

**CAMPAIGN TO BUILD A POLITICAL PERIPHERY**

**FOR THE ATTENTION OF ALL I.S.  
MEMBERS**

**TO BE DISCUSSED BY ALL BRANCHES AND  
FRACTIONS**

**EXECUTIVE COMM TTEE  
SEPTEMBER 14, 1976**

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## THE CAMPAIGN TO BUILD A POLITICAL PERIPHERY

1) The campaign to build a political periphery for the I.S. is much more than an extension of the WP circulation drive. It is a recognition that after a period of heavy emphasis on the "mass work" element of our general strategy, we have lost sight in a practical sense of the other main element, the question of building a party. The two month "periphery campaign" marks a shift towards that element; a shift that is overdue given the extremely small number of political supporters we can count on in most areas of work. We will recruit out of this periphery campaign, but that isn't the main aim. Our overall aim is to produce a new periphery which can be the basis for a more systematic push on recruitment at the turn of the year. The campaign will also mark the beginning of a more balanced approach to our industrial work in particular, as it will assist in the process of developing political tasks on the shop floor as well as the rank and file tasks that have been consuming most of our members' time in the last period.

Our plan for turning the IS into a workers' combat organization has been based on the twin goals of creating large scale agitational work and recruiting workers involved in those struggles to the overall politics of the I.S. Our experience over the past year or so bears out that, on the whole, this perspective is right. However, it has also revealed some of the weaknesses that have to be corrected.

For example, in auto, we were unable to generate large scale agitational work. We continued to drain all our energy in a huge and systematic effort on the gamble that we would still create motion on a mass scale. The failure, despite the fantastic efforts of our members means that after months and months of grueling work, we are ending up with very little to show for the whole initiative.

Even where we have proven successful in generating a leading agitational struggles, we can not yet claim we understand the correct balance and timing involved in coordinating efforts to recruit workers to the overall politics of the IS while leading the broad struggle forward. In the Teamster Union, for example, it is clear that we were more successful than we expected in building a broad movement and considerably less successful in building the I.S. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that we tended to telescope the relatively long process of developing revolutionary cadres in too short a time. But it is also related to the fact that despite the recognition of the "depoliticization of the organization", in the interim perspective, despite the convention discussions on Transitional Politics, we have still not rooted our party-building work firmly into the "mass work" at the level of the rank and file.

2) We cannot delay making progress in party building until we understand every detail of its relationship to every section of our agitational work. That is why we are proceeding with the periphery campaign at the same time we are opening up in the organization. First of all, through the NC, a serious discussion will take place on this relationship and the effects on it of the objective conditions we face in the working class. The plan contained in this document is deliberately flexible, it is open to changes as it unfolds in the next few months. But it is based on a general view of what have been the most significant political developments of the last year from the standpoint of building a revolutionary party and the effects of those developments on our potential political periphery.

3) The last year has witnessed a change of political atmosphere in the leading sections of the working class. With the end of the recession, the sense of grave crisis, of impending doom is receding and with it passes our ability to bring people around and into the organization on the basis of merely being the best fighters who will fight even better in the IS. That is not to say there should now be barriers to recruitment, or that crisis recruitment is wrong in the depths of a crisis but it does highlight the fact that we must now make an overdue shift in our approach. We have to project a much more general political understanding in order to build a large periphery. Our overall view of the world with long-term crisis for the whole system is still correct, but it is not as obvious to our contacts as it was a year ago.

4) The recovery has also been accompanied by the increasing success of the employers' offensive. So, despite the high unemployment and the continued threat of inflation which followed the misery of a full-scale depression, the ruling class has still been able to contain and blunt any serious working class response. In part, this has been possible because the basis for splits in the trade union bureaucracy which we saw a year ago have not matured at anything like the speed we expected. But the result has been to re-enforce the prevailing myth that nothing can be done as well as to convince many workers that they would be wasting their time to try. These questions will be dealt with in greater depth by the document for the upcoming NC on the assessment of our industrial work in the light of present conditions. This document will point towards the steps we must take to firm up our ~~xxx~~ direction in the key fractions but even before such a study is completed, certain things are already clear. From the point of view of the periphery campaign, perhaps the most important point is that without at least the key elements of a socialist outlook on the world, it is extremely difficult to justify the hard grind of continuous low-level struggle that still characterized the industrial life of this country.

5) To stress, as we have so far, that the shift to an emphasis on party-building, political periphery and recruitment is not just an internal requirement of the IS, but also fits the developing conditions in the real world, should not be taken as a sigh that we have made no mistakes. Indeed, we have probably made mistakes that we are not even aware of yet. Certainly we over-stretched ourselves in the last period in order to get a foothold in the working class and it follows that we cannot continue to over-rev the machine at the rate we have been doing over the preceding months. We have learned lessons about what expectations for results are realistic and what are not. We have come to understand that you cannot start a project with a worked out plan for "mass work" and a minimum agitational program, as we did in both auto and teamsters, without having an equally rigorous plan for I.S. political intervention and action in that arena for the same period. These are just a few of the lessons, mistakes that if we confront seriously over the next few months will stand us in good stead. If we get defensive and avoid them, they will be repeated and next time round, the result may be disaster rather than merely the demoralization we face at the moment. The second document for the NC on the relationship between party-building and our "mass work" perspectives will be much more useful for consciously internalizing these questions than the above relatively shallow observations.

6) But something else, even more significant must be added to the overall political picture. The same successful offensive which means speed-up and harassment for teamsters and auto workers means 50% unemployment for black youth and cuts in government spending which hit hardest at

minorities. The social effect of this political and economic offensive is the increasing rise of racist movements and official blessing for the reemergence of open racism. As we have always known in theory and now experienced in practice, it is the black community which gets hit hardest as capitalism goes into crises. It is also the black community which will hit back first and hardest. Our approach to building a periphery must reflect that fact and concentrate on the construction of a political answer to the problems faced by the black community.

7) It follows then, from everything that has gone before that we will be concentrating on raising our overall politics and particularly the key political question of Black liberation in our different areas of work in the next period. Not just because if we are to grow in power and influence do we need a political periphery. But also because the political situation we face as of now demands we make such a shift. It is an exercise in ensuring that our actions fit what is going on in the real world. We will come back to this later but it should be noted that although the analogy is not totally valid, it is none the less significant that the Red Tide which puts heavy emphasis on its general politics and fighting racism has created the first significant block of both blacks and working class people around the U.S.

To place that back in the context of a shift to party building, it means we have to be real clear that the party we are building, the workers combat organization we put together in the years before we become a party, has as one of its basic principles that all necessary effort and resources must go into insuring that even while the class is divided, the party is 100% integrated and genuinely multi-national.

8) The success of this periphery campaign and consequently our recruitment prospects in the near future rests solidly on two questions. First, our ability to use our politics to explain the world to those who work with us rather than just a small part of the world at a particular time as we have tended to do so far in our mass work. This need is actually most acute in our rank and file industrial work. TDU will not succeed unless we can develop the non-IS cadre sufficiently to sustain solid local committees. Our steelwork will not even get off the ground if we restrict ourselves to the normal slogans of rank and file organizing and refuse to face the important political questions raised by the union reform movement and the present state of the steel industry. Second, our ability to take the momentum of the last few months and construct out of it an organization which is known for its consistent fight against racism at every level and by every means possible, both large and small. Particularly we will have to demonstrate our ability to do this without totally isolating ourselves from the white working class and while putting down deeper roots in the black community.

9) The centrality of the concept of the rank and file movement to our politics is partially based on the understanding that in this country particularly, where working class traditions of independent organization are weak, the future leaders of the class have to be trained and developed in the rank and file movement. All our experience to date indicates that we do not, in general, have the option of giving established class organizers our politics. This training process is more than an exercise in developing organizational and administrative capacities: it involves imparting a political analysis which can impart to the historically unstable rank and file movement enough stability to function.

10) Similarly with the possible development of a new black movement. We are committed to taking some responsibility for such a development in the next couple of years. Movements do not just spontaneously arise, they are painstakingly put together by a politically trained cadre well before the "take-off" and develop their own momentum. The periphery campaign and subsequent recruitment is a step to building the I.S. in order to ensure the continued growth of the rank and file movement and the early development of a new black movement.

11) Already with the last couple of issues, we are starting the required shift in the emphasis of WP. We still have quite a way to go and the process cannot be carried through to completion by the centre alone. The branches and more particularly, the fractions must play a full role in developing the sort of analytical material that can be used week by week in the periphery drive. Accepting the task of "explaining the world" or "putting isolated events into the context of a general political view" sounds easy, but it will mean nothing unless we actually write the article which explains the relationship of the trucking speed-up to the employers offensive and the ongoing crisis in capitalism. Unless we explain how the role of the UAW bureaucrats in the present contract fits into the companies' drive for productivity and profits, unless we explain the shifts in strategy in the Carter campaign from the point of view of the needs of US capitalism and not from the bourgeois point of view which says they reflect the opinion polls.

There is already a document (see latest News of the Month) on the drive to increase the circulation of WP. But that drive cannot be seen as a separate thing. It has to be fully integrated into the periphery campaign for the paper remains our prime tool for bringing people around our politics. That was true in the last step forward we made, it has been true in the development of virtually every other revolutionary organization. It will be no less true for us today.

12) We have already said that the turn to establishing mass agitational work, and our incomplete understanding of the precise ways we should be doing political work on the shop floor has led to our work being depoliticized. In the worst cases we have even acted as if revolutionary politics, the politics of the working class, could not be laid out to workers. This weakness must be rectified once and for all in the process of the periphery campaign. For in a period where the emphasis is on party building within the context of "mass work" rather than establishing the basis for (and that is the overall shift we are making in the periphery campaign), our ideas play the central role. There is a sense in which we can, and have, proved our specific rank and file politics in practice. But with just a few hundred people there is no way to probe our general revolutionary politics in practice. We have no choice but to also operate on the level of ideas. That is no excuse for going back to the days of the discussion group. The ideas must be carried in best form for ongoing application in our working class areas of activity. That is precisely why the periphery campaign is tied, hand and foot, to the WP circulation drive.

13) But there ~~is~~ will be no politics in external work if there are no political discussions internally. We are already taking steps to increase the level of political discussion and development in the branches, and if these steps mean some reduction in external activity, then that is the way it has to be. The overall health of the organization is more important than any particular area of work, because that work will come to naught without a healthy political life in the organization.

The South African cadre school, the new regional women's conferences, the extended organizers school, the production of overdue definitive pamphlets on Portugal, the instruction for branch discussions on the new documents (including this one). All these things are indispensable to the process of putting the organization back on course.

14) Without pre-judging the outcome of the NC discussion on the proposal to launch a two-monthly political magazine, it should also be said that as things stand at the moment, this magazine is central to the plans we are generating to develop the politics of the organization. The role of the magazine, both for members and periphery will be to provide a vehicle for more serious political analysis as well as theoretical and factual background to back up that analysis. Unlike documents, it will be clearly written for external publication, have ongoing usefulness in terms of its back issues, and provide a vehicle for raising politics with our periphery. Unlike pamphlets, it will have wide enough scope in each edition to have something for everyone and be capable of speaking on topics that are not important or complex enough to require a pamphlet. Even if accepted, it will not appear until towards the end of the periphery campaign, but its existence then will serve to point up those elements of the campaign which have to remain as normal parts of our functioning.

15) Before going into the specific of what we need to physically organize for this campaign, two final political points must be reiterated. One, that we are not retreating from the mass work line for we have become totally convinced that this is the only way to create the working class audience for our political ideas. As we moved over the summer to organize serious black work, we applied this line both to the Gary Tyler Defense work and the Marquette Park march and our next steps will be no less related to this overall strategy. Two, the flaws that are now revealed in our industrial mass work are not due to a failure of the mass work strategy, though it still has some weaknesses, or simply to more difficult conditions resulting from the success of the employers' offensive. Nor are they due to differences in the combativity at this time of workers in different industries because of specific differences in work force, contracts, unions, conditions etc. They are also related to the fact that the IS political cadre is too small to lead the next steps forward, we are too stretched and we have to have a stronger IS and non-IS cadre in the rank and file movement to take the next steps in the right direction.

This is never more true than at a time when we have to think in terms of making less demands on some sections of our key industrial cadre in order to avoid their destruction through physical and emotional exhaustion.

16) All our members must be thoroughly familiar with the political justification for the periphery drive that is outlined above if that drive is to be successful. But political sophistication alone will not do the trick, we have to have some organizational tools to work with. In the two months of the campaign (Sept. 19 to November 19th) all branches will be having at least two well-organized forums. They will be assisted in this by the centre which will publish next week a list of five suggested forums with speakers for branches to choose from. Each branch should also run at least one film in this period from the list of films and how to get them which will also be published next week.

17) All these functions should have heavy social content to them for all our experience shows that parties provide an unofficial forum for the exchange of political ideas. It is important for the branches to be flexible in applying these ideas because a campaign that just goes through the motions will obviously fail. The Red Tide runs conferences after major interventions and that might fit some situations, one branch has a short open branch meeting on Saturday night every month and then has a gigantic party, another has small but almost weekly social functions of ISers and friends. Another is showing a film in someone's living room after work for contacts from a single plant. The permutations and combinations of this social/political approach are endless and we have local leadership which is competent enough to use the correct variation for the local situation.

18) In the fall drive last year, the large events were vital because we were attempting to fill a credibility gap while building our membership and periphery on a limited "fight back" basis. This time round, the premium is on breadth of politics rather than impressive size. A whole series of different small gatherings, using particularly the new IS slide show we will be issuing in connection with this campaign, or even based around a specifically tailored class or series of classes may well be more effective than the "large event" approach.

19) Flexibility is one thing. Sloppiness is another. There are certain things we will have to take a clear hard line on if the campaign is to be more than a branch discussion and actually effect the work patterns of our members. All members must be organized to do regular, consistent contact work as a major priority in the next two months. It will be easier to do this than at any time in the last year for there will be plenty of events, large and small to bring people to. But many of these events will bust unless every member knows that every other member is building them as well by following through on regular talks to all the contacts.

20) We also cannot leave the development of black work perspectives for every branch at the level of the "flexible approach". The centre will be working to develop such a perspective in all the branches, starting with the key Mid West branches. In certain branches (six in all) the further development of the Red Tide and its integration into various aspects of the IS work and organization will be the key to this perspective and in all probability a foundation of the periphery campaign in those areas. For we do not regard the Red Tide as marginal to our overall strategy for building the party, it is a key part of it. But the tendency of the Red Tide to be isolated from the IS, the tendency for the two organizations to develop in different directions must be fought if the IS is to reap the massive advantages and opportunities that the Red Tide represents.

21) It has to be understood that there is a sense in which a periphery campaign is similar to building a movement. The idea is to create around the IS a much broader layer which has a sense of loyalty to the IS on some level, the sense of being a part of something that is important and going forward. Even people who are never going to join should be actively brought around us because a stable layer of "fellow travellers" who will come around for at least some part of our activity not only increases the overall resources available to the organization, it can also help give us the weight and credibility necessary to recruit other people later. We are not going to be fussy, exclusive or picky in our drive to build the periphery. When we have once made the mistake

of moving too slow on someone and made them a "permanant contact" that does nbt mean we can never use them for anything ever again, all it means is that when it comes to recruitment, they are no longer the main priority.

22) Part of building a periphery and recruiting workers is opening our branch and fraction meetings to non-members. This should be done for a limited time and on an individually worked out basis in every case. We cannot fall into a situation where someone can have all the advantages of membership with none of the responsibilities. This would be a recipe for demoralizing the whole organization. The other side to that coin is that the organization has to have the sense of collective solidarity and mutual respect that makes it the sort of organization people from the outside will struggle to get into. The periphery campaign is a chance to consciously rebuild branch life and spirit that has suffered so badly in the previous period of overstretched external work. Party building is more than getting a periphery or even recruiting and holding new worker members. It is also forging an organization that you can be proud to be a part of, an organization in which the word comrade is not just an empty title but a symbol of how the party differs from the capitalist world that surrounds it.

I.S. Executive Committee,  
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