

## SLOGANS OR STRATEGY? -- THE EC ANSWER TO THE COUNTER DOCUMENT

The EC document on the next "Steps Toward Building the Party" offers a strategy for the next period which builds on the successes of the last year learns from the mistakes, makes some important shifts but remains true to the boldness and half-year perspective adopted unanimously by last year's convention. Several comrades have put forward a document in opposition to the EC's, which offers a different strategy for the next period; this document is called, "Build a Worker Leadership--Make the IS a Force in the Class."

The EC's strategy for the next year has 8 main elements:

- 1) On the basis of the "mass work" approach, the turn to agitation will be significantly deepened in the next year and the tendency to isolate ourselves that often arose in our rank and file work will thus be ended.
- 2) Within the organizations of "mass work" we will make every effort to give these organizations an internal political life in which we can guide the development of a collective working class political line, as we did in the TDC for it is the political clarity of the organizations, even at a relatively low level, which will decide their long--term effectiveness and their ability to unite the working class.
- 3) On the level of I.S. we will continue to develop transitional politics which provide a bridge between the everyday experience of workers in struggle and our eventual aim of workers' revolution. This is an indispensable part of making our politics a legitimate trend in the labor movement.
- 4) The lion's share of this key political task will be carried by Workers' Power. We are committed to developing the quality of the paper and its carrying of transitional politics, as well as developing the quantity sold in the working class movement. For the sag in WP circulation over the last year has been a serious defeat, and must be turned around. In September, the first campaign in our year--round long war on low circulations will begin.
- 5) We will continue our policy of wide--open recruitment of workers into the IS. There are enough barriers to workers becoming revolutionaries without us adding to them. Nothing in the high rate of turnover we experienced last year convinces us that the answer to this problem is to make joining more difficult. We cannot solve the problem of turnover by creating a new problem of zero growth.
- 6) Experience demonstrates however that we can make our recruitment campaigns, more effective by planning and executing them at the level of the fractions both locally and nationally. By putting the emphasis on recruiting from areas of work and integrating into areas of work rather than operating on the level of the whole working class as we did in the latter part of the last worker membership campaign, our recruitment will be more effective.
- 7) The policy of forcing our new members into leadership at various levels in the organization will have to be stepped up in the coming year. If we are to avoid the grave dangers of institutionalizing our present full--time and industrialized leadership. To have a worker leadership next year demands that our present leadership puts the time and effort into training new members this year.

8) Finally, in this and other convention documents, the EC has brought the politics of black liberation into our overall strategy for the first time. Black work and black recruitment is no longer an abstract task to be faced later but through our industrial work, our Gary Tyler defense effort and the building of the Red Tide, is firmly at the centre of the organization.

The above is the strategy that is opposed almost entirely by the opposition document, "Build a Worker Leadership--Make the IS a Force in the Class." It is time for a serious examination of what is offered in its place besides the two catchy and misleading slogans which provide the title for their counter--document.

The opposition document has 4 key points, not all of which are entirely opposed by the EC:

1) First is a plea for improved communications in the organization. The response to this generally has proven to the EC that comrades who raise this position are absolutely correct. A more politically well--rounded "News of the Month" and a seriously organized "Internal Bulletin" will be done, even though this step will inevitably divert resources from external work, and will require careful handling due to security considerations.

2) The second significant position in the counter--document is the demand to strengthen the fractions. This is neither controversial nor innovative, indeed it is policy and has been for some time. Progress has been made over the last year, but not enough. That is why, since the Interim Perspective, before the counter--document was even thought of, the EC has been putting extra effort, with some success in this direction. For example, in line with the political decision to put all of the resources of the organization into the Teamster work, this meant in practice emphasis on building the Teamster center while the fractions, particularly steel and telephone, received little help until June.

The controversy only arises when the demand is examined more closely. For included in the written demand to "strengthen the fractions" is an unwritten demand to weaken the center. On the level of political responsibility, production of publications, education and training, full--time staff, content of WP, etc. we are asked to transfer responsibility to the centers of the industrial fractions. In short the counter--document challenges the only effective method of organization for revolutionaries, it challenges democratic centralism. Only through a strong elected political center can we focus our limited resources in such a concentrated form that we can begin to change things. Only through a strong, elected, political center can we avoid the danger of becoming an organization of trade union militants rather than the basis for a new revolutionary party. The weakening of the center under any disguise is a step back into our past.

3) The same is true of the position put forward in the counter--document on the role of full--timers and their relationship to the industrial members. The full--timers are to return to their past role as servants, no longer are they to be political leaders. Unless they are part of the central leadership, they are not to be on the National Committee, and that body itself is to be set up to establish an artificial division between the full--time leaders and the industrialized leaders and to thus create an adversary relationship between the two. The EC is for drawing more industrialized leaders

into the political leadership. This will only be achieved through a political collaboration between party and trade union work--between full--timers and industrial leaders. This collaboration at times has a necessary healthy tension. The attempt to turn full--timers from political leaders into servants is a political retreat from the concept of the party and the dissolving of party life into trade union work.

4) The only significant point, in a document that is supposed to be a total alternative to the EC strategy, is the demand to focus our recruitment on the worker activists. This is presented as the salvation of the IS. We are never informed very precisely who the worker activists are, nor are we told what this mysterious "focussing" implies. We are just told that there are small numbers of them around in our priorities and we should just do it. This sort of vagueness and imprecision characterizes the whole document.

The restricted recruitment of the opposition document is counter to the approach of mass work and transitional politics. Mass work opens the possibility of wide recruitment but only if transitional politics are fought for in mass arenas. The open recruitment of workers is the only way to transform the IS into a workers' combat group. A timid approach which gives up on agitational campaigns and believes in recruitment of only a handful of workers cannot transform IS into a workers party.

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The fact that there are only four ideas of any importance in the document and that three of them are wrong, should not give people who haven't read the counter document the impression that that's all they will find in it. There is much more. There is a subtle blend of misleading observations and contradictions which attempt to tap a genuine sense of frustration which, after an extremely hard year, is widespread amongst the cadre of the organisation. Let us look at a few examples.

1) For teamsters, there is the view in the document that the organisation was correct to put the maximum resources into the IBT work, for people in other industries there is the frustration that not enough resources were made available for them. While faintly praising the EC for developing the concept of "mass work", the document also accuses the EC of promoting the very sectarianism that the "mass work" approach is overcoming. Those who believe in the employers offensive are told, by the opposition, that the employers offensive has increased militancy, those who don't are offered the observation that if the employers offensive exists at all, it has virtually no impact.

2) There is more. For the comrades dedicated to the political line of the last convention there are the statements in support of open recruitment and "transforming the IS". For those who have been exhausted by the back-breaking pace of the last year, there is the assurance that only a few can be recruited and even that will be done on the more restrictive "level of strategy". There is the undermining of the TDC success by implying that our expectations were greater rather than smaller than the eventual outcome. There is the attempt to elevate gossip to the level of politics with a rambling dissertation on heroes and whipping-boys. This dissertation follows earlier compliment to the EC in developing a campaigning method for the IS. There is no way to campaign without leading from strength--building off successes. It is the policy of the EC not to denounce comrades for failures, but to carry and protect comrades who are under attack. There does, in fact, exist an underground rumor mill in the IS, that often cuts people down. But this has neither been built nor maintained by the EC.

And there is total confusion on the level of economics, represented by a statement claiming that the recovery was less successful than we projected, which is one of many statements in the document which is the exact opposite of the truth.

There are serious misrepresentations in the counter document:

1) The charge is made that the EC, all on its own, put forward a teamster recruitment drive "and decided all of its own details." Most outrageous of these details was to be an IS Teamster conference the plan of which was "to bring our teamster leaders and contacts to Detroit." The opposition document speaks of this conference as an insane project designed to kill yet another precious weekend of organizing time. The truth of the matter is that the plan for the conference was discussed and approved by the teamster fraction steering committee before it went out as part of the recruitment drive proposal. That is, a number of the leading supporters of the opposition document, who sit on the Teamster fraction steering committee contributed to and approved the conference they now ridicule. Additionally, other details, including the recruitment targets, were ideas that came from various local fractions and branches.

2) Another misinterpretation concerns the two Workers Power supplements on Teamsters. The leaders of the Teamster Fraction knew of these WP specials. In the second one, the special on the Detroit wildcat in freight, the major article was written by a leading member of the Fraction Steering Committee, who is also a signer of the opposition document. For most of the TDC campaign, a representative of WP sat in on Steering Committee meetings. This was an unprecedented step and a very time-consuming one. It was taken because the NO felt strongly that WP had to be an important tool in our teamster work, and that even a severe strain on the resources of the WP staff were worth maintaining close touch with the fraction.

And that is not the whole story either. Four ideas (three of them wrong), a series of contradictions, a few innuendos, and more than that, for the rest is lifted almost word for word from the past and present EC positions. A section of our line on mass work finds its way into the second edition of the counter document. A vulgarization of our line on practical training versus abstract education is there. Our precise formulation on the necessity for united front work in the industrial struggle appears, plus a note to the effect that for thoughts on black liberation, women's perspectives, or Red Tide, people should read the EC document. All these are in the document, and that would all be to the good, if the somewhat childish cover letter to the document had not made the ludicrously backwards claim that this rip-off job represented the EC supporting some of the main ideas of the opposition.

Even the three original and incorrect positions that these comrades wish to fight on have their roots in positions developed by the very same EC which they now attack. It was the EC which as far back as the last NC meeting in May indicated its intention to expand the proportion of industrial comrades on the NC. They took that and turned it into a divisive principle of two-class leadership. The slogan of strengthen the fractions was first raised by the EC and remains an active part of our strategy. They took this and turned it around into weakening the center. It was the EC who first saw the need to focus our next recruitment drive. The opposition took that and developed the theory of focussing on worker activists. A theory which either draws the highly unoriginal conclusion that it is

best for the party to recruit fighters, or means we should be going after the older, more conservative established shop-floor leaders at the expense of younger workers in their base, depending on which of the signatories of the counter document you talk to.

The EC does not claim to be the font of all wisdom. The fact that these ideas first saw the light of day in EC documents does not mean the source is only EC members. Even the simplest most straight-forward political observation might have as its source a dozen different members in half a dozen different cities or industries. Or three branch execs, or a fraction steering committee, or even a fraternal group. That is the relationship the leadership should have to the rank and file. We are elected to collectivize the experience of the organization and then turn that into a lead for the organization. That is how we have operated over the last year, and that is how we have developed the strategy outlined in our convention documents and resolutions. It is now up to the membership to decide if the strategy is correct, or should be replaced by the counter document.

Before making that decision there is one other element of the counter document that must be examined. So far, we have spoken to what is in the document. Equally important in a balanced political assessment is the question of what is missing. Even when the section on mass work was added, that part of it which related to the politics of the "mass work" organizations was left out. Any reference to transitional politics is missing too, as is any serious commitment on the use of WP. Indeed the logic of the position in this respect is to break with the idea of WP becoming a mass circulation paper in the working class and return to the old idea of the paper as a selective tool speaking only to a certain strata. According to the opposition, that strata would no doubt be the worker activists, but our experience demonstrates that the way someone with a following judges our paper is by the reaction to it of those they lead. And amongst those who are not yet leaders are the supporters for the paper who will be the more effective leaders of tomorrow. What these missing parts have in common is politics. There is a retreat from bringing politics into our industrial work. There is a return to the division between politics and trade union struggle, which we only broke down in this year.

The document that claims to be an alternative to the EC strategy can be seen for what it really is if both documents are examined critically. At best the counter document is a partial amendment to the EC strategy. But that partial amendment, if passed and implemented, can change the whole course of the organization, it can take us back in time and throw away some of the political gains of the last period. That is why we are unalterably opposed to it. For if the convention passes the resolutions associated with the counter document, it will be passing a political position which flies in the face of the positions that the IS has been fighting for over the last two years.