important as either wildcat strikes or union elections. It is in this daily grind that stable groupings of militants are formed in opposition to the company and the conservatism of the union leadership. This battle will go on daily - in the plant and on the shop floor among the rank and file. This is where the bulk of our trade union work must be concentrated.

The I.S. sees its role as organizing, together with other militants, left wing opposition in the trade unions. We are willing to join with other militants in, and take organizational responsibility for, militant caucuses

and organizing committees on a minimum program of progressive demands directed at the company and the conservatism of the union leadership. We must always be free to raise our own politics of course and our criticisms of the militants themselves when they are relevant.

We will fight for such caucuses to adopt a broader program which includes: (1) The need to fight for union democracy at the local and international level, (2) The need to form alliances with similar militant caucuses in other unions on the basis of the common recognition of the need for a militant democratic union movement, (3) The need to politically ally the union movement, especially its militants, with the protest movements that have grown up outside the present union movement, (4) The necessity for a new political party of the labor movement that will oppose militarism abroad, repression at home and the subordination of the American economy to the needs of corporate profit.

We expect such caucuses to fight for the political support of the mass of union members. We would not want it to shrink from the necessity of putting forward its program in union elections where the membership will judge its usefulness, neither would we want such a caucus, out of a parliamentary cretinism which we have never advocated inside or outside of the labor movement, to avoid violating the legal proscriptions of the union, the company or the state when a particular action is politically necessary. The sole criterion for us is: will the action advance or retard the political development of the workers involved?

V. STRUGGLE COMMITTEES

In periods of relative class peace, when the socialist movement is isolated from the working class and its institutions, there is a powerful tendency among revolutionaries to abstain from activity in the existing institutions of the working class and waste their time attempting to organize "counter institutions" which supposedly reflect the "real" consciousness of workers. This is usually connected with an attempt to explain away the conservative political consciousness of workers by reference to the overwhelming power of the bureaucracy. In fact, except in totalitarian states, the case may be the opposite. It may be the temporary conservatism or apathy of the ranks which allows the bureaucracy a free hand in dealing with its critics. In the I.S. this tendency is crystallizing around the phrase "struggle committees."

We use the term "phrase" to describe the "struggle committee" proposal advisedly. We are dealing here not with a position but with a slogan that covers a number of mutually contradictory positions. When asked to define what a struggle committee is, the answer is usually given in terms of what the struggle committee does. This answer varies greatly among individual comrades. In many cases the struggle groups are seen as carrying out activities almost identical to those we described for militant caucuses and the differences with us appear to be purely semantic. Other comrades end up describing improved, less bureaucratic, unions, still others outline soviets, though no one in the I.S. that I know of has gone as far as the De Leonists in describing the new industrial democracy in detail. All such outlines, even those which appear similar to the one we have given, miss the main point. What is important is to define the *relationship* of this struggle committee to the existing mass institutions. Are they a vanguard, not a socialist vanguard but an organization of militants, which operates as a political opposition inside the unions? If so, there may be differences of opinion about the program of such committees but the difference between a struggle group and a rank and file caucus becomes merely semantic. On the other hand, there are other comrades who emphasize that the struggle committee is a new form of organization which operates "inside and outside the union". This would seem to indicate that the struggle

group is a new form of mass organization. We ourselves are for a new mass organization. An independent party of the working class. And the transitional slogan we use agitationally to point towards it is the demand for a new party based on the unions. If the comrades meant by a struggle group nothing more than the nucleus of an independent party and they wish to emphasize that they *do not* want to use the transitional slogan of a labor party, then there is more than a semantic difference. We would argue that such an approach is sectarian even though it points in the right direction i.e. independent class political action. It is sectarian in that it demands of workers that they first *recognize* the inability of the present trade union movement to move in that direction.

Behind the phrase, however, there lies a more consistent position. The partisans of the struggle committee thesis argue that the labor bureaucracy and through it the unions themselves have become primarily (in some versions, wholly) agents of the capitalist state. It is this point which is the radical departure from Marxism and the phrase "struggle committees" is in fact an umbrella under which this, the more serious question, is smuggled in. The claim that the trade unions are statified is quite different from the traditional socialist notion of the labor bureaucracy as a bourgeoisified stratum defending pro-capitalist ideology within the labor movement. Socialists always have argued that a labor leadership that supports the idea that capitalism can be reformed through trade union action alone always will be forced to defend capitalist "stability" against the onslaughts of the workers' movement. That is more true today than ever. However, socialists always argued that the ability of reformist trade union leaders to perform this service, to play the role of labor lieutenants of capitalism, depends upon their ability to carry the working class along. When the leadership loses its ability to maintain the struggle within "normal" bounds it begins to disintegrate. When workers are convinced of the necessity for revolution, then the capitalist class must give up its none-too-sturdy devotion to democracy and militarily defeat the workers' movement. If the capitalists win, they no longer need the, often expensive, services of the trade unions. If the workers win, they will do so only under a leadership that repudiates the politics and methods of reformism.

We do not believe that workers today in any large numbers have yet been convinced of the bankruptcy of pro-capitalist, reformist ideas or of the need for a revolutionary alternative. That is a task we have still to carry out. In any case it is not this conception of the bureaucracy as a defender of capitalist society (*not* necessarily of the capitalists as such) that the struggle committee comrades are using.

What these comrades maintain is that because *the bureaucracy* has become more and more dependent on the capitalist state and more and more openly an agent of the capitalist class, the *trade unions* have ceased to be an organization of the working class and have become nothing but tools of the capitalist class for disciplining the workers. Just when this happened nobody seems to know nor has the process been described in any great detail, although the National Labor Relations Act is generally held to be the guilty party. That would place the great change somewhere around 1934, at about the same time as the rise of the CIO.

Although the comrades have not developed the idea themselves, the truth is that they would have to place the change at the very moment unions became legal. Any legal union movement, because it contains as a union, as a mass organization of the class, not only class conscious militants in its ranks but also ordinary workers with diverse and often reactionary ideas, tends to give rise to a bureaucracy. The state will always encourage and support the "respectable" labor leaders and they in turn, will always use their "respectability" as an argument to persuade the more conservative members that the reformist

course is more practical than that proposed by radicals and revolutionaries. What is more, as Lenin points out in his polemic against "left-wing" communism, the problem of bureaucracy will continue to plague the working class even after the socialist revolution. There will still be many workers, often a majority, who, even though they turn to the revolutionary party in a time of crisis, remain politically and morally backward as far as their general ideas and attitudes are concerned. Sectarians and utopians of all kinds have always tried to find organizational gimmicks to overcome this problem of the bureaucratic corruption of the institutions of workers' democracy before and after the revolution. Marxists have always held that only the class struggle itself can overcome these tendencies and that the duty of revolutionaries is to operate within the mass organizations of workers' democracy and organize an opposition to the parasitic elements which thrive on the political and social backwardness of the class.

In any case, the argument of our comrades is that the power of the bureaucracy in the American trade union movement *now* is so great that they effectively prevent the unions from playing their previous role as defenders of the workers' most elementary rights against the capitalist. There are serious flaws in this argument:

- 1) The wildcat strikes mentioned above and the inability of the bureaucracy to control them, which indicates that the bureaucracy is still dependent on the workers' struggle and a distorted reflection of their power.
- 2) The continued necessity for workers in unorganized sectors of industry and government to fight the state and the capitalists for the right to organize. This would not be true if unions were really, like the stalinist and fascist labor fronts, a state agency for disciplining the working class.
- 3) The continuing necessity even for established unions like the UAW or Teamsters to strike or threaten to strike as a means of furthering *their* power. Most strikes, including militant ones, are not wildcats. No agency of the capitalist state has ever fomented strikes even for "vulgar" bread and butter demands.

Theoretically, this idea that the trade unions are statified leads to complete confusion. Such a decisively statified labor front implies the existence of a totalitarian state. Given the existence of a capitalist democracy even in a more restricted form than that which prevails in the U.S. now, it would be impossible to maintain such state agents of capitalist domination, such "company unions" instead of an independent trade union movement. Any industry that was so organized would sooner or later find its workers organizing legally or illegally new independent unions. That is just what happened in the thirties when "company unions" and even conservative AFL unions were replaced by the CIO. As a corollary to this it is absurd to suppose that the capitalist state, after going to all the trouble to establish a statified trade union movement would, because of some semantic prejudice, refuse to apply all that legislation to an organization simply because it preferred to call itself a struggle group. ("You can't hit me officer, I'm not a union picket, I'm a struggle committee picket." Or, "you can't expel me, I'm not organizing a caucus, I'm organizing a struggle group.") Under totalitarian conditions, moreover, we would find that the only form of organization would be illegal workers' groups fighting for the most minimal trade union rights. Such is the case with the Sindicatos Obreros in Spain today. However revolutionary the *ideas* of such groupings might be, they would be actually *fighting* for the most primitive trade union demands. The effect of totalitarianism, as of victorious reaction in general, is to *throw back* the level of struggle. The immediate demand under fascism is not for soviets, but for political freedom in general. The immediate demands would not be to replace the unions with some more revolutionary form of organization, but to restore the independence of trade unions.

We would not argue that the comrades who support the struggle committee

thesis would draw all these conclusions from their premise that the trade unions have been statified, or even accept them as legitimate conclusions when we point them out. In fact, the lack of consistency in thinking through their point of view is one of the problems with this tendency. It is also the reason they have written so little on the matter. Their confusion flows in large part from the ultra-left phrases which conceal a very conservative estimation of the potentialities of the American working class. That class is not, in fact, living under semi-fascist conditions. This combination of revolutionary phraseology and abstentionist program is not new - it is a common reaction to isolation from the mass movement. The abstentionism, often combined with frenetic activity that leads in no political direction, is a conservative adaptation to the real isolation. The revolutionary phraseology is a defense against those who would point out that, like a squirrel in a treadmill cage, you aren't really going anywhere. After all, if the major institutions of the working class are really agents of the capitalist state, who can blame you for having no influence on them? The practical consequences of this ultra-left combination in the past has always been disastrous. When the workers do not respond to the frenzied calls to break from the "outmoded" institutions, one section of the sect usually withdraws from politics; the rest drop the revolutionary phraseology and opportunistically adapt themselves to the rank and file's existing consciousness.

The tasks of the working class in America today are not those that exist under a fascist or semi-fascist regime: the scene is quite different. The task for this working class, organized in a powerful and successful trade union movement in the most powerful and successful capitalist democracy the world has seen, is to organize itself into an independent class party. There are two versions of reality involved here and the IS has to decide which world it is living in.

Turning-point.... (Continued from page 9)

That is why they have not written it down before this, and why it is unlikely that they will be able to write down ten lines of it without cringing. There is no Machiavellianism here, in the remarkable course followed by these sterling comrades. There is only disorientation. We are dealing with the phenomenon of disoriented sectarianism--not yet with a politically rooted sectarianism, still less with congenital sectarians. (We are still referring to Comrades Geier and Parker.) This is the sectarianism of pellmell full-flight, of fear--fear of *the turn we have to make*.

When we speak of making a turn, we hope it is understood that we are not silly enough to believe that, by some "crash program" or special drive, the social base of the I.S. and its political life can be transmogrified in six months. We have no get-rich-quick scheme, and are not in the market for any. We have no promises to make. It is possible, that, *even if we start turning the helm right now*, it will still take a number of years before the I.S. becomes substantially a revolutionary workers' movement--if we're good and lucky. But then, we don't know what social crises, what opportunities, what openings will arise in the next number of years. All we can do with certainty right now is re-fit ourselves and our organization to take maximum advantage of whatever blows.

What we know for sure is that, right now, the I.S. is drifting in the exactly opposite direction. We propose to halt this drift and turn it back. We believe that the way to do this is by the political education of the membership. But obviously--this is a result of the convention anomaly--the elected national leadership is politically incapable of carrying on this political education. It follows that, however reluctantly, we will have to try to carry out this educational program ourselves--that is, with all the comrades who agree with us--even though we may be able to do it inadequately only.

The National Rank & File T.U. Conference

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Richard Broadhead & Maxine Wolpinsky

On June 27,28 some 900 trade unionists from around the country met in the Packinghouse Workers hall in Chicago. The line of the conference was anti-Nixon, support the pro-labor doves, down with the conservative union bureaucrats, and support for the "progressive union leaders. This meeting was another indication of the current ferment in the working class. It adds an important new dimension to this upsurge, namely a move towards tying together and generalizing the struggles of (and within) individual unions. While the Communist Party and its friends organized the meeting in an attempt to use this sentiment for their own purposes, a large number of militant, democratically inclined rank and filers attended. All was not smooth sailing for the conference organizers.

Throughout the conference, the workshop and plenary chairmen and their supporters had to beat back attempts from the floor to radicalize and increase the militancy of the resolutions the organizers had prepared. The structure of the conference was also designed to prevent democratic procedures. Three and one-half hours Saturday afternoon was the only time allotted for work shops. With over 100 people in each workshop, it was impossible for all to be heard and for all amendments and resolutions to be discussed and voted upon. Saturday after dinner was given over to a rally which consisted of music and a series of speakers - Daley's black aldermen and some black union officials. (Jesse Jackson from SCLC and Kenneth Gibson, newly elected mayor of Newark were the morning keynote speakers. The heavy representation of black speakers was no doubt in part an attempt to head off political criticisms of the conference.) On Sunday, the plenary session lasted approximately 3 hours and was cut short when the meeting began to get out of the organizers' hands.

WORKSHOPS

In the Peace and Political Action workshop, two resolutions were on the floor. One dealt with the war and called for withdrawal by Christmas, resumption of the peace negotiations and so on. The other called for the political independence of the labor movement (in fact, this slogan was prominently displayed in the convention hall.) By "independence" the resolution meant labor should support only good Democrats and Republicans. Interestingly enough the resolution raised the labor party slogan. " We are not against a labor party (or farmer-labor party) such a development would be premature at this point,however!" This concession did not head off a debate on the question. A motion stating we look forward to the formation of a labor party was defeated 24-17. A motion to characterize the Indochina war as imperialist lost by the same vote. A motion for a one-day work stoppage tied 20-20 and was to be taken to the convention floor.

PLENARY

Many women walked out of the workshop on Women's Rights when sharp disagreement arose over several items in the workshop "packet". (Each workshop was provided with resolutions prepared by the conference organizers.) At the plenary session impressive numbers of young women contested the motion made from the floor that the body accept the motions passed by the workshops without debate or discussion "to expedite things, time is running out, etc." The women were joined in this fight by black transit workers from New York and St. Louis, as well as by representatives of the various Trotskyist sects and independent workers.

These uprisings from the floor were denounced several times by the chair as "instigated by disrupters from fascist organizations," and this charge was picked up by the supporters of the conference organizers on the floor with the

added invective "sons of bitches" thrown in for good measure. Nevertheless, the motion to dispense with debate and accept the workshop resolutions without discussion failed.

This opened the floor to heated debate on the proposals coming from three workshops: Women's Rights, Racism and Political Action. Curiously enough, the report from the women's workshop was read by a man. The woman who was scheduled to read the report did not come forward when her name was called, and a man who had attended the women's workshop was selected to read the report. This was too much for a number of women who were talking disgustedly to one another as they lined up behind the microphones.

Much argument centered around the resolution to oppose the equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would remove state legislation protecting women workers. The conference organizers opposed ERA, which is the official line of the AFL-CIO, on the ground that it would "strip away every piece of legislation that now protects working women and which were won after long years of struggle." Proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment argued that they were for the convention calling for the extension of protective legislation to men, which is a position held by some leading union militants, but this view was not appreciated at the conference. There is in fact much confusion among the ranks of women workers on this issue, as well as others, which is exactly why open debate should have been encouraged at the conference.

But the conference leaders had no time for a discussion of these issues. One sensed a great fear of opening up the conference so that delegates could make real decisions based on open debate and discussion. If significant changes were made in the proposals given the convention by the organizers, their authority would have been undermined and the job of creating groups around the country based on their program would become more difficult. It was this fear of more militant, radical resolutions and action proposals which moved many of the conference chiefs to schedule speech after speech from Democratic politicians and union officials while *denying repeated requests from the rank and file* to address the conference-

The toughest floor fight of the plenary was waged by black transit and construction workers from NYC and St. Louis rank and file movements called "Fight Back" - which claimed participation from 1,000 black and Puerto Rican workers. Their criticisms of the resolution on how to fight racism and fight for the rights of third world workers were scathing. (They had been denounced in the racism workshop and charged with organizing a dual union - which they are against the reactionary, all white leadership of the TWU in NYC.) Though stifled in the workshop, they fought in the plenary session to get an amendment to the Action Proposal on Racism adopted by the delegates. They termed workshop "action" proposal #1 ("We endorse the Petition to the United Nations Against Genocide and call upon all unions to support the signature campaign") as "unworthy and irrelevant" and scorned consideration of the UN as an agency capable of affecting improvement in the racist conditions confronting black workers in the United States.

After a strenuous floor fight, the workers succeeded in getting their amendment on the floor. They were not permitted to read their statement, and it was "misread" from the chair (e.g., "to establish economies in all unions by reducing the top heavy high salaried leadership .." was read "to abolish economies..") Clearly, the amendment from Fight Back was broader in scope and vision than the line taken by the "packet" resolution, and several proposals were greeted with applause from the delegates.

The proposal "to reduce the salary of all trade union officials to the level of the highest paid workers in their particular industries" drew prolonged cheering and table-pounding. Fight Back's general perspective was that rank and file workers face the enemy on two major fronts. 1) "The external struggle that workers

face in their day to day life, such as against the employers, government, etc., and 2) The internal struggle against the dictatorial and bureaucratic control of their organizations by those who have usurped the leadership of the trade union movement and sells out the working people".

They also proposed the establishment of rank and file centers "where we can run rank and file workers for political office and in this way help create feelings of strength and brotherhood as well as to help break the hold of the Democratic and Republican parties upon the workers." The conference brass, and the chairman in particular, must have been sweating at this point. What to do? It would be impossible to denounce the militant black workers as "representatives of fascist organizations bent on disruption". Yet the Fight Back Amendment was gaining too much favor from the floor - and the proposals were so broad as to open the Pandora's box of political debate on several issues. The chair foun its way out by ruling that the proposed amendment was instead a substitute and thus out of order. At this point, the Convention was adjourned.

Subsequent discussion with some of the Fight Back workers brought forth their sharp criticisms of the way the conference was organized and handled. They said it was "a fraud, a shuck and completely undemocratic." They were aware of the party affiliation (CP) of the main conference organizers and we discussed in some detail this point.

POST CONFERENCE

One of the resolutions presented to the conference was that groups be established around the country based on the resolutions and action proposals passed by the conference. Membership in these organizations would be limited to delegates from unions, central labor bodies and other labor groups. Whether these groups will be set up is not clear. Wherever they are established, ISers should make a maximum effort to get as many independents as possible to participate and fight for a democratic membership organization open to any working person. Winning this fight is a prerequisite for building a serious organization which can consider actions such as work stoppages, solidarity actions with other workers' struggles, links with minority, anti-war, women's liberation and student groups engaged in struggle. Raising the labor party perspective would be one of our important tasks in such a group.

IS FUNCTIONING

The role of the IS(as an organization) and the attitude taken by many individual comrades toward the Rank and File Conference was hardly interventionist. Even though the NAC was notified of the conference three weeks in advance and agreed to write a leaflet, we had no literature table up, no leaflet, no newspapers. (The Workers League claims to have sold 200 subs to their paper and 50 pamphlets on the 1938-1940 discussions with Trotsky on the labor party question.) No pitch was made by the IS convention leadership to get comrades to the conference (even though the student and anti-war movements were on our agenda while the conference workshops were going on Saturday afternoon.) One of the authors made a pitch both Friday night and Saturday morning during the meeting of the Labor Fraction. A total of eight comrades came to the conference, most of them for a short time. (Some comrades, not the authors, did tail end the Spartacists and endorse their leaflet - which was poorly produced and distributed on the last afternoon of the conference when many of the delegates had gone home.)

The rationale for this total lack of preparation and participation varied but when some explanation was offered it focused around the conference being a "CP thing". Do comrades feel that workers who show up at such a conference are beyond rescue from Stalinist influence? The Stalinists have long been and will continue to be one of the chief forces attempting to contain and confine upsurges in the working class to "safe" channels. Whenever upsurges occur, the CP will be there. Will the IS be there too?

One comrade who came to the conference Sunday afternoon reported his findings after half an hour. The conference was a waste of time because 1) very few young white male workers were there (false, though this did not look like an SDS meeting,) 2) there were a lot of students present (we met two - so what ?) and 3) the workers present were in the CP or were CP sympathizers. After this analysis the floor struggles related above took place and it was obvious that there were plenty of independent workers there on the convention floor. This fact would have been clear to anyone who chose to spend his or her time at the convention talking with workers and not "caucusing" and "blocking" with members of Trotskyist sects.

The workshop discussions and our talks with individuals revealed that the best elements at the convention saw rank and file control and democratization of their unions as a major task. The notion of building groups which did not take on the fight to transform the union movement as a central concern never came up and anyone who would have raised such a perspective would have been viewed (correctly) as other worldly.

The question of struggling to democratize the unions or build some new organizations also feeds into the question of building a labor party. Clearly, a working class party would have to have a strong base in existing mass workers' organizations. No one envisages a serious labor party being built by individual atoms who happen to be workers. Because the unions are the only mass working class organizations, any serious perspective for building a class party has to see the unions as a critical base for such an effort.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE ?

How did this lack of IS preparation and participation come to pass ? and what are some of the implications for our future? We say that this abstentionist and sectarian role flows from the struggle-group-workers' party perspective which many comrades hold. While no comrade has seen fit to write an explanation of this fundamental change in revolutionary socialist analysis it is clear from the discussion and votes at the recent convention that it flows from the "statification of the trade unions thesis".

Those comrades who hold this point of view (again, expressed only verbally so far) have put the unions on the side of capital in the class struggle. After all, they are organs of the capitalist state for the purpose of disciplining the working class. Any comrade who believes this must, if the comrade is principled, be in opposition to the unions, must call on the workers to leave their unions and form new organizations (new unions? revolutionary unions? what are these struggle groups?) and ultimately, smash the unions, just as we are for smashing the Democratic Party - a conclusion drawn publicly by comrade Barry Unionsmasher. At least Barry is principled and consistent.

Those comrades who disagree with the statification theory, and who voted at the IS convention for the Haberkern motion on this question (see full text elsewhere in this issue), but still are for something they call struggle groups, maintain in their heads a notion that there is something about unions - conservative leaders, restrictive legislation, increased bureaucratization - which is new (?) and which calls into question their real function. Which side of the class struggle are unions on? Should we boycott unions ? one foot in and one foot out ? three toes in and seven toes out? Such a state of mind has at least one result - little activity in the real world.

It is indeed unfortunate that these notions have such wide currency in the IS at this time. Unfortunately, precisely because there is something new about the working class and its organizations today. What is new is not that capital controls the unions (it does not) but that there is more ferment and motion in the class today than at any time since the 1940's. Comrades who do not understand that the major struggle of the class will be fought by and within the union movement will find themselves on the periphery of the class struggle - at best.