

EC DISCUSSION DOCUMENT
1976 CONVENTION

STEPS TOWARD BUILDING THE PARTY

Last Year's Targets

The IS has always been dedicated to creating a base for socialist ideas in the working class. But at last year's convention we moved a significant step forward by setting ourselves three important new tasks. First, we aimed to become a working class organization through aggressive recruitment. Second, we declared that henceforth our organization would be in the forefront of the day-to-day struggles of rank and file workers; indeed, that the IS would take responsibility for initiating those struggles. Third, we realized that to successfully make these changes, we would have to become a much tougher and more serious organization--an organization serious enough to push revolutionary socialism in all areas of the working class.

These tasks we summed up under three slogans. FOR A WORKERS' COMBAT ORGANIZATION. FOR THE TURN TO AGITATION. FOR THE BOLSHEVIZATION OF THE IS. These slogans represented a way forward for the IS which has guided us at every level over the last year.

At that time we stated that the crisis in the system, the attacks that were coming down on workers in the form of unemployment and job insecurity, continued inflation eating away at living standards, and the universal efforts of employers to get more production through speed-up and harrassment, would produce in the working class a readiness to fight back. We believed that this readiness to fight, coupled with the focus provided by new contracts coming up in 1976, would enable us to make rapid progress in turning our three slogans into reality.

The Record

We can now say that, on the whole, we were right. From the point of view of building a socialist alternative to this lousy system, both real conditions and workers' attitudes are more favorable now than at any time since the 30's. Before going into the details of our next steps toward building the party, we must examine briefly how well we used the opportunities presented to us over the last year.

We had hoped it would be possible to double our size over the year, but we only managed to record a 50% increase in size. Certainly a disappointment, but one which must be seen in the context of the kind of recruitment we have achieved. A considerable portion of our new members are working class and this has had a very real and beneficial effect on the organization at branch, fraction, and national levels.

In the second area covered by our "Turn to Agitation" slogan, we have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams at least in one area of work, the teamsters union. We have forced strikes, squeezed concessions from the bosses, and created the movement which will eventually take back the union for the members. We have yet to achieve the same success generally or prove we can continue the daily agitation at shop-floor level once the focus of the contract has disappeared. But if we have grounds for being disappointed with our growth in size, we have every reason to be more than pleased with the extension of our influence in the labor movement.

Finally, in judging the progress made in "bolshhevizing" the organization, one need only look at the incredible level of activity our small organization has sustained over the past year. In addition to the work in the industrial priorities, we have launched a weekly paper, raised thousands of dollars for our Portuguese comrades, done a worker membership campaign, begun Tyler defense work, etc., etc., etc. This record, coupled with the solid professional machine we have created and the phenomenal development of our members, even relatively new members, as leaders both in the working class and at every level of the organization, is eloquent testimony to our success in toughening up the organization.

That, then, is the balance sheet of what we said we would do and what we actually did in the field of party building over the last year. We cannot claim to have completed the process we started last year, but we are certainly well on our way. We are not looking for any new "turns" in the coming year, but there are some shifts that must be made in light of our experience in the last year. That is what this document is all about. Continuing on the course we outlined last year, but learning the lessons, plugging the gaps and taking on the new problems that have arisen out of our success so far. In short, refocussing our goals so that in the next year we can progress as quickly as in the last year. For it is clear that our overall schedule demands that we maintain this rate of progress in our "Steps Toward Building the Party."

"Mass Work"

We live under a system which grinds down workers. It is impossible for it to convince workers that the system is great, but it does convince the majority that nothing can be done to change it. When we talk about agitation, on the other hand, we are talking about action. The action of a group of workers trying to change some element of their work situation. It follows that successful agitation holds the key to the struggle for socialism. For it convinces masses of workers that things can actually be changed by organized and collective action. Now it is true that, from that conviction, it is still a long way to the workers' revolution. But without agitation, the other elements which come together to create socialism can't even begin to operate. That is why the IS consciously made the "turn to agitation."

With a year of solid experience under our belt, we are now ready to move away from a general concept of agitation and tie ourselves down to a specific agitational method which fits the present needs of both the IS and the working class. Basically it is the method we adopted in our contract campaigns, the method of "mass work." It is a method which, despite its name, can be applied equally well to a work group of a dozen or an industry of hundreds of thousands. "Mass work" involves mobilizing a significant proportion of the people affected by an issue around a limited program designed to deal with that issue.

In a contract campaign mass work will involve organizing thousands around a few key demands for a decent contract. In a movement to retake the union from the bureaucrats, effectiveness will inevitably demand a more extensive program and therefore less people involved at the outset. At shop floor level, still the hardest place to sustain agitation, "mass work" may be mobilizing a single department around a single issue of safety on the job. It is even likely that, at this point in time, the mobilization would involve demonstrating against the union to get something done, rather than a job-action against the company.

But the method remains the same in all cases. Having chosen our agitational goal on a realistic basis, our aim is to mobilize the maximum number of people by limiting and focussing our demands as much as we can while still remaining effective. In the Teamsters for a Decent Contract and the UAW Coalition for a Good Contract, we have applied this idea of the minimum effective program with good results.

Agitation is not restricted to trade union issues either. We are mounting growing agitation around the slogan of "Free Gary Tyler." This too is "mass work" around a limited program. We have a whole analysis to explain why Tyler is on death row, but we don't insist people agree with that analysis before they can work with us to defend Tyler. All we require is agreement on the most limited program, "Free Gary."

Working Class Unity

We take the "mass work" approach to agitation because we are out to create united working class action. We have to organize and move those who do not yet understand the class struggle. Indeed, we have to organize and move those who understand our view of the class struggle and disagree with it. Even those who are consciously anti-communist have to be organized. Organized and opposed, it's true, but organized nonetheless. In the past we have set up caucuses and other forms of organization that often meant in practice that people couldn't act with us on one issue unless they also had our view of another. With "mass work" this exclusion ends and we begin to break down our self-imposed isolation from our fellow workers.

Having said that, we should be absolutely clear that united working class action means that our on-going rank and file organizations must take a firm programmatic line on racism and sexism. Not as an abstract principle, but because these are the sources of division and weakness in the working class, and must be taken head on to achieve any fighting unity. But we should also be clear that in telephone, for example, our caucuses will find ways of working with racists against forced transfers. In auto we will find ways of uniting with the worst male chauvinist bigots in order to combat speed-up. In the PO, we will be ready to block with bureaucratic opportunists to stop inhuman overtime, and in the teamsters we will fight side by side with the super-patriots to bring Fitz to his knees. Without unity, the working class is powerless. Unity doesn't arise automatically; it is built up thru common struggles.

Transitional Politics

In the next period we have to begin to operate on the understanding that trade unions have a political life and the organizations we create with our "mass work" must have a political life, too. Not a political life that is separate from the main economic or democratic demands of the movement. Not a political life imposed on it from the outside, but one that arises precisely out of the main struggle. The TDC, for example, developed its own politics, particularly in the last couple of months, with Convoy. In fact, it developed its politics late, because we were slow in using our position to create a clear political line. But the limited fight for a decent contract came up against political barriers (the threat of a Taft Hartley injunction, for example), which had to be faced politically. The politics of TDC were not revolutionary, could not have been revolutionary, and certainly shouldn't have been revolutionary, but they were working class politics, and they did represent a serious development of consciousness for thousands of teamsters.

With the UAW CGC, there is a growing political problem around the attempts of the bureaucracy to cover up a contract sell-out with an emphasis on a Democratic victory in the November election. And while the political solution will not be a revolutionary line on the election, there is no doubt that the CGC will have to have a clear political line in order to survive. That line will not be able to avoid fighting against some basic and widespread illusions in the Democratic Party. In short, there can be no successful agitation without politics; even if the agitation is of a limited and sectional kind, it must still give rise to a political position.

This is something we have not understood well enough in the past, nor have we clearly understood the application of our own revolutionary socialist politics to the situation of "mass work." Only toward the end of the teamster campaign did Workers' Power begin to consciously develop transitional politics which started from the real situation and point workers in the direction of our overall view of the struggle for socialism. If you start with speed-up and harrassment on the shop

floor, it isn't a large step to the idea of the employers' offensive. Nor is it a large step from there to the idea of unremitting class struggle between the capitalist class and the workers. But the connection between speed-up and class warfare is impossible without the transitional politics of the employers' offensive. The employers' offensive, rank and file control, working class solidarity, etc., etc. These are all ideas that can be a bridge between the direct experience of workers today and an understanding of the struggle for socialism.

emphasis
here

Workers' Power

It is Workers' Power which will carry the burden of developing transitional politics and thus carrying revolutionary socialism into the new working class movement which we are helping to build. There is a sense in which our politics will take up where the politics of "mass work" organizations leave off, and that is the key to recruiting from the movement into the IS. However, the possibility of recruitment will be undermined if we continue our present tendency, both in our "mass work" and even in our Workers' Power coverage of our "mass work," to downplay politics and lapse into economism. The predominant emphasis in IS over the next year will remain agitation, but we will start to get the full benefits of that emphasis only when we are successful in integrating politics into agitation.

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With "mass work" as the general method of the organization, the aggressive projection of the IS in each area of work becomes increasingly vital. As the organization expands its areas of mass work, so it must make increasing efforts to ensure that the IS has a political presence in those areas. For only if we have such a presence can a solid political periphery be developed and substantial recruitment achieved. There are many ways of creating the IS political presence, but probably the most important is Workers' Power. The paper is our best organizer, our most political leader, our most impressive agitator, our most eloquent speaker. But it can only do the required job if we use it widely and consistently so that it becomes an accepted part of the labor movement.

Historically, it has always been the case that the key weakness of the working class is its lack of leaders. Today in America, after decades of stability, this is more true today than ever before. The finest traditions of the working class have all but disappeared. It is clear that the major source of leaders will be the revolutionary party we are building. That is why we put such a heavy emphasis on recruitment in this period. But not all the leaders of the working class will be revolutionaries, and we must therefore be using Workers' Power to train worker leaders who will never join the IS. A workers' paper will be read even by people who loathe its politics, because without it, they won't know what is going on in key areas of the labor movement. And more than information, a workers' paper begins to be the source of explanations about what is going on in the world. This is extremely important for workers who are fighting a system

which is specifically organized to mislead and confuse them. Our ability to explain the significance of various events, to analyze the news and to predict the direction of future developments will have a real effect on our standing (and therefore size) in the working class.

* | But the paper can only do its job if it is actively used. Distribution is not enough. In order for the paper to act as an organizer, the fractions of the organization must see it as a tool in building the work. That means not just reporting an activity, but figuring out the important political question connected to the event, deciding how best to get those points across. In other words, the entire organization must take responsibility for developing political coverage and pushing the paper forward.

Using the paper means more than developing copy. It also means talking to contacts about its contents. It is only when the paper is actually used in this way that we are able to get the feedback on which arguments were effective and which were not, so that we can continually increase the over-all effectiveness of the paper as a tool for winning workers to revolutionary politics.

Recruitment and Growth

Progress toward building the party clearly demands the rapid recruitment of worker members. In the last year we have done better than at any time during our history, but it is still not fast enough. The policy of wide open recruitment that we have pursued in this period must be maintained for the foreseeable future. There can be no artificial barriers to workers' joining our organization; this rotten capitalist system itself places enough barriers in the way of workers becoming revolutionary socialists without us adding to them. It means that we are committed to the idea that people will be trained to be effective revolutionaries once they enter the organization, and our first task is to bring them into the IS as soon as possible. It also means that we accept the fact that not all who join will stay long enough to become trained and committed members. Some turn-over of members is the price of an open membership policy. Stagnation, however, is the price of a restricted membership policy.

It has to be acknowledged that the rate of turn-over from the 1975 fall membership campaign was dangerously high, at over 50%. High enough to have a disorienting effect on some of our branches, but an examination of the problem tends to demonstrate that it was our practice, rather than our "open membership" theory, which brought about the extra losses. If we had put as much effort into involving our new members in the work of the IS as we did into recruiting them, the rate of turn-over would have been much nearer the one-third level we originally projected.

It is true that the emphasis on teamster work, particularly in February and March, interfered with the integration process to a considerable extent. But at the beginning of the year, it was still possible to assign experienced "buddies" to new members, organize training classes, and involve new members in serious and interesting political work in the fractions. Some of this, and the other small steps which add up to an integration program, could have been sustained even in the height of the campaign, if we had started early enough and understood the necessity clearly enough. We didn't, the recommended steps to worker member integration were ignored or carried out sloppily in branch after branch. But on the bright side, we learned in that period that the integration of new members will not take care of itself, and must be seriously organized. It also became abundantly clear in this period that the political development of our new members was being hampered by the lack of suitable political material from the center. Something that is only now being rectified by the creation of an education department, and the projected publication of our Workers' Power magazine.

The Next Steps

In the course of the last year, it has been brought home to us time and time again that we are not yet a party. There have been many issues we wanted to deal with that we had to ignore. Many questions we said we would deal with that, in the end, we didn't. Many things we have done that have only been done half well because of our lack of resources. The next year will be basically no different. If anything, it will be worse, because the gap between our resources and what we could be doing is getting wider, not narrower, as the potential for working class struggle expands. We have to get used to this. It will haunt us for the next few years. We are not a party; we cannot do everything. The following areas are crucial to building the party.

Membership Campaign

In the fall, we will once again be launching a campaign for rapid worker recruitment. It will not be a carbon copy of last year's campaign, because we learned valuable lessons then which can now be applied. We learned we have to focus our recruitment efforts to get the maximum impact and lowest rate of turn-over. Last year we had a general campaign; this year, it will be a series of specific, simultaneous campaigns in each of the fractions. We will recruit more on the basis of our on-going work than before, and we will have a situation in which we have an organized area of work to involve each of our new members from the start. Last year, with some exceptions, our new members didn't fit into our major fractions, and this fact alone caused us serious problems.

In focussing our recruitment efforts on our fractions and on other areas of on-going work, rather than on the scatter-gun approach of our last recruitment campaign, we will be specifically targetting for recruitment workers who are already leaders in the work, or who are being developed as leaders out of the work. Some comrades, however,

in preliminary discussions, have taken the concept of focussed recruitment too far. They want us to concentrate our recruitment on experienced worker activists who have a following among their fellow workers.

traditional
leaders

This orientation will direct us away from younger workers just beginning to develop themselves as leaders, and set us seeking a more experienced and trained layer of activists. This is a category of people said to exist in all our priority industries, apparently having identical characteristics. We are told our work must be tailored to their common needs.

It is a prescription for recruitment which starts with a myth of a non-existent layer with common characteristics in our priority industries. It flows from a lack of confidence in our ability to develop our present and future members into leaders of the class, and substitutes for this a perspective toward recruiting established leaders. In practice, it will inevitably end up in a backwards attempt to orient to whoever has a following in the working class, and will bend our attempt to build the party by focussing away from open recruitment of young workers and toward more conservative elements. It is presented as a short-cut to having a solid presence in the working class, but in reality, it is a dead end.

Worker Leadership

The recruitment of worker comrades over the last year has now opened up the potential for establishing a worker leadership at every level of the organization. Such an important development will not occur automatically, however. Indeed, the weaknesses already outlined in the area of holding some new members has also meant the slower development of the other new members who have stayed. The improved atmosphere for training and political discussion that has been created over the past month or so should speed up the process of establishing worker leadership, but there are two other developments which could yet stifle it.

There has been a tendency toward tokenism at virtually every level of the organization. New comrades, who have not yet been trained in the political experience of the organization, are added to committees because of their real experience in the working class. They are then left to sink or swim on their own. Older and more experienced comrades fail to take the time and energy to train these newer members, and to work out concrete programs to fully integrate them into the leadership process. As a result, new comrades who should be developing as our future front-line leadership, become alienated not only from the committee, but often from the organization itself.

Our policy is to continue the process of promoting newer comrades into the leadership-- particularly comrades recruited out of working class and black struggles. Our solution to the problem of tokenism is to approach the task of integrating, training, and developing new leadership as seriously as any other task in building the party. This will overcome the tendency for older comrades to dominate leading committees at the

point is worker + black recruits - intellectuals must still
50 tough & complicated process -
requiring full political discussions -

various levels of the organization. It is true that these comrades are increasingly members from industry. But it is important that we don't institutionalize the industrialized leadership and fool ourselves that we have created a worker leadership. There can never be enough leaders in a workers' party. Despite the progress of the last year, the watchword for us must still be "expand the leadership." Our new members must be trained as leaders by our present leaders and not just left to themselves.

That training is not just for selected individuals, but must be applied on a fairly general level. For open recruitment means that the demands the organization puts on new members will be less than on the experienced ones. That makes perfect sense, for increased activity comes with training and increased commitment. But while being sensitive to the fact that we are now recruiting a large number of comrades with family commitments, it is our job to make increasing demands of our new members. It is liberal nonsense to have separate, long-term standards for the new worker members, for very soon that separate standard will become a sort of second class membership. And that is totally unacceptable.

Black Liberation

In this country, minority and particularly black workers will be in the forefront of the revolution, because of the special oppression they suffer under US capitalism. Therefore, it follows that they will also be in the lead of the revolutionary party. This is not yet the case in the IS, and we have no reason to be complacent about the progress we are making in this area. Unless we make faster progress over the next year, our claim to be in the process of building a new workers' party will begin to sound hollow.

We have not stood still in black recruitment, but the several hundred per cent increase in black membership reflects much more on the weakness of yesterday than on the strength of today. On the positive side, we do now have an organized black caucus in the IS that is creating the beginning of the black cadre which is vital for our further development in this area. Not only development in size, but equally important, development in political clarity. This development cannot be underestimated. Without the beginnings of a black leadership in the organization, which these cadre represent, our prospects for progress in this area would be very limited indeed.

In the area of black liberation, our politics, in practice, are behind our political development in virtually every other area. Given our past as a largely white organization, this area of weakness was probably unavoidable, but it certainly cannot be allowed to continue. The black caucus conference in June, the appointment of a full-time black organizer after convention, the allocation of greater resources to developing literature on these questions, the spread of Tyler defense work to all the branches--all these initiatives are devoted to ensuring that the next steps toward building the party are the next steps to building a multi-racial workers' party.

Working Women

Over the last year our perspectives for the industrialization of women has been proven correct 100 times over. IS women have played a magnificent role in the rank and file movement. And, through their work and the work of male comrades, female industrial workers have been brought around the IS. In fact, we have found that women in predominantly male jobs have become toughened and hardened by their work experience, and are therefore often more open to ideas of women's liberation, class struggle unionsim, and socialism.

However, since they are pioneers in these jobs, their numbers are quite small. As our work and influence in the priorities deepens, the proportion of recruitable women to men will decrease. We always knew this would be the case. This fact is just one more powerful argument for re-establishing strong, outward-oriented women's caucuses. The caucuses have proven to be extremely valuable in bringing women from outside our priorities around the IS, in introducing revolutionary socialist politics to wives of worker militants, and in helping to train the next generation of women leaders in the IS.

Red Tide

It should be noted that the promise of a fast-growing national youth movement that was apparent at the last convention was not fulfilled. Indeed, for a period of several months, it appeared that the Red Tide had totally failed and that the Detroit branch represented only the remnants of a once-promising perspective. In the fall of 1975, we took a big risk and asked almost the entire leadership of the Red Tide to move to the center from the West Coast, because we understood that no revolutionary workers' movement could be built without a serious program for attracting and training youth. In the last few months, the Red Tide has proven that the overall perspective was sound, by the solid progress made in Detroit.

It has shown that rapid recruitment is possible and that this recruitment is taking place largely among black and white working class youth. The Red Tide has proved to be an excellent experience for training new political leadership, and plays a critical role in filling out the breadth of IS politics. In fact, in many ways the Red Tide has been in advance of the organization in leading mass work, doing contact work, developing programs for integration of new members, and in helping the Detroit district to develop a political periphery.

As a result of recent opportunities through mass work on the Gary Tyler campaign, it will be possible to expand the Red Tide to other cities in the next year. We will make no grand plans. Instead, we will review the situation in each city and select targets where we will map out a specific plan for building the Red Tide. This will require significant resources and involvement of local IS branches and fractions.

By developing and expanding our mass work and by bringing into that work transitional politics which provide the bridge between the day-to-day struggle and the struggle for socialism, we can again make big progress in the coming year. Our targets are simple. Greater recruitment and deeper roots in auto, teamsters, telephone, steel, postal, and the black community. We will not be able to double our overall size next year, but significant steps toward building the party demand that we double our size in these target areas. We have the politics, we have the organization. We have the means to succeed in a way we never have before. We will not fail.

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The End