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“...But what I am afraid of is this tendency where you do not have much going in the base, and all this concern about talking with the bureaucracy, working this out, getting very clever, could get us into a very rightward direction of politics very easily. So that’s a tendency that I think could very well come out in the next period.”

—George Crawford,
II discussion, TU Conference,
Summer Camp, August 1975

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ON THE NORTH AMERICAN II FRACTION

by Douglas

Hillquist's history of the NA/II fraction stands by itself as a damning indictment of the work of the fraction. The purpose of this document is not to in any fundamental way refute its thrust or soften its criticisms, but rather to make some generalizations as to the what, why and how of this history. Hillquist and I largely agree on what was wrong with the fraction's work and how it was deformed. We do, however, have some apparent disagreements on why.

One must understand that there is a certain limitation to Hillquist's document. As a critique of the fraction's work, it does not offer an alternative. That does not undermine the document per se, but does leave one wondering what Hillquist would propose. This is particularly the case since Hillquist in the last few months has repeatedly been in an ill-defined minority in the NA/OC. He has been in what I have characterized as an "oppositional mood" although the potential of underlying political differences has been clouded and has not been explicitly articulated from his end. Hopefully, the upcoming TU conference will help to clarify this situation.

What Was the Nature of the Problem?

In an attempt to emerge and get a base, the fraction relied on a series of essentially agitational campaigns focused on particular issues: unemployment, the labor party, busing, a mass layoff in the work location, etc. Virtually the entire work of the fraction was seen as one long drawn-out period of emergence. The fraction proceeded on the conception that out of these partial struggles, a group of workers would be drawn around them, of whom some could be recruited to the full program, providing the basis for establishing a caucus with a regular propaganda organ espousing our full program. Thus the fraction throughout this whole period saw itself as still aiming toward what it understood as the norm of the RO's trade-union work: a small caucus formation, hopefully with an indigenous recruit(s) with a regular newsletter to express its politics and lay the basis for further recruitment.

Hillquist identifies the pressures the fraction felt to "get active." At the time of its first "campaign" around the labor party issue, the fraction had been implanted for about a year and felt the compelling need to do something. Further, the fraction felt that the need for a national II caucus, projected by the June 1974 TUC document for existence by 1975, required it to take the steps necessary to establish itself as a caucus and the center of the national caucus.

The main tactic of the fraction in this process was to get a number of workers to sign its leaflets, expressing their agreement with the key slogans or demands of that particular campaign. But to get a number of these signatures dictated that the fraction key in on those programmatic issues that the more "advanced militants" in the union could more or less readily agree to.

Therein lies the basis for the charge that the fraction was in

effect operating on a kind of left-I.S.ism or CSLism. I have, until just recently, rejected that charge, on the basis that each individual "campaign" or "committee" the fraction tried to establish in concert with other workers was a perfectly legitimate and important one. But the pattern of these activities as a whole constitutes an unmistakable trend of the I.S./CSL character. The fraction based itself on campaigns in unity with workers who were not theirs politically, who could be grouped together only on a "popular" basis, to the detriment of the fraction making its unique politics paramount and clear.

Thus, thinking that it was just trying to group some workers around it on key issues, the fraction in fact was pursuing a flawed strategy, which by its very nature deformed the presentation of the program. And by always being concerned to undertake activities that could bring into activity some "advanced workers," the fraction was inevitably led on a rightist, opportunist course. For of course the consciousness of the layer it was trying to reach (and ended up chasing after) was that, at best, of militant trade unionism.

This is not, of course, to suggest that agitation and some campaigns were not in order. Class-struggle militants must know how to advance slogans and demands that can lead workers who do not agree initially with all they have to say. But by relying almost exclusively on these campaign-blocs, the fraction subordinated its main goal--emerging as a clear pole politically through primarily though not exclusively its own propaganda. In hindsight, probably an important turning point was the unemployment committee work. While it thought it was doing some ORO work in the sandbox unemployment committee, it was in fact bogged down as was clearly the bureaucracy's intention. The fraction--while it could have continued to attend the meetings and said whatever it had to say--should have turned to the plant to expose this sandbox as completely ineffectual and in the course of doing so outlined its own program and perspectives.

Quite naturally, this process took place at the expense of the necessary contacting and recruitment necessary to make a real caucus perspective viable. Not that the fraction was not urged to do "contacting." Indeed, the fraction head verbally and regularly whipped the other fraction members for their inactivity and irresponsibility in contacting. But there was a fatal flaw. Contacting was projected largely as lining up the contacts for the next impending campaign. The exception was when the contacts were taken aside and quietly talked to about the fraction's full program, convictions or world view. Instead they were usually talked to about the importance and necessity of them joining the fraction in the next campaign. This inevitably detracted from the possibility of recruitment to the fraction's general goals and views.

The fraction's image to the contacts and plant workforce was flawed in another secondary way (not taken up in Hillquist's document) but I believe linked to the question of contacting and recruitment: its shop-floor activity.

The fraction had realized for the first year of its existence

that it confronted a difficult situation with respect to shop-floor militancy. The workforce in this plant tended to be older and more disciplined than what is seen in the NA city as a whole. Thus, emerging initially as trade-union militants seemed a difficult proposition, since little shop-floor militancy was evident.

But consciousness of this problem and the need to take the lead when there were opportunities tended to recede further and further in the fraction's consciousness the more the fraction involved itself in literary activity and union meeting interventions. I was thinking not in small part of this fraction, as well as others, when I wrote in the August 1975 RO bulletin of the importance of paying attention to this work and developing our friends in this area.

In hindsight, the fraction's relative quiescence on the shop floor limited its impact and altered its desired profile to its contacts and fellow workers. This helped contribute to a de facto literary bias. Not that leaflets should not have been put out. But given that many of them dealt with issues not immediately related to life within the plant, it was necessary to combine them with militant activity, where possible, within the plant and for that in turn to be reflected in the literature. The fraction's literature suffered a dual liability: (1) being agitationally focused, it lacked in propagandistic content, and (2) it was hardly linked to the fraction's own rather passive activity within the plant.

This relative absence of shop-floor work contributed to the fraction going off the rails politically in another, more indirect, way. Periods of intense activity centered on this or that campaign alternating with periods of little or no activity contributed to the "squirrel in the cage" syndrome. The fraction developed the internalized feeling that if it wasn't doing a campaign, getting motions passed in union meetings, handing out leaflets...it wasn't doing anything. When it should have been following up its contacts, sinking its roots deeper, developing and enhancing and rounding out its image and authority, it was instead looking around for the next issue or set of issues to jump into for a splashy campaign.

Parenthetically, I continue to suspect that a number of our fractions suffer in this regard: seeing their leaflets and union meeting interventions as their "real" work to the detriment of being sufficiently sensitive to struggles within the plant of a more mundane character that nevertheless are crucial to establishing oneself as a respected class-struggle militant.

To see this as the main problem of our trade-union work would, of course, be to turn things on their head. The main problem has been to keep the fractions from running off the rails--toward opportunism or substitutionalism--in a period when the low level of class struggle leaves us isolated, vulnerable and prone to deforming pressures. But correcting this deficiency in shop-floor work is part of the process of the development of our trade-union work from the more abstract to the more concrete, a point I want to return to at the end of this document.

The policy the fraction was following could not lead to success. While the fraction could episodically group a number of workers around it, that was virtually all it could do. As Hillquist outlines, the fraction was trying to skip over the necessary stage of slowly, arduously cultivating real recruits in a misplaced attempt to do "mass" work. In the absence of its real ability to do so, in the absence of a solid base of genuine political supporters, the fraction's exertions did indeed lead to the bureaucracy's doorstep: the most classic case being its desire to liquidate pro-busing as a plank of its proposed labor/black defense committee, and the way it went about "building" this effort from the start. I want to go into the busing/labor-black defense campaign because I think it represents in the clearest way the fraction's deviation leading the way to betrayal, even more than the voting booth incident although that was more starkly egregious.

Just after the election campaign run by the fraction, the fraction head went to the center and outlined the labor/black defense campaign proposal. The expectations and proposals presented there were the basis for the subsequent campaign. From the beginning a false reading of the reality, a tendency to telescope events instead of letting them unfold, and a tendency to view as inevitable what was only possible, flawed the fraction's work.

The fraction expected the implementation of a city-wide busing court order that would send the racists up the wall and precipitate Boston-type attacks on black school children. But this city was not Boston. The much higher concentration of blacks and the presence of a massive trade-union movement, with many blacks in the lower-level leadership positions, offered the possibility of labor/black defense being much more of a reality than in Boston. It was projected that in any event the black masses would not stand for wide-scale racist attacks and that there would be spontaneous defensive reactions. It was felt that if the fraction could succeed in establishing a pro-busing, pro-labor/black defense committee in an important trade-union local, this would serve as a focus for organizing and giving a political lead to the spontaneous black desire to repel the racists. As well, the fraction projected the strong possibility of some polarization between the higher-up union officialdom, which would want to avoid all the turmoil, and the lower-level more predominantly black officials (as well as black community groups, block clubs, etc.) who would feel much more pressure to do something. Already, we had seen the local director of the NAACP, something of a maverick, work with a black veterans group to guard a black woman's home in a white neighborhood when it was subject to racist attacks. Leaders of this largely nationalist vets group expressed their intent to "ride shotgun" for the buses, whether anyone else did so or not. At an RSL forum (as I recall) we had seen the local leader of the SCLC oppose busing but state himself in favor of defense efforts.

On this basis, the fraction projected a two-pronged approach: first, establishing a committee in its local committed to (1) busing (2) its extension to the suburbs and (3) labor/black defense; second, when the time became appropriate, seeking to then take the lead in establishing a city-wide committee based on labor/black defense alone.

It was felt that the pro-busing stance of the local union committee would give the fraction members and other participants the basis to push busing, but that to make agreement on busing a precondition for a city-wide defense effort would preclude collaboration with the many black forces who were ambivalent or negative on busing (they were in the majority by far) but who didn't want to see black school children getting trashed. This policy, based on these expectations, was approved by the center.

The implementation of such an ambitious policy, as Hillquist notes, would have required a constant reassessment of the situation, and the forces the fraction was really mobilizing. For, as it turned out, things did not develop as the fraction had projected. Busing was on the front pages of the papers every day for the summer months and a big political controversy in the city. But the racists were far more intimidated by the relationship of forces in the city than had been anticipated. Several anti-busing demonstrations drew only about 100 participants and even the left in the city out-mobilized them. The federal judge's drastically circumscribed busing plan, handed down only a week or two before school started, craftily helped insure against either a big white backlash or a black defensive response. And in the absence of mass pressure from their ranks, the black bureaucrats and community leader types were not compelled to make much pretense of any defense efforts.

All this did not congeal until very late, when the judge's miserly plan defused the conflict over the issue through a massive retreat on black rights. But the fraction proceeded throughout the summer as if its projections were inevitable. Rather than propagandizing its ideas, drawing together a firm base of support and preparing to shift gears when the (projected) crisis exploded, the fraction proceeded in the frenzied manner Hillquist describes, feeling that it had to establish its committee and make the necessary contacts city-wide in order to be ready to "seize the opportunity" when school started.

Even if things had unfolded as the fraction projected, it was pursuing its campaign in such a way as to undermine its own effectiveness. Too much emphasis was put on contacting elements outside the local union and not enough on insuring a solid basis of support within the local. Although the fraction kept trying to stampede its supporters into action (calling the many meetings Hillquist describes and talking to them night and day in the plant), it did not concentrate on the necessary, patient one-to-one contacting nor draw back and reassess where it stood when the contacts started wavering and/or receding.

Finally, on the attempted bloc with the left-talking ostensibly pro-busing union bureaucrat. Such a bloc was not precluded, but the preconditions for forcing this bureaucrat's hand did not materialize: the mass pressure from the ranks which could have come from wide-scale racist attacks. And although the fraction had projected that this union official would pull out of such a bloc at some point anyway (when he got heat from his superiors when the going got rough, the fraction responded to his unexpectedly early departure by wanting

to liquidate its pro-busing plank. This was not motivated by some desire to be "in line" with the bureaucrat, but by the desire to shore up the fraction's support. The bureaucrat, no dummy, had seized on what he knew to be the soft spot in the fraction's support, its forthright advocacy of busing, in order to launch an essentially nationalist attack to drive a wedge between the fraction and its black supporters (for whom labor/black defense was much more compelling than busing). Since the fraction felt that what it was really after was labor/black defense, it responded by wanting to remove pro-busing from its committee proposal. Wanting to liquidate this aspect of its program, particularly in the absence of a real prospect of labor/black defense anyway, is only further testimony to the fatally flawed way the fraction had built its "campaign": it did not really have the support it had kidded itself it had.

Why?

The reasons standing behind the behavior of the NA/II fraction should not be difficult to deduce, both from Hillquist's document, the above and the generalized pressure that has made itself felt on our trade-union fractions.

First, impatience. In a desire to "reach out" to the masses, thinking it was implementing the injunctions of the August 1974 Perspectives and Tasks document to "seize opportunities" and "create links with the masses," the NA/II fraction tried to skip over the necessary stage of fraction/RO building and the necessary isolation implied by our programmatic counterposition to all stripes of reformism and centrism in a period of relative class quiescence.

Second, a misreading of the period. The fraction embarked on every campaign with a consistent over-reading of its possibilities. It thought that each one would lead to a real breakthrough in terms of mobilizing sections of the workforce behind it.

Throughout the past three years or so, the RO has been projecting the imminence of class battles in this country that would simultaneously impel the workers into struggle and also shatter, or at least severely shake up, the iron-clad hold of the labor bureaucracy. But this has not yet happened, a circumstance that largely accounts for the disorientation and pressure the trade-union fractions feel. In its particularly exaggerated way, the NA/II fraction attempted to telescope the conditions that class explosion would produce into its present-day reality.

Both the first and second conditions mentioned above accounted for the fraction's departure from the tasks of the RO as a propaganda group. In recently re-reading Trotsky's Third International After Lenin, I came across the quotation in the section on "Strategy in the Imperialist Epoch" that aptly sums up the problem, or at least a good bit of it, of the NA/II fraction:

"It is the worst and most dangerous thing if a maneuver arises out of the impatient opportunistic endeavor to out-strip the

development of one's own party and to leap over the necessary stages of its development (it is precisely here that no stages must be leaped over) by binding, combining, and uniting superficially, fraudulently, diplomatically, through combinations and trickery, organizations and elements that pull in opposite directions. Such experiments, always dangerous, are fatal to young and weak parties."

This is not a new lesson for the RO. But it has taken on a real and profound meaning only recently for the NA/II fraction.

There were, just prior to the West Coast motions bringing the fraction to a screaming halt, certain corrective impulses. These were partial and empirical, but demonstrated that the fraction itself felt it could no longer pursue the course it was on. The fraction decided to drop the tactic of getting other workers' names on all its leaflets, realizing that this was detrimental to producing a solid and hard face to the workforce and was not producing the desired results anyway (closer contacts).

Second, the fraction was having some important internal discussions concerning its previous superficial contacting and its inadequate shop-floor work.

Finally, the proposal for a newsletter represented the fraction's understanding that in the upcoming contract period it could not expect to do other than propagandize its program, attack the bureaucracy for its simultaneous capitulations to the companies and to Carter and attempt to recruit to its views. (This perspective had been outlined in the earlier "Perspectives on the Contract" in February [see addendum, this bulletin]).

At the time, the newsletter proposal was attacked within the RO as just another "gimmick." On the contrary, I believe it represented the fraction's striving for a way to more clearly and consistently demarcate its ideas and program and to be done with the hitherto relied-on policy of grouping a shifting number of contacts and names around this or that agitational issue or campaign.

Being empirical and partial, the corrective impulses the fraction was expressing did not go to the root of the problem and would not have corrected it. A thoroughgoing re-examination of its history and methods was necessary and was precipitated by the drastic measures of the West Coast motions.

It is in discussing the why of the fraction history that Hillquist and I are in apparent disagreement on one important point. Running through his document and an important part of his conclusions is that the fraction operated with serious illusions in the bureaucracy (based on his examples, from the lowest to the highest level) and that these illusions manifested themselves in every campaign the fraction conducted.

I think Hillquist confuses cause and result. Given that the kind of operation the fraction was consistently trying to run was

beyond its means and without a firm base of political supporters, and was, so to speak, built on the shifting sands of workers who did not really share the fraction's viewpoints, then this weakness would lead it to rely on what it knew were untrustworthy "allies," e.g., the union bureaucrat in the labor/black defense campaign. This was the almost inevitable result of its policies. But to see illusions in the bureaucracy as the "unspoken theoretical justification for the political deviation of the fraction" misplaces that result as the cause of the process. In fact, the fraction separated its theoretical understanding of the bureaucracy from its actions at crucial points (the way it conducted the labor/black defense campaign and in the voting booth incident). But "having illusions" and "failing to act on what you know to be the case"--even when the result looks pretty much the same, as we agree it did--are not the same thing.

I also believe Hillquist's definition of the alleged illusion involves, in and of itself, a false counterposition. The fraction allegedly "tricked itself into thinking that the bureaucracy, particularly at the secondary level, is not composed of enemies of the workers, but rather of more or less well-meaning incompetents, who are bewildered by the complications of capitalist society." Since when did being merely "well-meaning," "incompetent" or "bewildered" save someone from being "an enemy of the workers"? Some union officials are undoubtedly more "well-meaning" than others, though the requirements of office produce a corrosive cynicism very early on. (In this particular case, the central bureaucrat was no innocent babe just getting started, but indeed a sly and cunning operator.) But the politics of even the most well-intentioned reformist are still the politics of betrayal.

Since Hillquist and I essentially agree on how the fraction work was deformed, what is the importance of this difference? Only that the picture that is created and the correctives to it will be different. Hillquist would logically argue for the re-education of the fraction on the evils of the bureaucracy. Not seeing this as much of the problem, I don't see it as much of the solution either.

Looked at in another way, I would maintain that the fraction--given its method--would have had substantially the same flawed character even in the presence of an implacable right-wing local bureaucracy instead of one headed by the left-talking official, for its primary problem centered on the relationship of the RO to the class in this period, on how the fraction was attempting to "reach the workers," not on a misanalysis of the bureaucracy.

I had originally intended in this document to simply note this difference and pass on, fearing that any lengthy attempt to differ with Hillquist's analysis on this point would conjure up images of "lawyers arguments" seeking to shirk criticism. But after a discussion with Knox--where he suggested that if I disagreed with Hillquist on this point I better try to make and document my point--I have decided to take up some of the examples that Hillquist points to and show how they in fact do not back up his point. Quite aware that this question of "illusions in the bureaucracy" comes up

with respect to another discussion (the TDC and all that), I am also mindful to knock down any straw men now so that they don't reappear later.

To make his case about the illusions in the bureaucracy, Hillquist is forced to distort, pull out of context, or misrepresent a number of fraction leaflets and actions. He must further skip over the almost continuous conflict between the fraction and the bureaucracy that accounts for the fraction's image in the plant, though inactive over the past period. If the fraction members are known for one thing, it is that they are the radicals who don't like, and are in opposition to, the bureaucrat who heads up this union section.

While there are formulations that no doubt could have been sharpened, points that could have been made that weren't, Hillquist really has to strain himself to accumulate his "evidence."

Pointing to the fraction's second leaflet (incidentally, the fraction's first leaflet--whatever its other faults--had condemned the bureaucracy for its contract sellouts, undemocratic extension of its own terms of office, unwillingness to fight layoffs and speed-up, and reliance on the Democratic Party) which centered on unemployment, Hillquist objects to the phrase "BUT THAT IS TOO LATE!" as a response to the bureaucracy's promise of some kind of shorter workweek "later." Hillquist says that our difference with the bureaucracy is not that we want to fight now and they only later. Of course. But I defend as perfectly legitimate the argument that the bureaucracy's response to mass layoffs--"well, there's really nothing we can do, there's the contract and all these legal problems"--is a sellout to avoid a fight, and the counterposition of the argument "Re-open the contract now, for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay." Hillquist's implication that to indict the bureaucracy's inaction and criminal passivity in the face of mass layoffs is to somehow have or sow illusions in it is, it seems to me, patently false.

In commenting on the fraction's orientation to the sandbox unemployment committee (I agree with Hillquist's critique and suggested earlier what I think the fraction should have done--made an early turn to the plant workforce with its propaganda), Hillquist jumbles history and ascribes by implication positions to people who did not hold them in order to "prove his point." Hillquist states:

"There was within the fraction a tendency to feel that the intervention on the full program and the accompanying denunciation of proposals for demonstrations, confrontations, etc., was wooden and sterile, and that more could be gained by paring down the program to perhaps four or five points that the other reds would be hard-pressed to oppose, and on that basis the fraction could initiate proposals of its own for demonstrations. The underlying assumption of this tendency was that, while the ranks in the plant could not be mobilized around the fraction's full program, they might very well respond to a hard-hitting program of four points, and on that basis could be drawn into the committee under the leadership of the fraction and be used

as a battering ram to defeat the bureaucrat-CP-CLP-RU-PL bloc."

I think it is clear whose tendency Hillquist is talking about: allegedly the fraction head's. But this description is such a jumble of what really happened and mis-ascribing of arguments that it is difficult to know how to sort it out.

In fact, it was the fraction head who fought for taking the full program into the committee and doing essentially ORO work, while it was the local political chairman who had some hesitations and thought that this might be running the red flag up the pole too early on.

At that time, it was the fraction head who raised internally the question of proposing some tactic that flowed from our program--perhaps a demonstration at the international union headquarters against the criminal inaction over the layoffs--not because "the accompanying denunciations of proposals for demonstrations, confrontations, etc., was wooden and sterile," but in order to parry the ORO baits that "you guys don't want to do anything but sit around and talk" and to emphasize the primacy of the fight within the union against the leadership as the main roadblock and to expose the fruitlessness and impotence of the OROs' incessant proposals for stupid two-bit demonstrations around food stamps, unemployment checks, etc. The bureaucrat--willing to engage in all sorts of militant demagogy to the ranks but above all fearful of any conflict with his superiors in the international--would have opposed this, and the OROs which were sucking up to him would have been faced with an awkward choice: with the bureaucrat and the international, or against them. This perhaps demonstrated an oversensitivity to the OROs but is not, as Hillquist paints it, a desire to liquidate the program which the fraction head had drafted and was arguing should be presented in full.

Finally, some 18 months or so after all this transpired, it was the fraction head, in an informal discussion reviewing the fraction's work, who raised the possibility that a shorter, sharper list of its key programmatic points would have better served to expose the OROs rather than the rather cumbersome four-legal-sized-page document it kept putting forward. This is a debatable point and in hindsight is quite secondary to the fraction being bogged down in the unemployment committee for a lengthy period of time. But again, this is hardly the picture Hillquist paints.

In commenting on the unemployment committee proposal in the basic industry section, Hillquist is 100 percent right in saying that it was a "political monstrosity and embarrassment from beginning to end." But I can only ascribe to some kind of cynicism Hillquist's suggestion that the fraction's "conception" was "to present the committee as a left cover for the betrayals of the bureaucracy." If Hillquist really believes this was the fraction's conception, we have much bigger problems than he posits.

Hunter had never before raised any politically substantive

issue in his section. The fraction was overly mindful of this when it authored an overly circumscribed set of demands for the unemployment committee as part of his "emergence," thinking these demands could be added to, flushed out and amplified as Hunter went along. Of course, the fraction should have realized that if Hunter was insufficiently emerged and politically unclarified, he should not be proposing any committees, but beginning to raise these points from the floor of union meetings and in the plant. Raising only a few of the more popular and acceptable points of the program in order to begin to "emerge" with an accompanying organizational form resulted in a horrible mess.

I have already discussed at some length how the labor/black defense campaign was flawed from its inception. Hillquist suggests that the fraction "embarked on a deliberate and conscious policy of deceiving the workers about the intent of their reformist misleaders." There is no doubt, based on its own hopes and aspirations, that the fraction "painted an idiotically optimistic picture of how easy it would be to set up such a committee and reach out to other groups in the city." But the fraction was not so cynical as Hillquist suggests. While lining up workers for the committee, the fraction told them that the bureaucrat had endorsed it but warned that he could not be trusted and would cop out at some point. I have already touched on the fraction's telescoping of projected events and mis-evaluations that led it to believe it could successfully pressure in united-front action certain black community leaders and the major OMO in the union--or at least the I.S. wing of it. As Trotsky points out in the article cited above, in a maneuver one must figure on the worst variants; instead the fraction projected the most optimistic and tended to regard as probable what was only one of the possible variants.

Hillquist suggests that the leaflet for the January 1976 nation-wide union conference was reformist in its presentation of the shorter workweek and "only quantitatively at variance with the slogans of the reformists." Here, again, the sliding scale of wages and hours no doubt could have been elaborated more clearly. But to call what was presented reformist has already been taken up in the "Perspectives on the Contract" document (February, 1976) and I will let the matter rest with the argumentation there.

Hillquist quotes a leaflet on the question of a major layoff in the local and suggests that this implied a willingness to struggle on the part of the local bureaucracy that was in fact absent. If comrades will read the leaflet in question, they will see that fully three-quarters of this two-sided legal-sized leaflet is devoted to denouncing the bureaucracy for its evasion, fake solutions, including explicitly that the local leadership has no intention of calling a strike over the layoff issue: "...why isn't such action being declared and implemented? BECAUSE THE LOCAL UNION AND INTERNATIONAL UNION LEADERSHIP WANT TO DIVERT THE MEMBERSHIP'S ANGER." The leaflet also contains a rather extensive analysis of the dual and contradictory nature of the bureaucracy, explaining why it blusters and threatens on occasion only to be better able to sell out. How can Hillquist quote one sentence of this leaflet while missing the entire rest of

its content?

Let me skip over some of the other examples Hillquist raises and come to the ultimate one: the voting booth incident. Surely if there is a case for "illusions in the bureaucracy" it is this.

But I would maintain that the fraction had no such illusions. Remember, the fraction had just spent the preceding month denouncing these candidates and promoting its own. It had just had a fraction discussion on how neither was supportable in the run-off. It had just distributed a leaflet explaining that it supported neither in the run-off. I believe both then and now that the fraction shared a common and pretty accurate assessment of the candidates in question.

The fraction's subsequent action, the subject of the voting booth scandal, is then perhaps even more reprehensible, even more "cynical and irresponsible" than if it had indeed had illusions. The fraction acted in conflict with what it knew to be the case, when in fact it was telling the workers something different. Some members of the fraction in effect said "well, I'd still rather have the left-talking guy: that will probably make more openings for us." The other fraction member, acting out of a flippant sort of pique at the incumbent, in effect said "screw you, I'd rather have the dummy who is less adept at handling our politics."

To do this, the fraction separated its public position from its "private" actions. It regarded the voting booth as something akin to the bathroom or bedroom, where one can "do what one wants." It falsely believed that there were certain precedents for its behavior, a view shared by other leading members of the local (alluded to in Luxen's letter [TU Bulletin No. 2]). It betrayed both the spirit and letter of the RO's program and discipline.

This is not a pretty picture. My purpose is not to present one. But this does not sustain Hillquist's argument of "illusions."

How Did It Happen?

Hillquist raises the pertinent question "How could this mere working body of the democratic-centralist RO pursue policies over such a long period of time so much at variance to the politics of the RO?" He answers by suggesting that the fraction, largely through its fraction head and his relationship to the exec and center, pursued a policy of "maneuver" to the RO as a whole, and a not-so-thinly-veiled charge of duplicity if not outright lying. Further, Hillquist cites as evidence two examples of the fraction seeking to "maneuver" the RO by implementing policies not yet cleared through the RO so as to present the "pressure of the ranks" as a rationale to do what it wanted to do. These are a leaflet on the eve of the elections and the proposal to canvass some contacts to see if they would be willing to help distribute a possible newsletter. (Comrade Crawford and Adrian over the summer also charged that they had been presented a fait accompli, since they had not previously heard of the motion the fraction passed to canvass its close contacts on the newsletter question.)

I flatly reject these charges. None of the policies Hillquist describes were initiated without first being cleared through the center. (Knox confirms this in his report [see TU Bulletin No. 2].) Why Hillquist wanted to put into print charges that he could have checked on, simply by asking, especially on the two specific examples, is simply beyond me. (Again, I can only ascribe it to a kind of cynicism, perhaps born of over three years of putting up with policies without saying a word that he now disagrees with almost in their entirety.) In fact, when I first read Hillquist's document I remarked, "Gee, this is pretty good. Why didn't he say something before?" One cannot fault Hillquist for reaching his largely correct conclusions even after so long a period of time, but I think it had eaten away at his confidence in both himself and his former leadership.

The decision to include a section in the leaflet just before the elections whose purpose would be explicitly to feel out the workers' response to the idea of fraction candidacies--without necessarily making a commitment--was presented both in a written report (dated 4 April 1975) and in a phone call with Knox. The idea of canvassing some of the fraction's contacts on their willingness to help distribute a newsletter--making clear that the fraction was just thinking about it and getting their response--was also cleared through a phone call with Knox on, as I recall, the same day it was raised in the fraction. That Comrades Crawford and Adrian may not have been aware of this is not so hard to understand: they were both involved in other important areas of work, and--as has been noted elsewhere--the phenomena of senior leading committee members feeling a breakdown in communication through dispersal and being over-burdened was being felt overall.

The fact that these policies were cleared through the center in no way absolves the fraction head of the overwhelming burden of responsibility for the fraction's policies. As Knox notes in his report, it was the fraction head who was providing (at least to the center) the perceptions of the arena, the proposals for activity and who is responsible for the flawed thrust of the work.

I have explained at some length above in what manner I believe the fraction work was fundamentally flawed. I'm sure that the main document for the upcoming conference will codify a series of previous PB and TUC discussions and elaborate on the general pressures being felt and tendencies being exhibited in our trade-union work in general and the context for these: the objectively bleak state of the class struggle in this country. I will not try to duplicate that here. But a few comments on the particular characteristics of the NA/II fraction head are in order.

He has been noted for both his talents and his liabilities. He has a certain flair (and appetite) for leadership, can speak and write competently, is forceful, energetic and dedicated. He was seen as the kind of person who, with seasoning and development, could break the organization out of isolation. It was largely for these reasons that he was selected for this assignment and

elevated to positions of leadership within the organization.

On the other hand, he has been noted for his empiricist and pragmatic methodology; a tendency to divide both history and present-day reality up into isolated segments without seeing them in their organic development and interpenetration; a too formal understanding of the program was combined with a tendency to think that "if it works (in terms of mobilizing the workers), do it," leading the way to opportunism; a tendency to think that his own energy and competency could substitute for favorable objective circumstances and the organization's growth. All these were combined with a crowning liability: a tendency to be so "outward" focused as to not be sufficiently aware of his own liabilities and their implications.

In the circumstances of the NA/II fraction, these lent to leading the fraction into a strategy different than the RO's, which has already been gone into. Impatience and a desire to leap over the RO's role as a propaganda group, combined with a consistent over-estimation of the period and its potentialities, led the fraction to seek to create a series of campaigns, blocs, and committees--to the detriment of the elaboration of its program and recruitment to it--that led to betrayals.

One final point--woe be it to he who has had debater's training! It is a pernicious school. It is this that accounts, I think, for some comrades' perceptions that if the fraction head was not duplicitous, he nevertheless sold someone a bill of goods. The fraction head would look at a situation, appraise it to be overripe for exploitation by a fraction intervention and create a detailed worked-out plan of just how to do it. He would then argue down all but the most intransigent opponents, brooking no hesitation or second thoughts. Given that he was not bad at doing this, he could usually win acceptance of his plans--both in the fraction, the local, local exec and in the center.

Though occasionally upbraided for his tendencies to the right, the fraction head tended to see his errors as isolated though characteristic flaws. It was not until the PB of 17 June and, more importantly, the West Coast motions of 4,5 July that he took a deep and serious turn toward coming to grips with his methodology.

But he did operate as part of a leadership collective. Without in any way seeking to "spread the blame" this has to be accounted for.

In the NA local for a long period, Comrade Crawford was the main political collaborator of the fraction head. All details of fraction work were discussed between them, usually before being presented to the fraction, exec or local. Both felt it, I believe, to be a useful and balanced collaboration, though in retrospect things were not working out quite as they thought, to say the least! Given that together they constituted a powerful and

respected team, it was seldom that anyone in the fraction, exec or local was going to challenge their proposals or conclusions. This undoubtedly led to a certain laziness on the part of the rest of the exec and local in terms of thinking about and being critical of the work of the II fraction.

After Comrade Crawford left NA for assignment elsewhere, and after the fraction was on layoff for an extended period, the fraction head's main collaborator, in a real sense, was Comrade Knox via the telephone. This was explicitly encouraged from the center, fostered by the fraction head vis-a-vis the rest of the exec, and accepted in the local. Once again, if Knox and the fraction head agreed on something, seldom was anyone going to challenge it.

The last time I talked to Crawford, he scratched his head and wondered how such a thrust had slipped by him, since if he has a tendency, it is toward the conservative, passive and sectarian while the fraction's thrust was overly activist and opportunist. I have only a tentative hypothesis on this, which, since Crawford is away, I have been unable to discuss with him.

Comrade Crawford has a very deep feeling that we cannot do much in the trade unions without a base, which is of course true. In addition, he tends not to be an initiator of plans and ideas, but one who mulls them over, rounds them out and gives them balance. In the case of the NA/II fraction, I think Crawford tended to give the activist fraction head rein precisely because he respected his abilities and appetites to "reach out" to the broader ranks and because he thought these plans might actually succeed in getting the fraction something of a base, laying the ground for future work and a higher profile on a fuller political basis. A turn toward more propagandistic work would have appeared to mean "sticking out" more, more apparent isolation given the period, and I think Comrade Crawford was therefore overly reluctant to both recognize this necessity and to counterpose this to the course the fraction was on. The strong side of Comrade Crawford was to operate, as he himself has put it, as a "pull-back" influence on the fraction; the weak side was his inability to realize and say early enough, "No, no, no, you're going about this all wrong--here's what you should be doing instead."

Comrade Knox has already gone into the general problems of weak local leaderships, the inherent limitations of direction of detailed work from afar, etc., in his report. I have only a few points to add on the role of the TUC.

The circumstance of weak local leaderships and inexperience in the field led to the tendency to "Call Knox." But the TUC fell prone to this pattern from its end. In giving detailed advice concerning this or that intervention, this or that campaign (and there is no doubt that few if any comrades could have done the work Knox did in this regard) it lacked an overall sense in many cases of where the fractions were really at. It had, as it were, a

series of snapshots of any given fraction based on leaflets and phone calls, more than a general, rounded and balanced view of the fraction's development. Given the distances involved, this was to a large extent unavoidable. But the TUC was not sufficiently aware of what it did not know, which helped it miss the forest for the trees.

While there is no substitute for strong local leaderships, these as we have seen are not so easy or quick to develop. Even with Knox and Samuels more available for the Midwest in the next period, and given the changing nature of the TUC, there are some small correctives in addition to the overall lessons of the past period which I think could help keep the center better informed on what is going on in the field. More fleshed-out fraction minutes (they are so skeletal and sphinx-like now that virtually no one reads them) and more regular reports from the fraction heads (virtually none are written now) which can have a more in-depth character than a phone call which is usually focused on a specific question or issue.

A large part of the burden of the TUC was operating in the context of the development of our trade-union work from the abstract to the more concrete. A few years ago we essentially sent a bunch of relatively inexperienced youth running into factories with the transitional program rolled up under their arms and without too much of a concrete sense on their part of how to apply it. After a period of "run silent, run deep" the leadership perceived a certain over-conservatism and said "take advantage of the opportunities, build some links to the masses." Some steps could be taken in every fraction on this road; there were some gains and some victories.

But really big opportunities--given the low level of the class struggle--were few and far between. The desire of trade unionist friends to drive ahead anyway began to express itself in false starts, flawed paths and defeats: either in adventurism or opportunism, or in some cases, swings between over-activism and passivity.

The upcoming TU conference is aimed at a reorientation and re-arming of our comrades in a difficult period. Hopefully the RO will be strengthened by dealing with its internal crisis. But at the same time, nothing can substitute for a turn in the class struggle opening up the possibility of the further development of the trade-union fractions in leaps and bounds. For there is much that will remain abstract about implementing our program and much that our comrades cannot know concretely without going through struggles and gaining the experience of our program intersecting the class struggle.

--Douglas
13 November 1976

ADDENDUM TO "ON THE NA/II FRACTION"

(Excerpts from "Perspectives on
the Auto Contract," 25 February)

Where do the fractions stand? Mostly pretty isolated. The fractions lack any sizable followings and are widely dispersed across the country. They have no significant and well-known presence in the heart of the industry, where nearly two-thirds of the union is. With respect to the OROs in this industry, our friends are stronger than the Maoists (nationally at least) and the SWP (which claims to have some friends in but are neither seen nor heard) but weaker than the CP (not that they are doing much, but they have more well-placed connections) and the IS, which has half a dozen fractions in NA and a couple elsewhere.

Our friends' weakness is exacerbated by the lay-offs which have hit every fraction except Mid-Atlantic. While all the fractions should be back to work by early spring, and thus at full strength for the period of greatest interest in the contract negotiations, this cannot entirely make up for the authority lost due to forced inactivity over the last year.

Thus, barring significant changes, our friends' role within the industry in this upcoming contract period will be largely propagandistic, explaining to the most conscious and most dissatisfied workers what the main needs are and how to satisfy them, laying out a strategy counterposed to both the bureaucracy's and the OROs/OMOs. The main result should be, in addition to strengthening our friends' profiles and roots, recruitment, both to MOs and fractions.

The overlap of the contract period with the 1976 elections should augment this process. There will be increased awareness and interest in both the contract/economic issues and the political process, at a time when the political capital of the labor bureaucracy and the bourgeois parties stands very low. While our friends cannot artificially compensate for the relative quiescence in the working class, they should be able to effectively address the most conscious workers with the goal of winning them over. Even modest recruitment (one or two to each fraction, particularly blacks) would be a tremendous gain and a real shot in the arm to both the national II fraction and the RO as a whole.

(Saying that our friends' main goal nationally should be propaganda and individual recruitment does not, of course, preclude the possibility of a breakthrough or agitational leadership role in a particular location--say the West Coast, or possibly even in NA, should something big break in the heart of the industry and at the target company. But we cannot count on this nor let such a possibility obscure our main priority.)

* * * * *

The jobs issue can be expressed a number of ways: sliding scale (to propagandistically present the socialist principle and the way the union can lead the entire labor movement in ending

unemployment), shorter work week with no loss in pay, and "30 hours work for 40 hours pay." I believe our friends can and should use all these formulations in their material, explaining the more general conception and presenting a fighting slogan, reminding everyone (and it's a useful tool) that "30 for 40" is an old II union goal.

What I want to oppose is the conception, articulated by Fournier, that this demand is not a "contract demand," or that concretizing it ("30 for 40") would be presenting it in a reformist fashion. The sliding scale of wages and hours can only be fully implemented and really eliminate unemployment on a society-wide basis under the dictatorship of the proletariat. But if this truism is used to avoid raising a concrete demand that should be fought for right now the whole point of the Transitional Program is missed, not to mention letting the bureaucracy off the hook (they will be happy to agree that "you can't really get this in a contract"). The point is precisely to present demands that bridge the gap between today's problems (and the workers' consciousness of them) and the need for socialist revolution. To in some way say "you'll only get full employment when you get socialism" (which is, of course, true) and juxtapose that to the fight for the shorter work week today is to be guilty of the worst kind of passive propagandism. Why orient to the contract period at all?

A number of opponents, of course, present "30 for 40" as a single-issue program, or as a panacea. I think it is clear our friends are not doing that; it is an important and central demand in their program, particularly in this period of high unemployment, nevertheless. Our friends should not fall prey to putting a minus everywhere opponents put a plus.

Within the context of explaining the sliding scale of hours, there is also good reason to concretize this demand, not to be afraid to say, "yes, we're for 30 for 40." This demand has a history in this union; the bureaucracy is not accidentally presenting vague motions for a shorter work week. It does not want to be pinned down, and who could be opposed to a "shorter work week": the vice-president is for it (39-1/2 for 40), a leading union militant is for it (36 or so for 40), everyone is for it...as long as they're not nailed down. In 1973, everyone was for "voluntary overtime"...but there were pretty wide variations in what people meant by that. Our friends want to explain their general propaganda and combine it with a concrete slogan to use as a hammer against a bureaucracy that will never seriously lead a fight for it.

--Douglas

ON THE RECENT SEMI-FACTIONAL SITUATION IN NORTH AMERICA

by Hillquist

I had hoped to avoid getting into this question, particularly since the level of tension and hostility in the OC has largely dissipated. However, with the appearance of statements in Samuels' "North American Report" which are radically false, I feel it is necessary to set the record straight on at least that distortion which directly bears on the current TU discussion.

Samuels maintains that Hillquist "attacks Crawford as acquiescing in Douglas' deviations while there and then in New York becoming the 'hard guy' hatchet man over the head of the misguided unionists." What Samuels is reporting here as a conversation with Hillquist is actually derived from conversations with others who were explaining what they "thought" was Hillquist's position. Hillquist could hardly have "attacked" Crawford for acquiescing in Douglas' deviations since Hillquist acquiesced in those same deviations for a much longer time and to much worse effect. Nor could Hillquist have possibly attacked Crawford as "hard guy hatchet man" since he considered Crawford a much needed ally on the question of the II work: the harder, the better.

After the exposure of the voting booth incident Hillquist began to re-evaluate the history of the fraction in an attempt to locate the parameters and causes of its political deviations. In the course of that re-evaluation, Hillquist came to the position (contrary to the assertion of Douglas and adhered to by Waters that the voting booth incident was the result of flippancy) that the fraction was afflicted with a deep-rooted political deviation which had expressed itself in every campaign it had conducted. On the basis of that realization Hillquist resolved:

- a) to oppose the creation of a plant newsletter by the fraction (which was supported by Douglas and Waters and which Hillquist had also supported);
- b) to propose that the OC launch an organized discussion on the history of the fraction;
- c) to write a history of the fraction that would expose its political deviations.

Hillquist determined to take this course prior to the West Coast motion. He expected that his political evaluation would be strongly opposed by the entire OC exec and that a prolonged political fight would be necessary before his assertions would be accepted. Not relishing the prospect of waging such a fight in isolation Hillquist was extremely relieved when he heard of the motion. By way of contrast, in a conversation with Hillquist (prior to the appearance in town of Crawford and Adrian) where he informed her of his support for the West Coast motion, Waters actually attempted to incite him against the motion, making such statements as, "If I were in that fraction, I'd be so mad."

After the exec was won over to the motion by Adrian and Crawford, the OC rapidly heated up in a very unfortunate manner. Under pressure to fight the political deviations in the OC but unable to

clearly define them, the Waters leadership proceeded to introduce a high level of confrontation and tension into OC meetings without a correspondingly high level of political clarity. The closest it came to characterizing the political problem in the OC was to assert that Douglas was an incorrigible Menshevik, supported by the equally incorrigible Hillquist. Hillquist, who was in the process of writing a coherent and systematic political expose of the deviations in the OC (contained in the "Critical History"), resisted the execution characterization as personalist, over-simplistic, apolitical, and fundamentally wrong. Possessing (rightly) no confidence in the capacity of the OC leadership to correctly analyze and combat these political deviations and (again rightly) perceiving that he was under attack, Hillquist developed and acted on the basis of a paranoia completely out of proportion to the reality of the situation.

He began to raise points of difference with the OC leadership without notice in meetings, reasoning that by so doing he would ensure an open and frank discussion and minimize the possibility of distortion by a leadership he felt was out to get him. Instead this mode of operation by Hillquist produced a white-hot level of tension in the OC and caused the leadership to modify its characterization of the problem to something like, "Douglas is a rightist who went off the deep end politically by relying on the cynical and pernicious social democrat Hillquist who now stands exposed and is trying to get out of the organization, taking whatever snipes at the leadership he can on his way out." Needless to say this produced an even greater sense of paranoia in Hillquist and the tension continued unabated until the departure of Waters.

--Hillquist

14 December 1976

ON THE TDC AND RELATED QUESTIONS

by Douglas

The normal purpose of a document for RO discussion is to argue a position or combat others in the RO over some issue(s) in dispute. That is not the primary purpose of this document, though it is a factor. I caused a lot of hue and cry in the RO over my objections to the TDC articles--and more importantly, issues spinning off from them--and think it is necessary and appropriate to provide an accounting of these issues and of the changes in my thinking on them.

Because this document represents shifts in my thinking on different though related issues during different periods of time, it has been somewhat difficult to organize. I hope its main points are clear.

My thoughts and positions on the TDC can be roughly divided into three periods.

1) From November 1975--when we first wrote on the TDC--up to the Teamsters strike and subsequent Detroit wildcat in April 1976.

When we first started writing on the TDC, I had no objections to our characterizations and analysis. The TDC appeared to be just another I.S.-sponsored bureaucratic lash-up, more to the right than its sister the UNC in the UAW--at least in its paper program--but no less opportunist and similar in composition: the I.S., a few out- and in-bureaucrats and some opportunist aspirants.

But as time went on, it appeared to me that the TDC was doing something that the UNC has never succeeded at: actually tapping discontent within the union and bringing in and around itself numerous rank-and-file Teamsters. This impression was based on reports in Workers Power on the several hundred Teamsters mobilized for several conferences and substantial numbers involved in local events in various places, not only in Master Freight but also UPS (through the TDC's parallel organization UPSurge) and on what could be seen in Detroit, with the TDC mobilizing 200-300 Teamsters. It seemed to me that the paper was insufficiently reflecting this growing support and continued to characterize the group as just a bunch of I.S.ers, out-bureaucrats and careerists. (I will return to the specific quotes later on.)

In a local discussion in the NA local around the time of the Detroit wildcat, the above was my main criticism of the articles. It was at this time that the "entry question" arose. As a sub-point in criticizing the characterizations in the paper, I said essentially: "This is a group we could enter, because it is attracting a large number of militants. We could expose its leadership and win some of these militants over. One would not get the impression from the articles that there is any flesh or substance to this thing."

2) The second period roughly culminated with the July 31, 1976 discussion of "critical support" in the North American local which was really a discussion of the TDC and entryism.

Subsequent to a discussion with Knox, I had abandoned the idea we could enter the TDC on the following grounds:

a) This was of course a most abstract proposition. We had no forces in the Teamsters and the question of entry can only be discussed, like the united front, etc., in the concrete: what are our forces compared to the group in question, at what stage of development are we, are we a well-known and clear pole (which would affect our relation to the group in question, driving it to the left or right). These were all derivations from the well known axiom in our movement that one can only maneuver, enter, etc. based on one's own profile and strength.

b) Entry was not necessary to reach the Teamster/TDC ranks. The TDC was not a cohesive tight-knit organization but had more the character of an inchoate "movement" in the Teamsters. We could say what we thought by intervening in their meetings and at TDC events, etc., without entering.

c) The TDC was a passing phenomenon, occasioned by the absence of any other coherent opposition at contract time, and would decline in importance and following rapidly.

I continued, however, to be quite unclear on the principles and orientation on entry into another trade-union group.

As well, I continued to believe that some of the characterizations in the paper were so off-the-mark as to undermine the generally correct polemical thrust and to aid any I.S.er--after all, our main target--in discrediting our polemics by pointing to these inaccuracies.

Finally, I raised the issue--which I had originally raised with Knox at the Chicago Educational Conference--of "contract blocs."

From my reading of the articles, we were not only condemning the I.S.'s reformist trade-union strategy and tactics in general and the specifically wretched basis on which the TDC was organized (both quite correctly) but also strongly implying that the whole conception of an organization based essentially on a contract struggle was inherently reformist, a betrayal, etc., and that we counterposed the construction of class-struggle caucuses based on the transitional program. While I certainly supported the centrality of our perspective of building class-struggle caucuses on the full program, this did not seem to me to be in conflict with initiating other kinds of organizations or formations where appropriate: the West Coast II committee for an industry-wide strike against layoffs, the group for second-class workers in the T-1 industry, etc. While our size and heavily propagandistic tasks of today and the relatively low level of class struggle dictate that in general our friends in caucuses will mainly propagandize around the contract and attempt to recruit directly to the caucus, it seemed to me that, in the future, we might very well find the occasion and circumstances where it would be useful for a caucus or caucuses to initiate an organization based on the main, key issues of a contract fight, drawing in workers who wanted

to fight for these goals but who did not yet agree with the full caucus program, with the goal of bringing them under RO leadership, and, through struggle, closer to its views.

Both Comrade Knox--in a brief and not very clear discussion at the Midwest Conference--and Comrade Seymour at the July 31, 1976 NA discussion, declared that we were in principle opposed to "contract blocs." Comrade Seymour did qualify this somewhat: he said we were "in general and in principle" opposed to contract blocs but stipulated that there might be cases where we, in the process of fusing with another left-wing tendency (a la the WL in the SSEU), would bloc on a contract struggle. He also said we might initiate a "transitional organization" of our friends and a few sympathizers who for some reason or another didn't want to join our friends' caucus but that this wasn't a contract bloc and furthermore was not a very good practice.

At this point the discussion was clouded by a lot of terminological confusion and bad analogies from my end. In the course of explaining what I meant I referred to "contract blocs," "united-front-type organizations" comparable to campus united fronts (anti-CIA committees or the "Committee Against Friedman/Harberger"), "organizations we would initiate on a few key points," etc.

Also, since the discussion came up in connection with the TDC and I.S., some comrades evidently thought, though this was not my position or intention, that I was proposing org-to-org blocs with the I.S. or TDC-type groups. Hence, Comrade Seymour polemicized: "...a contract bloc with the TDC is a bloc with the I.S., anti-communists, Camarata and Hoffa regime remnants" and "a contract bloc, unless it is our friends and three sympathizers or with our friends and some left-wing group, involves giving up key elements of the program to the reformist and bureaucratic forces."

3) The third period is the recent one.

It has become clear to me, largely through a review of the NA/II fraction work and an ongoing methodological re-evaluation, that the flawed methodology pursued in the II work was the same prism which shaped my analysis of the TDC, inflamed my objections to the articles and pushed to the fore the questions of entryism and "contract blocs." Comrade Knox accurately notes the key elements of this methodology in his "Report on Detroit." With respect to the TDC, the most important elements were a tendency to misread the period and hence over-read the possibilities of groups like the TDC flowering to comprise wide layers of militants, and a corresponding tendency to downplay the key political tasks and organizational necessities of the RO and our fractions in this period.

As well, there was an important element running through, shaping and deforming a number of these discussions: speculative projection. This is most obvious in the question of entryism and "contract blocs." Since we had no forces in the Teamsters--and since even if we did their task would be mainly to distinguish and differentiate themselves, to speculate about the possibilities of entering other

groups or engage in relatively abstract discussions on criteria was far from the RO's main consideration. Similarly on "contract blocs." While I was not proposing it for our fractions at this time, to engage in speculation about what we might do, given a hypothetical set of circumstances and alignment of forces, had no relationship to our current tasks. Furthermore, such "speculation" tended to telescope itself into the present period so as to deform the view of what our current tasks and perspectives are. This has been clearly demonstrated in the history of the NA/II fraction's work.

I put the methodological question first, in terms of my own thinking at this point, because I believe it is the key thing to have come out of the discussion. Whatever the importance of this or that position, or argument over this or that characterization in the paper, without getting at the methodological root of the problem, one argument would and will disappear or be deflated only to have another one crop up.

Having said that it was the methodological problem that was key, that pushed to the fore the following questions and blew them out of proportion, the following should be seen and taken in that light. I proceed to an examination of the questions involved not because of their intrinsic importance, but because I believe comrades expect an accounting.

On Entryism

Entry into someone else's trade-union opposition group--or party for that matter--is not something one yearns to do. All other things being equal, it is better to stand with your own banner and organizational independence. Entry can, however, be compelled on an organization when the sweep of events is carrying militants you want to get at into other organizations much faster than your ability to reach them.

In this period, events are hardly racing forward so fast that other organizations are gobbling up vast forces while we are unable to get them. The fairly low level of class struggle is such that we seldom see anything worth discussing entry into.

While it was clear to me that there was no fundamental upsurge in the class struggle as a whole going on, I tended to view the TDC's ability to mobilize a few hundred Teamsters as a sort of anticipation of that break in the class struggle yet to come.

Comrade Jim has discussed the impressionism that comrades are prone to who have not been through a few big up and down swings in the class struggle, whose experience is limited to one short historical period. It was that kind of impressionism that shaped my view of the TDC. Obviously, any real upsurge--propelling thousands and thousands of workers into struggle--would make the TDC look pretty insignificant.

In addition, the minimalist political character of groups like the TDC are heavily shaped by the low level of class struggle. Any

genuine upsurge would very likely focus on issues and demands that would make the TDC's nickel and dime slogans look pathetic.

Exactly what issues the next deep labor upsurge will take off on, whether they will be mostly economic or become rapidly political, is a question one can only speculate about. What organizations will emerge, just what their character will be, whether we shall be compelled to consider entry into some of them at some point, is likewise only a speculation. What is clear to me now is that the TDC, even hypothetically, did not pose the question of entry and that, in this period, it will not generally be on the agenda.

A lot of arguments against even the conception of entering a group like the TDC centered on how bad its program was, the terrible things it was doing (court suits, etc.). These arguments did not have much impact on me, not because I didn't agree with them, but because it seemed to me that you do not enter a group because of its fine program, outstanding leadership, and class-struggle policies: in those circumstances you talk fusion. It seemed to me the key criterion was whether the group, however rotten its leadership and program, was attracting militants you wanted to get at.

But the connection between a group's program and who it is attracting is present and important. The TDC promised to fight for so little that there was little contradiction between its stated goals and its membership's stated or felt aspirations. The dynamic within was, in that sense, not even comparable to a centrist party that promises to fight for socialism but pursues class-collaborationist policies or zig-zags between reform and revolution. While we might discredit to some TDCers the leaders of their group on their inability to fight effectively for even the elementary contract demands they raised, or for not raising better ones, this would not likely bring those workers substantially closer to Trotskyism. Even the most effective entry would not, therefore, have the likely prospect of a successful deep split in the TDC in our direction.

On "Contract Blocs"

I have already commented on the barrenness of the route of idle speculation. But given that I raised this question and thought the paper was implying that the whole conception of initiating an organization based on essentially a contract struggle was reformist and unprincipled--to which a whole lot of comrades said "yes, that's what we mean"--let me offer the following thoughts.

In this period, given our size and resources and our relation to the OROs and to the class, our major tasks around contracts as elsewhere are to construct, recruit to and make a pole of attraction of our class-struggle caucuses based on the full transitional program. This does not mean that we do not agitate around key issues or partial struggles. It does not mean that we cannot take the lead in initiating official or ad hoc committees around this or that burning issue or set of issues. But these initiatives must be firmly and clearly subordinated to our main propagandistic tasks. It was in departing from the above that the NA/II fraction was drifting to disaster.

Given the above, we will not in this period and with our tasks find it wise or useful to have our friends' caucuses initiate organizations, committees or whatever based on contract struggles, which in most unions and in most situations are the focal point of the struggle between labor and capital. They would blur our friends' ability to make their own unique views known and divert their rather meager resources. They would range from Potemkin villages (our friends and three sympathizers) to sandbox messes (our friends set it up and the RSL joins) to disasters (a lot of workers perchance join and some popular bureaucrat joins and takes it way from our friends).

But I can foresee situations in the future where we would want our friends to initiate such an organization. Given growth in our size, deepening of our roots and the establishment of ourselves as a well-known communist pole, we will be able to take initiatives that we cannot do now without essentially liquidating. (One of the most pernicious aspects of the I.S.'s TDC maneuver was the way they used it to emerge--or re-emerge, after the TURF disaster of a few years ago--under the guise "just a bunch of workers for a decent contract here"). It is not that hard to conceive of a situation where the bureaucracy is discredited or distrusted, the ranks rebellious but not sure how to fight, the OROs are either not a significant factor or are busy pursuing some bureaucrat, are pushing the wrong issues or are compromised, our friends are a significant but not hegemonic factor, where they could bring a significant number of workers into struggle around their demands. If they find that they are bringing them directly into their caucus, so much the better. But if there are many who like and are willing to fight for their key demands, but are not yet convinced of their full program and hence unwilling to join their caucus, I can foresee our friends launching a temporary organization to bring these workers into struggle under their leadership and key demands, and in doing so, further expose opponents and enhance their ability to win these workers to the full program.

Some of the key arguments against even the possibility of this have been:

1) Such a proposal involves liquidation of the full transitional program. First, the caucuses would still exist with their own voice to say whatever else they wanted to say that went beyond the immediate key issues involved. Second, even today, we recognize that certain issues and demands are, at a given time in a given union, more key and more central than others. A review of just the T-2 and II material in their respective contract periods indicates that we've seen certain demands as more important than others. It is a parody of our friends' trade-union work to say they just unfurl the transitional program at contract time, without regard to what issues are more burning and compelling than others.

2) This is the same conception as PL/WAM, I.S. or CSL.

The difference is strategic and fundamental.

The RO has a strategic perspective of building a revolutionary movement within the unions based on the transitional program, which at this time and in the foreseeable future takes the form of class-struggle caucuses. The perspective of PL/WAM was, and in the case of the I.S. is, explicitly to build organizations on a left-center coalition reformist program, or in the CSL a united-front network of caucuses on a left-centrist basis. For PL/WAM, I.S. or CSL that was the ultimate goal and guiding light of their trade-union policies. For our friends, the tactic of initiating a committee or organization for a given and limited period of time is subordinate, and in service of, the goal of class-struggle caucuses on the full program.

3) The contract is the focal point of the struggle of labor vs. capital and of the ranks vs. the bureaucracy. In most cases, this is indeed true. But short of a pre-revolutionary situation, the contract remains at one end of the spectrum of partial struggles against the capitalists. If we can initiate a tactic to maximize our ability to mobilize the ranks in struggle against both the capitalists and the sellout bureaucrats, so much the better for us and the class struggle.

All of the above is speculative. It is not something we want to do now. But it does not seem to me that such a tactic can be ruled out in advance as inherently unprincipled, reformist, etc.

The "Characterizations"

Excesses of polemical zeal are perhaps the occupational hazard of a heavily polemical press. And, of course, there are elements of personal and literary taste involved, which vary among comrades. I tend to prefer the force of a devastating analysis over the attempts at rapier wit which sometimes miss their mark and can be turned against us.

Thus, for example, I wish we would quit using the "suit and tie" socialist epithet we have recently been throwing at Peter Camejo and friends. Though it may produce a few chortles in our own ranks (and given that it has appeared in the youth press a number of times and in the RO press at least twice, I gather that many find it amusingly apt), I think any competent SWPer could make us look silly on this. I can just see Camejo at some public meeting:

"The ROers, who have obviously learned from the New Left that the only appropriate revolutionary garb consists of work boots and blue jeans, accuse me of being a 'suit and tie socialist.' Well, I plead guilty, along with Lenin, Trotsky and James P. Cannon, who not so rarely appeared in public in a suit and tie themselves."

The point we are trying to make is the SWP's craving for respectability in bourgeois public opinion, for which there is lots of evidence. I think we should just make that point and avoid the clothing jokes.

But there is a different kind of problem that can come up. In

trying to slam an opponent, one can make characterizations that try to over-prove the point, are too categorical, and in doing so either mis-define the animal or leave oneself open to cheap-shot responses by the opponent who can brush off the point of the critique and insulate his supporters by seizing on the bad or inaccurate characterizations and saying that "these people clearly don't know what they're talking about." It was this kind of problem I felt some of the characterizations of the TDC fell into.

Now, I no longer think that these were as bad or as serious as I did earlier. I have read the TDC and related articles three times in their entirety: once as they were coming out, including a quick review prior to the April local meeting where I first criticized them; second, before the July 31, 1976 NA discussion, and again just prior to writing this document. In the most recent rereading I have concluded that the articles on balance had the correct thrust and were pretty accurate. Especially as time went on and the TDC picked up more of a following, this was noted in a number of articles. It is also clear that what we could see in Detroit was not representative of the TDC nationally.

Within that context however, I continue to feel that there were a number of characterizations that tried to "over-prove" the point and were too categorical.

One issue describes the TDC as "...one of the most wretchedly sub-reformist in a long line of I.S. backed-alliances with two-bit 'reform' bureaucrats, out-bureaucrats, aspiring bureaucrats and any other brand of sellout artist they can sign up."

The "wretchedly sub-reformist" part is completely accurate as is the description of the general I.S. "alliance." But it is clear that the I.S./TDC "signed up" a lot of people who do not fit in the category of various varieties of bureaucrats. This, in fact, was the main thing that distinguished the TDC from other more aborted I.S. "alliances."

Another issue: "Where it has gone beyond a small number of I.S. supporters, the TDC has become a home mainly for disgruntled Hoffa supporters."

Knox argues in his "Report" that this article was clearly based on the West Coast, where the characterization is most apt. True. But I don't believe that I'm much more literal-minded than the average reader of the paper and I took the above to be a generalization on the TDC, not limited to the West Coast.

As well, I'm still not sure what we meant by "Hoffa supporters" in this article and elsewhere and don't think we made it very clear. Are we talking about Hoffa machine bureaucrats on the outs with Fitzsimmons, or rank-and-file Teamsters who still suffer the illusion that Hoffa was qualitatively better than Fitzsimmons, a "tough guy" who would stand up to the government instead of holding hands with the Republicans? I'm sure there are thousands and thousands of Teamsters who share this belief, one which they have to be broken

from. But we analyze them and approach them differently than the Hoffa regime remnants in the IBT bureaucracy.

Another issue, following a paragraph on TDC's simple trade-unionist program: "This is the program of aspiring union bureaucrats. The only difference between the TDC and Louis Peick is that no one has bothered to buy off the TDC yet." (Peick is the Chicago Teamsters local president who led the key local wildcat in 1970. He was subsequently brought into the International officialdom to keep him and his local in line.)

This is the kind of formulation that made me wince. I could just see an I.S. er pulling it out and showing it to some TDCers in order to discredit us: "Look at this, these people think you're just out to be bought off."

Comrade Knox in his "Report" explains that this was not a pay-off comment on any individual, but a "political characterization of the TDC generally."

It seems to me by inserting the "leadership of the TDC" in this characterization we could have made it both more precise and less useful to our opponents, or even better, finding another way of making the same point that lends itself less to misrepresentation.

The TDC was not a tight-knit organization and the super-minimalist basis for it allowed a number of diverse types: I.S.ers, aspiring bureaucrats, in- and out-bureaucrats, and militant Teamsters, who, in however an elementary way, wanted to fight both the trucking companies and the union tops. It seems to me that the bulk of the TDC's membership, following and periphery was of the latter type.

Of course, when one has characterized the leadership of a political organization, one has in a certain key sense captured its essence and in most circumstances can predict its policies and future. But organizations can also have a membership and a following that is more heterogeneous than their leadership, and this was the case with the TDC.

Knox says "the statement was an angular but accurate way of saying that there is absolutely nothing politically separating the TDC from yesterday's trade-union militant-of-the-moment who is now bought off with high office..."

In a programmatic sense, this is of course true. Louis Peick, Pete Camarata, the I.S. and the rank-and-file Teamster/TDCer are all reformists.

But this does not mean that we regard them as all the same or that we approach them in the same way. Nor, from its end, does the trade-union bureaucracy. It responds to irritations like the TDC (or like phenomena) through various measures: ignoring the whole thing and waiting for it to dissipate, "buying off" (in the direct sense a la Peick) a few key leaders, co-opting the ranks through a few concessions, or resorting to repression (allowing company victimizations,

goon squads, expulsions from the union, etc. The IBT bureaucracy cannot "buy off" the TDC as a whole in the same sense it "bought off" Louis Peick.

The labor bureaucrats are reformists because they have a material stake in capitalism. The I.S. is reformist in the classic social-democratic sense, with a dash of "rank-and-file" syndicalism, in that it opportunistically separates the "minimum" and "maximum" program, pushing reforms because they seem "practical" and capable of mobilizing the "rank-and-file movement" at its current level of consciousness. The rank and file has reformist consciousness not simply because of the transmission of bourgeois ideology through the bureaucracy, but because in the absence of the intervention of a vanguard party imparting socialist consciousness, its conditions of existence and spontaneous struggles under capitalism lead it nowhere else but to, at the best, militant trade unionism.

And the TDC included all these elements. As I have said, there were more and more characterizations which indicated our acknowledging that the TDC, particularly in Detroit but also elsewhere, had picked up rank-and-file following. Thus in an issue last spring we said:

"Teamsters for a Decent Contract, an amalgam of would-be socialists, opportunists and simple trade-union militants, was fielded just last August.... By the approach of the 1976 contract, it had become a pole of attraction to a layer of Teamster militants."

This is an accurate description and in no way interfered with our ability to fry the TDC in that article at length for its disastrous handling of the Detroit wildcat and to explain how this fiasco flowed from its reformist practice and politics.

But two weeks later, in polemicizing with the I.S. over their apologia for the Detroit events, we said:

"The TDC is an unstable bloc around a reformist trade-union program. It is made up of fake-socialists and simple careerists, with the latter aspiring to integrate themselves into the anti-communist Teamster bureaucracy."

But the TDC was "made up" of more than just the fake-socialists and simple careerists, as we had acknowledged elsewhere.

Which brings us to the question of Pete Camarata. Now the individual Camarata has little importance. But in a lot of the discussion about the characterizations in question his name came up as a representative case.

At the outset, let me note my own error in seeing Camarata as a "representative case" of the kind of militant the TDC was attracting and using that as a touchstone for several of my criticisms of the paper. First, the paper did not specifically single out Camarata in a number of cases where I assumed that he was the type being

discussed. Second, as a local leader of the TDC (and now a national leader of the TDU) he is not only more directly responsible for the results of TDC/TDU policies than the average TDC/TDU adherent, but also plays a greater role in shaping them. Finally, as a trade-union member changes from entering political life to rising to leadership--even of an oppositional group--he becomes more separated from his base, more subject to the pressure of other classes. Particularly in this period, with the pressure of the bourgeoisie and its representatives in the labor bureaucracy, not much rebelliousness from the broad ranks nor the real attracting pole of revolutionaries such trade unionists are drawn to the labor bureaucracy. As Knox says "the half-life of non-bureaucratic militants is short."

The only point I would add here is that this is a process, not a syllogism. That is, the Pete Camarata--or others--who in November 1975 first comes in contact with the TDC without any previous activity in union life or political experience (so far as we know) and who less than six months later is "leading" a wildcat, may well end up in the bureaucracy. Unless he breaks with the path he is on, that is almost inevitable. But that does not mean that from the outset he was by definition an "aspiring bureaucrat" or a "simple careerist."

Does this mean that we should "soften our approach to the militants of the moment"? No. In fact, at the time of the Detroit wildcat, I wanted and argued for a more categorical condemnation of Camarata, et al., for calling off the wildcat, as a concrete example of their capitulation to the bureaucracy and the state's court injunction. As I said in the NA/II document, even the most well-intentioned reformist will betray. It is our job to explain this, fight the reformists and counterpose revolutionary politics.

In unions where we do not have any forces the only means we have to do this is through press sales, talking and arguing with workers and contacting. (I do not believe that we can have a "perspective of maneuvers or alliances with elements as our way of relating to these unions from the outside" which Knox apparently believes must follow from my argument.) If we have characterizations in the paper that are inaccurate, or lend themselves to misunderstanding, or can be picked up and easily used by our opponents against us, these will make what we can do more difficult. (Outside the recent Red Tide conference, one I.S.er was engaging one of our comrades in an argument in front of a bunch of Red Tiders. Our comrade was denouncing the I.S.'s alliance with the bureaucrats in the TDU. The I.S.er asked him to name one. After an awkward pause, our comrade said "Pete Camarata" which broke up not only the I.S.er but all of the Red Tiders, who knew that Pete Camarata had never held union office.)

Knox says that my "approach to these articles generally tends to ignore our lack of physical presence, our lack of fractions. He seems to be thinking in terms of a tactical sensitivity to momentarily popular militants which, while certainly not irrelevant in an article, can only become centrally important as an aspect of fraction tactics."

I believe that where we have fractions we can, in general, be more precise, more categorical, more specific than where we do not, simply because we know more about the individuals involved, the character of the leaders, who is the slimy proto-bureaucrat on the make and who is the more sincere militant we want to talk to. It is from a distance, from outside the situation, that it is more difficult to make such distinctions, and where, in general, it is advisable to make the general political points about the limits of militant reformism, the need to break from it, etc.

The Miners Article

Despite being largely outside the situation, I thought the article on the miners wildcat (20 August 1976) was a very good one. It both applauded the tremendous militancy of the miners and pointed to the limits of this militancy, particularly as it is still wrapped up in the religion, anti-communism and parochialism of the region.

Given the discreditment of the Miller regime, there is a lot of jockeying going on in the UMW: split-offs from the regime like Trbovich, old Boyle loyalists like Leroy Patterson, local level leaders of the Hayes Holstein variety, all will be vying for the support of the disgruntled miners. Also present, but a much smaller factor, is the RCP.

Also a factor, though not a fixed, static or independent one, is the layer of militant miners which has emerged through the experience of three major, virtually coal-field-wide, strikes since 1972, not to mention innumerable local skirmishes. While the miners as a whole have been quite volatile, there is always a differentiation of some sort in these situations. There are some no doubt who take the lead, "pour their water" first, are more active as pickets, are looked to as more authoritative by their peers, etc. All the various jockeying forces will try to line up these "opinion makers" behind their respective electoral wagons.

It is probably some of this type of militants that the article talked about: having become more distrustful of the local leaders like Holstein, some of them took faltering and unsuccessful steps to set up an ad hoc strike steering committee not dominated by local leaders and bureaucrats. And it is these types who we sometimes somewhat jocularly refer to as "honest trade-union militants," not to prettify or glorify them, but to note that they are different than the OROs and bureaucrats.

It is this analysis, which I think is consistent with the paper's, that made me object to the conclusion of that article:

"Just as we warned against the reformist Miller in 1972, so we warn against today's 'honest trade-union militants'--such as the leaders of the District 17 and 29 Miners to Stop the Injunctions--who are the candidates for strike-breaking bureaucrats tomorrow."

Now who are the leaders of this group?

The article says:

"At about the same time a group called District 17 and 29 Miners to Stop the Injunctions made an appearance and led pickets in front of District 17 headquarters. Unfortunately this group had nothing to offer beyond the demands already posed by the strikes. Spokesmen for the group denied being allied with the Right to Strike Committee (RSC) though the perspectives of the two groups are restricted to similar sounding economist reforms."

I concluded that this group was probably the RCP/RSC with a new name. Interestingly, two leading members who both write regularly for the paper and are present at ed board meetings, told me later that they had concluded that this group was a local bureaucrats' group (a la Hayes Holstein). The author of the article, Laughton, subsequently told me that he was sure it was the RCP.

In any case, neither the RCP nor the local bureaucrats are what we, even jocularly, refer to as "honest trade-union militants," even in quotes. And it doesn't seem to me very pedagogically useful to refer to the "honest trade-union militants"--in the sense I described earlier--as the "candidates for strike-breaking bureaucrats tomorrow." In theory, of course, everyone in the UMW who is not a Trotskyist is a potential "strikebreaking bureaucrat." But it seems more what we want to do to warn the "honest trade-union militants" against the reformist crap of the Holsteins and RCPers; that unless they take up the class-struggle road, adopt as their own the transitional program, break with all varieties of "militant reformism" they will be defeated and will hoist into power only new betrayers, either those on the scene today or new ones from their own ranks.

In Conclusion

In an effort to deal in some detail with the quotes from the paper, I have gone on at some length, which may produce the impression that I am still blowing them out of proportion. Let me anticipate that response by once again saying that I no longer see them as crucially flawing the articles; I think our main points came through clear. I also feel that normally these are the kinds of disagreements that could be handled in an ed board meeting, or over the editor's desk, rather than warranting a document. It is not my view that the quotes indicate some political deviation beginning to creep into the paper. I think they probably reflected a desire to hit the I.S. hard and put a sharp polemical edge on our formulations which, in the cases mentioned, were a bit excessive in the direction of being too categorical or not sufficiently pedagogical.

I have gone into detail because I feel many comrades want to know the source and nature of the arguments that flared up over the articles and where I stand now. Whatever the merits or demerits of this or that characterization, I think they are quite secondary to the flawed methodology which inflamed not only my objections but produced the related political questions.

--Douglas
10 December 1976

ON THE OPERATION OF THE TUC

by Hillquist

Our trade-union work has not received sufficient political direction from the RO. There is a mystique associated with TU work which makes many non-industrialized comrades feel that they are unqualified to help formulate or criticize RO policy on the trade unions. This is expressed in attitudes of, "the TUCers know what the situation is, they must be right" or "let the TUC handle it." Such attitudes are particularly dangerous for us now, since we do not yet possess a significant layer of experienced trade-union friends who can be relied upon to correctly formulate and execute class-struggle policy in the unions. The struggle to develop such a layer requires more attention from the RO as a whole and of the local branches in particular.

The RO has developed a mode of operation on TU work which has tended to exacerbate this problem. A fraction will typically work out its tactical plans for a particular situation in direct consultation between the fraction head and the TUC. As the plans are executed, all problems encountered, political questions, unanticipated events, etc. are again routed, via long telephone conversations, directly to the TUC. Since the fractions are inexperienced, and more often than not either don't know what to do or express impulses in the wrong directions, the TUC ends up doing all the thinking required for even the most detailed and minor tactical questions.

Multiply this phenomenon by the number of fractions in the RO and one can easily see that one result of this mode of operation is the overwork of the TUC comrades who are continually considering and making decisions on an enormous mass of minute tactical details. This overwork on details is an important factor contributing to the lack of updated national TU guidelines, industry-wide perspectives, generalized evaluations of work conducted, etc., which it is the business of the TUC to produce or solicit. For the TUC to play more of a guiding and corrective role nationally requires as a precondition that it be freed from much of the encumbrance of reckoning with every detail of every fraction, and that it have more time to deliberate on the kinds of overall questions and problems which only a national body can do effectively.

Another consequence of the present mode of operation is that it not only relieves both the fractions and the local branches of their responsibility to make such tactical decisions, but actually retards their capacity to do so. A fraction may spend many hours discussing a given set of tactical problems. As often as not, there might be several ways the fraction could effectively act on these questions. It then consults the TUC with a phone call and typically receives a detailed set of recommendations. Since these recommendations are acquired from overworked TUCers on the basis of necessarily partial information, they many times possess a certain exotic or even bizarre quality when applied to the concrete situation. They carry however the authority of a national body and constitute an integral whole. It is only with the greatest reluctance that individual fraction members will want to "disagree with the TUC" and get embroiled in a national fight over some tactical points which usually have very

little importance. Usually the TUC recommendations stop discussion and the fraction proceeds on implementing them, again calling the TUC every time it runs into a problem. The knowledge that the TUC will make detailed and thorough recommendations which will in any case be followed makes the fraction discussions (and therefore the tactical thinking of fraction members) insubstantial and cobwebby. The branch leadership can feel secure in withholding opinion on these questions until it finds out "what the TUC thinks." But the problem remains: the TUC cannot direct the fractions, it can only correct them. In order to develop fractions and branches capable of dealing with trade-union questions it will be necessary to consciously stop the over-utilization of the TUC as a crutch, force the fractions to do their own thinking, and the branches to seriously confront their TU work.

Such a change in the mode of operation would result in greater RO attention and control over all aspects of the TU work. The fractions would have to decide on their own what to do and get it approved by a branch whose leadership would know that its head would be on the line if there were mistakes. The TUC would be able to play the role of vigilant watchdog on the TU work, correcting mistakes, exposing deviations, and pointing out inadequacies. Such a changed mode of operation would require much more frequent and substantial written reports from the field and more circulars, directives and guidelines from the TUC; giving TU work a more coherent and unified character nationally. While the TUC would retain its function of a consultative body for emergencies, its response to those fractions and branches which would overuse this function should be, "You figure it out; and you'd better be right!"

Unless the TUC can distance itself from the responsibility of actually directing the work of the fractions we are in for more serious trouble in the future. Inevitably the industrial fractions will continue to feel pressure from the backward consciousness in the trade unions. This pressure will tend to manifest itself in political adaptation to that backwardness. If the TUC is not aloof from the tactical decision making process, the danger exists that, rather than being able to detect that political adaptation, the TUC will become an accessory to it.

An example of how this can happen is an incident that occurred in the WC/II fraction. Workers in the industry had been laid off in the tens of thousands, with no relief in sight. The plant where the fraction worked was itself scheduled for mass layoffs which would include the fraction. The fraction correctly launched an energetic agitational campaign for a sit-down strike/demonstration. The workers' response to the campaign was overwhelmingly enthusiastic; even the shop committee felt such pressure that it discussed the feasibility of such a strike. All the objective conditions for a sit-down were present save one: there was no force with sufficient determination and authority to successfully organize and execute it. The fraction correctly realized that, although it was recognized as the force calling for the sit-down and was rapidly increasing its prestige, it did not possess and could not rapidly enough acquire the authority necessary to lead the strike. It then came up with

the incredible idea that perhaps the shop committee would lead the strike. Completely intoxicated with the power of its agitation, the fraction tried to leap out of a tactical impasse by throwing overboard the strategic conception of the necessity to smash the bureaucracy, replacing that conception with the idea that the bureaucracy can be pressured into initiating mass militant class struggle.

For a fraction, in the heat of the moment, to forget that if there is going to be a sit-down, then, in addition to agitating for it, showing its necessity, and showing its feasibility, the fraction must be able to stand toe to toe with the shop committee and take the workers away from it in a bitter fight, while not excusable, is certainly natural. What is completely unnatural and intolerable is that the TUC was so tangled up in the details of the incident that it not only developed these illusions in the bureaucracy but elevated them to the status of an accepted RO myth, i.e., "If only the WC/II fraction had seized on the shop committee discussion soon enough, the shop committee might have been pressured into leading a sit-down strike against layoffs."

DOWN WITH THE MYSTIQUE OF TRADE-UNION WORK!

STOP POLITICAL ADAPTATION TO BACKWARD CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE TRADE UNIONS!

DEVELOP A LAYER OF EXPERIENCED COMMUNIST TRADE UNIONISTS!

ROOT OUT ILLUSIONS IN THE TRADE-UNION BUREAUCRACY!

--Hillquist
9 December 1976

ON LIQUIDATIONIST TENDENCIES

by Collins (West Coast)

23 December 1974

New York, New York

Comrades:

In last night's local meeting we had two discussions, one on the II fraction and one on the T-2 fraction, which revealed that under pressure of the economic and social situation and given a strong impatience to do something about it, some fairly strong liquidationist tendencies have surfaced in the local. The discussions were healthy in that the local was faced sharply with the results of this kind of impatience and the reason for the primacy of program in our TU work (and the rest of our work) was brought out once again and very starkly--in other words the local was prepared for the coming period by examining our own mistakes. The struggles were carried out not just in the local but in the II fraction for at least a couple of days and in the T-2 fraction through a fraction meeting, an exec, and finally the local.

The situation in the II fraction is fairly easy to explain. After the shop committeemen met Wednesday and discussed the sit-down tactic, our friends made a decision to come out Thursday with a leaflet sharply re-enforcing the call for the tactic, calling on the membership to turn out for the Sunday union meeting to vote for the tactic, and preparing the membership on points like full meetings with democratic votes in the plant to determine tactics and policy, press, management out and so forth in the event that the shop committee did follow through on their discussion for a sit-down on Friday run from the top by them. Given the fact that many of these committeemen faced the possibility of layoffs themselves and that pressure was therefore building up even in their ranks to do something about it and given that announcing Thursday that this shop committee meeting had taken place and was planning a sit-down for Friday would also announce it to the company and serve no real purpose as far as building pressure for the tactic in the ranks or preparing the ranks for what to do if it actually happened (our friends were doing that anyway), it was decided Wednesday night that Thursday's leaflet should not announce this Wednesday committee meeting or the fact that it was discussing the Friday sit-down. This was a decision applicable only to a very brief conjuncture and based on a fairly strong possibility that the committee might actually stage the action. As soon as it became clear that they had no intention of doing so or hadn't the capacity to do so (a big split in the committee with only a small minority for the tactic), this orientation toward the committee no longer applied and their spinelessness should have been exposed with a strong call on the membership to rely on their own strength and a repeat of the call to turn out at the Sunday local. It is difficult to assess how quickly the situation unfolded in the plant vis-a-vis the committee's intentions, and

the fraction stuck with its Thursday leaflet and, according to Robinson, our friends Friday went up and down their lines explaining what had happened with the committee and urging people to come to the Sunday local. However, it seems pretty clear that the fraction never really broke away from the conjunctural orientation toward the committee, and in Saturday's fraction meeting to prepare for the Sunday union local meeting Nelson and Tweet had to overrule a fraction motion to the effect that at Sunday's meeting either our friends or the friendly committeeman break up the bureaucrats' agenda (which was to be restricted only to explanations of unemployment benefits, etc.) and place the question of the sit-down first on the agenda. Our friends carried out the correct tactic Sunday in disciplined fashion, were ruled out of order (the tactic is "illegal"), and all four of them spoke--the friendly committeeman didn't even show up until too late. However, at last night's local Price and Robinson stuck to the idea that it would have been all right to go with the fraction motion, that they would have spoken anyway, that it was a minor tactical difference. Moreover, Robinson was very defensive and took the position that the fraction knows best. At the same time she was potshotting Tweet, Nelson, and myself (Tweet reacted slowly to the whole thing, Nelson couldn't even be reached--he was in Vancouver, I had said Thursday's leaflet was "too agitational and wouldn't call Jim because it would cost too much"--which is not true and seems to imply that I was afraid that Jim would overrule my toning down and polishing certain half-assed formulations in the leaflet draft). The defensiveness and potshotting (which was irritating but not central) aside, the problem here was reliance on the friendly committeeman to do what only we could be relied on to do, and secondarily the old fraction exceptionalism. After some rather sharp discussion in which the liquidationist ramifications of this course were laid out the following motion was passed: "The fraction decision that it was possible for the friendly committeeman to break the agenda was incorrect and we support the TU directors' move to overrule the fraction." All including Robinson voted for this motion. Parenthetically, other motions to the effect that we would energetically pursue our tactic through the layoffs and that the political thrust of the II campaign around the sit-down (two leaflets and the union meeting intervention) is correct were passed. This latter motion was introduced because Jeff B. (primarily) and a couple of others were objecting that calling for a sit-down around a set of negotiable demands (no reprisals, unlimited unemployment benefits, drop the suit, etc.) even in the context of a fuller programmatic statement was opportunist, reformist, and what-have-you. I don't believe he ever backed down from this position.

The problems in T-2 were more interesting. In the West Side local we were faced with the collapse of the delegated caucus to the International president on the question of a February approval of a contract package. Our friends had put out a full programmatic statement last week around this subject and another draft was in the process of being drawn up to update the situation, again a full programmatic statement. At this point, Friday night, the fraction met to decide what else should be done. After a none-too-clear fraction discussion two motions were passed to the effect that our friends should launch a campaign concentrating in the West Side

locals but extending up and down the coast on the contract with two points: 1) vote no on the contract; 2) vote for the following four contract demands (later expanded to include the right to strike)--repeal the steadyman clause, shorter work week with no loss in pay with full COL, no deregistration of secondary status members, secondary status members to full status. The motion also projected that co-signatories would be sought for these proposals. The motions in question were proposed by Tweet and myself, hers being more general and mine being very specific but both saying the same thing and projecting the same tactic. There was a third motion passed which is not particularly relevant to all this, and there was no motion passed regarding the leaflet then in the process of being drafted (neither Tweet nor I advanced motions on this because it was already being done and in fact Tweet was in the process of taking over the draft to expand it programmatically and otherwise). The tactic outlined in the motions was characterized the following night in the exec as sliding off into a propoganda bloc or strategic united-front conception in a motion advanced by Nelson--I don't have the full motion with me but this was the punch line. His motion also included the phrase "in the absence of a surfaced caucus" as a qualifier, but this was dropped in the local discussion. This motion is of course correct--the tactic had projected a bloc with others in the union in writing on the basis of a partial transitional program for a coast-wide campaign, and, with or without a surfaced caucus, our friends would have been involved in a de facto or explicit "committee to stop the contract" on a partial program a la CSL.

As I said, the discussion in the fraction was not particularly clear and different people understood different things by the motions. It came out in Saturday night's exec that Edwards thought we were projecting on this reduced programmatic basis a coast-wide opposition to the International president, which is perhaps carrying the tactic out to some logical conclusion but by no means what Tweet and I were trying to get at. The motivation as it stood in the fraction meeting for the motions was to consolidate contacts and periphery and not simply to say vote no on the contract but, while they were at it, say vote yes on the fraction's four (or five) demands. The tactic had nothing to do with a vote of no confidence in the International president, a call for such a vote, or an opposition to the International president, but rather was an attempt to grapple with building a solid vote against the contract and for our demands. At the same time, as I said, Tweet and I were projecting this full programmatic statement signed by our friends. In an impatience to rally the union against the contract railroading by the International and to "save the union," we were projecting a tactic in which the fraction could have programmatic differentiation and a propoganda bloc too. It came out in Saturday's exec that Edwards was reading into this a coast-wide opposition to the International president and it came out in Sunday's meeting that he thought the fraction was going to take the full programmatic leaflet draft and water down the program to get the contacts to sign it around the four or five demands and build the coast-wide opposition to the International president around this! In Saturday's exec, Edwards advanced the following motion which he did not see as counterposed to Nelson's: "It would not be unprincipled to put out the

leaflet with the co-signatories calling for a no vote on the contract proposal lacking the four central demands if the fraction had clearly defined themselves programmatically and were circulating their own literature; still such a tactic poses the danger of liquidation since there's no clearly established caucus, even with the programmatic statement having been laid out." Nelson's dropping of the phrase "in the absence of a surfaced caucus" from his motion made it possible to see a little more clearly for most what was wrong with this motion, and at the end of the discussion Sunday nearly the whole local voted for Nelson's motion with a few abstentions here and there (Edwards voted for it) and against Edwards' motion (Edwards abstained on his motion). Other motions were passed, or rather another motion and other sections of Nelson's motion, projecting a full programmatic leaflet to update the situation vis-a-vis the contract and seeking to consolidate the fraction's contacts around its program.

This report compresses four days of struggle in two TU fractions around fairly complicated matters, but I think the basic outlines of the problems are clear. Under the pressure of trying to save not one but two unions, we lost the programmatic line, and the organizational consequences followed close behind. The RO's collective discussion accomplished what it's supposed to accomplish: the period and our weight in it was placed in perspective, the local was re-educated on some fundamental points, and the line and tactics were corrected. Foster told me before I left New York that this kind of discussion (comrades reaching to solve the problems facing the class and in the process veering off to the right) was beginning to pop up all around the country, and so now the West Coast can be added to the list. Hopefully our discussions and this report will be useful in helping to correct this tendency.

Comradely,

Paul Collins

ADDENDUM TO "ON LIQUIDATIONIST TENDENCIES"

(Excerpts from West Coast Local Minutes
of 22 December 1974)

II Report: Robinson. Announcement of further cutbacks and reduction in rate of work mean a drastic reduction in work force. Some lower level bureaucrats, likely to be affected by this newest wave of cutbacks, seriously considered friends' motion for work action. Friends' propaganda centered on the need for work action but clearly didn't call for adventuristic work action. Friends saw the real possibility of work action, led by the bureaucrats with friends getting the credit. They also saw the possibility of a work action locally sparking a work action in other significant locations. However, the incipient movement for a work action died. At the area meetings where a semi-sympathetic lower bureaucrat might have assisted friends in organizational matters re: agenda was late and other sympathizers failed to speak, friends were ruled out of order but got motion for work action on the floor. The OMO who clearly has no strategy for fighting cutbacks introduced a motion for a demonstration clearly counterposed to the need for a work action.

Discussion: Carter, Edwards, Melt, Price, Martha, Nelson, Collins, Jeff, Wiggins, de Silva, Garcia, Dreiser, Bruce, Pepe, Waters, Molly, Kula, Fournier, Dale, Keith, Redmond. Summary: Robinson. Second round: repeat first round, add: Mauri, Larry, Marge. Summary: Robinson. Third round: repeat second round. Summary: Robinson.

Motion: The II fraction and party local must be prepared to pursue vigorously the issue of a work action during the last week before the cutbacks. Our friends need a new leaflet.

passed

Motion: The fraction decision allowing the possibility of a lower level bureaucrat initiating the necessary agenda change was wrong and the W.C. RO supports the action of the TU directors in overruling the fraction to have our friends initiate the agenda change.

passed

Motion: The II fraction have a meeting Monday night to continue discussion and plan future interventions.

passed

Motion: The basic political thrust of the fraction's propaganda has been correct.

passed

* * * * *

T-2 Report: Edwards. The programmatic basis for a surfaced public formation exists but a base in the strategic local doesn't exist for a public formation to be consolidated. The leading committee convened to ram through a premature contract settlement but the meeting collapsed after a fight, by allowing the top bureaucrat to sign the settlement prematurely and agreeing that the demands would be used as "guidelines." The friends adopted an agitational perspective to stop the contract but neglected the need to crystallize an opposition. There was an incorrect conception of blocking around contract demands. The main task is to show the need for a full transitional program.

Discussion: Collins, Wiggins, Carter, Jeff, Melt, Pepe, Nelson, Stone, Martha, Dreiser, Waters, Larry, Dale, Redmond, Keith. Summary: Edwards. Second round: repeat first round.

Motion: In the absence of a surfaced public formation:

- 1) The proposal for a campaign by our friends and their supporters in T-2 to solicit a broad area stop-the-contract bloc in the form of a signed statement of only four to five contract demands would be a slide into a partial transitional program propaganda bloc or a strategic united front conception, especially when linked to a "no confidence in B" theme.
- 2) We should seek other ways to maximize opposition to the contract and increase our friends' periphery of various TU militants and contacts not yet prepared to support a full TU program (e.g. seeking support for specific motions in various locals).
- 3) Friends should continue to agitate on the key contract issues in the context of the fuller class struggle program to oust the collaborationist bureaucracy.

passed as amended
vote: unanimous

Amendment: To strike the phrase "In the absence of..."

passed

Motion (Edwards): It would not be unprincipled to issue a leaflet with co-signatures calling for a no-vote because the contract does not include the key demands around jobs, provided our friends have done consistent full programmatic analysis of the situation facing the arena. Such a tactical move would pose the danger of liquidation since there is no clearly established surfaced public formation even if accompanied by a programmatic statement by friends to differentiate themselves.

failed

ON LIQUIDATING NA/LI

by Hillquist

North America
July 3, 1976

National Org. Sec.

Dear Helene,

This week it came to my attention that the liquidation of North American LI is being considered. I recognize that a decision on this question can only properly be reached by evaluating sets of data that are unavailable to me (thinness of cadre, opportunities elsewhere, cutbacks in other areas of work that could be avoided by liquidating NA/LI, etc.). Hence I am not advocating a specific policy on this question. My purpose in this letter is to put forward certain considerations about NA/LI that might not otherwise be present in the discussion.

I fear that the impulse to liquidate is too much colored by the combined repressiveness of the union and the company, with the consequent lessening of our friends' ability to conduct their work as openly as we would like. While this is a definite drawback that should not be underestimated it should also be understood that:

a) this semi-clandestine style of work is not a permanent condition but is dependent on our friends' relative strength vis-a-vis the company and union bureaucracy;

b) our friends have demonstrated an ability to increase their strength in the rank and file even while curtailing open, public activity; and

c) there is an objective process developing that is fast eroding the base of the existing bureaucracy while creating an ever larger stratum of workers open to a class-struggle union opposition (this not in the general sense that it is true almost universally but in a very immediate sense specific to NA/LI).

The workforce in NA/LI is predominantly white. The city however is mostly black and getting blacker. The recent modification of the company's racist hiring practices with affirmative action in both hiring and upgrading is resulting in a very rapid increase in the ratio of blacks to whites from the lower paid classifications, through the skills, and into first and second level management. This process is reinforced by the increased incidence of white transfers to the suburbs. The local bureaucracy, on the other hand, is entirely white and openly racist. Because it rests almost exclusively on the white skilled workers who feel the most threatened by the influx of blacks, this bureaucracy is organically incapable of even appearing to represent the interests of the black workers.

The situation is therefore ripe for the formation of a largely black opposition to the local union leadership and its policies. There are several symptoms of this. There is a complete lack of

confidence in the local leadership on the part of the black workers. This extends even to minor grievances where the normal procedure for a black worker is to go to the EEOC rather than the union. Although the union meetings are relatively large, very few black workers attend. At the same time when there is an outbreak of rank-and-file militancy (such as the wildcats around contract time), black workers are conspicuously present and in leadership roles. There are also a substantial number of black stewards (the distance between these stewards and the local leadership is so great that in one recent case where a black steward with six years was fired he did not even file a grievance, going instead directly to the EEOC).

There is another peculiarity of the NA/LI workforce. The overwhelming predominance in the city of mass production-type factory work draws to LI that stratum of the industrial workforce willing to trade higher pay for a more interesting and challenging job with the opportunity for advancement. The company further screens its applicants for literacy and basic educational skills. The result is particularly striking in the black component of the LI workforce where, almost to a man, the workers are intelligent, well read and intellectually active. This has not only been universally observed by our friends in the industry but also demonstrates itself in press sales. While we sell a significant number of papers to LI workers, the vast majority are sold to black workers, in some locations approaching 10 percent of the total black workforce.

The possibility exists that a racially integrated class-struggle caucus could come into the leadership of a significant stratum of the NA/LI workforce. The realization of that possibility is of course contingent on the ability of our friends and the RO to recruit in this period when we are relatively weak and isolated. This aspect of our work has been showing encouraging signs. There has been one recruit out of this industry to the RO. Several months ago our friends drew another worker into close collaboration, and, although he has since moved away from us, he has been replaced by a potentially much more valuable black contact who is entering a study circle conducted by the RO. Additionally the RO has conducted individual sessions with black LI workers and more are projected. Our friends are also developing respect as union militants. One friend was approached by a dissident bureaucrat for an election bloc. Another is pressured by his co-workers to become a steward. A third is wildly cheered by workers from his location when he speaks at union meetings. Two others, when they were laid off, were able to successfully organize a social that included virtually all the black workers and a substantial portion of the white workers from their location, where the norm is for each racial group to have separate socials.

Admittedly all this is very modest. Nor is it likely that NA/LI is about to explode in intense class struggle. However our friends have recruited here, and they have attracted and continue to attract workers to our conception of a caucus. The RO finds a significant (and largely unexplored) receptivity to its press among many black workers in the industry. This, combined with the increasing isolation of the union leadership, makes it reasonable to

project both black recruitment and the emergence of a caucus with significant support among the rank and file.

With communist greetings,

Hillquist

cc: DC

by R.W.

Introduction

The inactivity of our friends and the passivity of the RO around the T-2 picket line arrests pose the immediate question of whether the failure to institute a union-based and Defense Organization (DO)-supported defense campaign constituted the single most important lost possibility for defense work by the common movement. The deeper lesson, however, is the recognition that legal defense must be conducted as an integral part of trade-union work.

History

The arrests of our friends among others in T-2 for participation in a picket line posed a series of possibilities for defense work in that arena: a campaign to defend victimized militants, a literary intervention explaining the need for a mass defense campaign, a competent and carefully monitored legal defense. Until a long overdue intervention by the Defense and Legal Fraction (DLF)/DO, not even the last possibility was seriously discussed or implemented.

The T-2 case posed a difficult situation. Our friends faced criminal charges rather than direct employer harassment or discharge. The defense efforts, or the lack thereof, did not appear to have any immediate effect on survival at the workplace in this circumstance. Of course, an unsuccessful outcome resulting in jail time might cause the firing of our friends, but the possibility of discharge was viewed as unlikely.

The defense work in this case appears to have been viewed as a legal problem rather than as an integral part of political work in this arena. Further, the absence of an expose of the bureaucrats' failure to build a militant defense campaign seems to have carried over into a sense that we could rely on the legal defense provided by the union officials. It has been argued by the RO district committee reps and the T-2 MO that given the state of the MO and the labor movement in this area, a defense campaign was beyond their capacity. What is disturbing, however, is the fact that the possibilities of initiating such a campaign or, more minimally, presenting in our propoganda the need for a campaign, were not raised for discussion in the MO or explored by the RO. Calls from the DLF center about this case raised the question of a campaign, but the more minimal suggestion of propogandistically raising the need for a defense was not put forward.

As a result our friends relied on legal counsel provided by the union (despite our earlier recognition of his general incompetence) and the bureaucrats' opinion that the charges would eventually be dismissed. Our friends did not call for meetings of the other arrested trade unionists, of which there were 40 or more. Rather, they consciously avoided any such meeting. None of our friends followed the progress of cases which were scheduled in court on days other than those of our friends' cases. The DLF was not called upon to make a contribution to the union defense committee. Indeed, no effort was made to find out if such a committee existed (it didn't).

No motions were made in either the strategic or basic TU locals putting forward the necessity for a campaign, nor was the possibility of doing so considered.

In fact the DLF center agrees that ultimately a campaign might not have been wise. Operational at the time were, at least, the following factors: the then current strike was going down in defeat; the 40 or more arrested trade unionists were demoralized; these arrests followed the unsuccessful overall strike and were accompanied by repeated police attacks on picket lines and an increasingly virulent anti-working class sentiment in the area. Just days before the arrest of our friends, Edwards was beaten up at a stewards' meeting, leaving him shaken and prey to ultra-conservatism. Further, attempts to censure one of our arrested MO friends for advocacy of militant action to defend the strike and picket lines were underway. Finally, as a necessary control on an overly active fraction--which had tended to substitute itself for the bureaucracy--a motion was passed which placed internal consolidation as the fraction's first priority and determined that campaigns and other activities would be decreased. Discussion on this motion, made within weeks of our friends' arrest, did not take up the arrests as a political and organizational factor to be considered in implementing the motion.

Thus the issue posed by the arrest of our friends is not so much whether there was an error in not having a campaign but that there may be an insufficient understanding of legal defense work as an integral part of our political work. The point is that legal defense work is not separate, isolated from, or a foreign element in our friends' trade-union work. It is, rather, and especially in this period, increasingly a necessary part of it.

Legal defense questions involve general political questions and perspectives. Thus, while the question of whether to cop a plea or proceed to trial are legal considerations involving expert evaluation of the strength of the evidence as well as available statutory and constitutional defenses, a case's resolution also involves a political determination of whether a defense campaign is warranted and necessary. It is possible that there will be some instances in which a plea may be unacceptable due to the underlying political context of an arrest.

There is a basis for arguing that, outside of a likely possibility of conviction and jail time which would result in firing, arrests for activities in defense of strikes and picket lines should unquestionably be met by the most vigorous legal defense--optimally within the context of a militant campaign. The principle of defense of a strike or picket line against a government-employer-scab attack resulting in arrests compels an aggressive legal response. Our political perspective to fight for a militant defense of the strike should not stop at the point of arrest.

Moreover, legal defense issues should be an integral part of our propaganda. Throughout the strike action our friends pointed out the increased use of cops to bust union picket lines and to protect

the scabs. They responded with the historical demands of the Trotskyist movement to defend the strike by calling for flying squads, strike committees, hot cargoing, etc. MO leaflets reflected tacit recognition that defense also involves legal defense of those criminally charged by the state for action in defense of the union (newsletter: "The union must defend any victim of company provocateurs").

But in large part, the response by our friends in the arena to the massive arrests of strikers failed to combine both the need for flying squads, etc., with the need for militant legal defense. The sell-out character of the bureaucracy is evident not only because of its failure to militantly defend the strike by the use of flying squads but also by its failure to build a militant defense of arrested strikers. Prior to the arrests we actively demanded those steps necessary to defend the lines and make the strike successful. When the union officials failed to build a militant strike, the result was the victimization of union members. Our friends' propaganda should have integrated the political significance of the arrests and the union's failure to mobilize a militant legal defense with the more classical political criticism of the bureaucracy.

The articles in the RO press on the various arrests of labor militants --the phony "arson" charges in the craft workers strike, the arrests of the base local president and other arrests, as well as articles on our friends' arrests--set forth the clear task of the labor movement to mobilize and defend arrested militants.

In the industry, however, the MO did not propagandize around the lack of union-initiated militant defense against the charges. As indicated earlier, there were no motions, and no effort by MOers to participate in common defense with other union members. In fact, the defense consisted of pure and simple reliance on the bureaucracy. For example, the MO produced a leaflet two days after the arrests but there is neither a mention of the recent arrests nor a call for a militant defense, but rather only a routine call for amnesty for all those arrested and for the formation of flying squads. Later MO leaflets did not discuss the political significance of the failure to defend arrested militants as a criticism of the bureaucrats.

It was not that the MO was inactive during the period following the arrests and thus did not put out leaflets and newsletters. Indeed there was a campaign against the deregistration of one company's workers for their participation in the strike, and one to provide union support for the family of a militant killed by a scab. Yet, we failed to defend our friends when they were victimized along with numerous other union members for having engaged in a heroic action in defense of the strike!

In retrospect, the cause for concern is the failure to consider a defense campaign and/or a propagandistic expose of the union bureaucrats' failure to do so. It may have been merely routinism resulting from the pressures of the period (i.e., the objective status of the fraction) which made our friends unable to do more than res-

pond in a legalistic fashion. The causes for this error are murky but objectively it represents passivity in relying on the bureaucracy, which perhaps resulted from a desire not to pose ourselves in opposition to them so soon after the attacks, in conjunction with a legalistic deviation on the question of defense.

The Need to Provide Our Friends
with Competent Legal Defense

Quality legal representation has been consistently sought in all areas of our work. We seek out and retain lawyers, even where the union or the labor board purportedly represents us. We do this in recognition of the need to have legal counsel which will aggressively fight for us and of the generally unreliable quality of lawyers on retainer to the trade-union bureaucracy or the government.

The T-2 case is our single failure to provide adequate legal defense for our friends. We ignored previously "learned lessons" and relied on the bureaucracy's assessment that the charges would simply be dropped. The union lawyer made court appearances for his "clients" without consultation with them and made himself generally unavailable for out-of-court meetings. In case of a major disaster we had a well-known criminal lawyer waiting in the wings to take over the case.

As a rule, it is preferable to have a lawyer who is reliable, competent and working in our interests from the beginning of a court case. A policy of reliance on a previously demonstrated incompetent union lawyer, with the intention of substituting counsel when and if the union lawyer has sufficiently messed up the case, does not produce the most effective legal representation.

This error comes from a lack of experience, and was compounded by the fact that it was a repeat of a mistake made several months earlier, which we were advised against by a lawyer who had expressed willingness to represent our friends for a nominal fee (by market place standards). While the question of retaining private counsel in the midst of "mass representation" by a union-hired lawyer may raise tactical considerations--particularly in the midst of a campaign around the defense--this is not a question of principle. Given the circumstances of the T-2 case, we should have had private counsel from the beginning for our friends.

The Role of the DLF/DO in Labor Defense Cases

With the establishment of a functioning DLF/DO center, we have striven to conduct all trade-union labor defense cases under joint TUC/DLF guidance. Within the last year the consultation between the TUC and the DLF/DO has become automatic and exists informally as well as on DLF meeting agendas.

The need to work out a consultative relationship between the DLF and the locals around decisions concerning legal defense work is most clearly evidenced by the T-2 case. At the outset of the T-2 picket

line arrests, the DLF was uniformly of the sentiment that a campaign around our friends' arrests within the context of the arrests of other union members should be explored and implemented if possible. It was also difficult for the DLF to comprehend the local response that a campaign was neither possible nor desirable. Despite this, the DLF relegated its role in the decision on the "campaign question" to suggestive phone calls. A motion passed by the DLF in the summer of 1976 merely stated that a campaign in the future in a similar case would be desirable.

The DLF did not bring the question of the T-2 arrests to the WC meeting on 4 July or to the PB. Although not an excuse for this passivity on the T-2 case, the DLF/DO during this time was in the middle of an international defense campaign for another case. Neither the DLF nor the TUC adequately monitored the T-2 case, nor was consultation with the center recognized as essential by the involved local.

The corrective for these failures lies in the development of the DLF/DO center apparatus so that cases are carefully monitored and disputed issues are brought to the PB for discussion and resolution. The DLF recognizes its failure to intervene in the T-2 case and passed the following motion:

We self-criticize the failure of the DO to conscientiously follow up the T-2 picket line defense case, especially to see if an aggressive defense campaign was possible, noting the absence for most of the case of an in-resident TUC, and the passivity of the T-2 fraction and the DO rep.

In addition there is a clear need for a DO rep in the area whose main RO task is the defense arena. It is the presence of someone whose prime concern and political responsibility is defense work which will be definitive. While this person does not have to be a lawyer, it is recognized that legal expertise is desirable for the area. It is not, however, the precedent for competent defense work.

The public role of the DO in trade-union defense cases is being clarified. A general formula for DO participation in labor defense cases takes into account the fact that the DO does not substitute itself for the trade-union movement. Thus we recognize that the best labor defense campaign is carried out under the auspices of the union. Alternatively, we strive for a defense committee initiated and run by our friends. If a union-based defense committee is impossible, a DO-run campaign would be considered.

Thus, where defense is necessitated by company harassment or discharge the public role of the DO is usually circumspect. Our priority is to build a union-based defense committee, optimally supported and funded by the union. The DO's role is to give assistance to the union defense committee in the form of fundraising, publicity, legal fees, etc.

The possibility of a T-2 defense campaign posed a situation for

the DO to play a greater public role in a union/caucus-run defense campaign. When the state attacks our friends, the defense campaign naturally lends itself to efforts going beyond the union.

--R.W., for the DO
10 December 1976

ADDENDUM

Leafletting Cases and the NLRB

The "fight" for our friends' leafletting rights at Mid-Atlantic II began in the heat of an election campaign in which they had been able to expose the use of a company typewriter to produce leaflets attacking both our friends and other militants. In the course of this campaign our friends found themselves greatly hampered by the fact that they were unable to distribute their literature on company property without risking discipline.

The first NLRB charge filed with respect to this company policy was withdrawn when the company agreed to "change" their rule on literature distribution. A new rule was promulgated but our friends were still not allowed to distribute their literature and so they returned to the NLRB. The case took six months to come to trial and six to nine additional months for a final decision. During the entire period the case was never mentioned in any of our friends' propaganda.

Needless to say, our friends did not challenge the local union bureaucracy's failure to grieve the company's denial of their leafletting rights either in their newsletter or at union meetings.

The failure to integrate the leafletting case into their other work and propaganda reflected our friends' legalistic approach to the case. There was a tendency to view bringing a charge to the Labor Board as simply an expedient action to enable our friends to distribute literature on company property. It was seen simultaneously as meaning nothing in terms of our overall political work while obtaining something quite important for our propaganda work. A possible explanation is that our friends believed themselves unable to propagandize about this issue without falling into a legalistic campaign in which they would only build union reliance on bourgeois state institutions to win concessions from the company. Our friends appear to have experienced difficulty with and hesitancy about attempting to explain a likely victory at the Board. They were concerned about avoiding a conclusion that the enforcement of their rights was "victory" and, more importantly, about avoiding any intimation that the Board is an ally of the honest militants against the bureaucracy. Other factors were important as well, however. In particular was a concern about polemicizing prematurely against the bureaucracy. Most significantly this case was never discussed by the legal counsel/DLF/DO or TUC from any viewpoint except the legal one until its virtual conclusion.

It was not until after a report of the final decision was published in the bourgeois press and our friends were questioned about it by workers at the plant that we made our first public statement concerning the case. Thus, both propaganda opportunities and campaign possibilities were overlooked by our failure to consider the leafletting case as an integral part of our friends' political work.

In retrospect it seems that two important points could have been made by our friends in this case. One was to have exposed the bureaucrats' failure to protect and fight for the rights of all union members against the company. The second was to explain the role of the NLRB as an arm of the bourgeois state which we can and should use against the employer but not against the union/union bureaucrats. The failure to place our friends' Board action within the proper propaganda or campaign context allowed the union membership to understand our "victory" only in the terms of bourgeois ideology rather than our friends' analysis.

In general it may be said that where necessary and/or useful to our work we seek to bring affirmative legal actions against employers in defense of our rights as unionists. However, there is a major pitfall in such actions for which we must be constantly on guard. Many of the rights protected by Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act are also covered in the terms of existing contracts between unions and employers. Where the issue or right is covered explicitly or implicitly in the terms of a contract, the employer may seek to use the contract as a defense for its actions. Thus, enforcement of Section 7 rights will necessarily involve an invalidation of the contract clause, a form of state interference in union affairs to which we are opposed. A more extreme variant of the same problem arises if the NLRB or some comparable agency takes it upon itself to include the union in the action we have brought--and they may very well end up siding with the company against us. Thus, before commencing any such action, the extent to which the contract is involved must be carefully considered.

The difficulty of foreseeing this problem and attempting to maneuver around it was most severe in the T-1 leafletting case. First, we began the action in a manner which would have involved a contractual provision. After extricating ourselves from that, we found that the Labor Board made the union an "interested party" and invited the union to participate in the action. In addition, the Labor Board lawyer was determined to subpoena internal union records for use in the case. At the point in which the union lawyer was volunteering union documents to the Labor Board and the company, we withdrew the case. Our attempts to keep ourselves clear of a situation where we could be accused of involving the union in a government suit were fruitless and had the potential of undercutting our authority as the only group opposed in principle to government intervention in internal union affairs, particularly in an industry where the issue is critical and ever-present. (In fact, the union newspaper noted an union executive board discussion of our friends' case which "involved the union.")

In Maurice's case, there was insufficient attention paid to the terms of the contract when the initial consultation on a leaflet-

ting case was conducted. The fraction did not know that contract restrictions on leafletting, soliciting and distribution preclude our use of the Board. Our necessary decision to stop building for a Labor Board complaint, after approval for the case was achieved in the Maurice defense committee (which had evoked the enthusiastic participation of the steward working with us), caused a certain amount of disorientation and dissatisfaction from our steward supporter.

Labor Board actions are complicated and can only be considered after the most thorough political discussion. Furthermore, their utility is limited, transitory and our most minimal success must be refought with each changed circumstance.

--V.W., 10 December 1976

ADDENDUM 2

Further on the National Labor Relations Board

Because the NLRB is an arm of the bourgeois state, it as often facilitates union-busting as it facilitates union recognition. From time to time, it allows an apparent expansion of the "rights" of trade unionists, as in the so-called leafletting cases. However, many of the precedents on which we relied in the leafletting cases were brought to the NLRB and won by union-busters on the theory that those opposed to unions have as much right to distribute and solicit as those in favor of unions. Any apparent expansion of rights by the Labor Board occurs only within the context of its primary function: to restrain and cripple the trade-union movement.

Defense Against Harassment and Discharge in the Trade Unions

In the last 18 months, our friends have successfully fought two firings in West Coast LI and are currently attempting to fight a purge campaign in Mid-Atlantic II.

The LI cases provide good examples of aggressive defense campaigns from both a legal and political point of view. Although some errors were made in both cases, their relatively successful outcomes were due at least in part to the defense work of our friends. Another important factor is believed to have been pressure within the International for more arbitration of West Coast cases.

In both cases we were successful in pressuring the union bureaucrats to fight for us. This was accomplished primarily by drawing supporters from outside the existing MO into defense committees. In Maurice's case a union steward joined the defense committee. Optimally we are seeking an official union defense committee. Additionally, in each case our friends sought competent legal counsel and attempted to pursue all available legal actions.

During Waters' campaign a total of four separate legal actions were initiated. Yet, while we utilized various legal means to put

pressure on the company and, simultaneously, conducted an aggressive campaign with the union, we never propagandized or explained our attitude toward the arbitrations process or the Labor Board. Of course, in any given instance there may exist tactical reasons for not discussing a legal action at a particular time but our failure to do so was not the product of a conscious decision but of a conception that separated legal actions from the campaign as a whole.

In Maurice's case we seized upon the leafletting issue with the intention of incorporating it into the campaign. This was an excellent idea and would have no doubt added something to the campaign. Unfortunately, the contractual limitation on leafletting made this unworkable.

The defense problems posed in the Mid-Atlantic fraction, while apparently less serious because there have been no discharges yet, are in fact tactically more difficult. Our friends are faced with a quietly and systematically escalating form of harassment. Two of the major targets have physical weaknesses resulting from plant injuries which have increased their vulnerability.

Our friends were somewhat slow in responding to initial company advances primarily because there was nothing extraordinary about periodic and relatively isolated incidents of harassment. By the time it became clear that an aggressive defense campaign was needed, both the employer and the union officials had had considerable opportunity to probe for weak spots and had developed a rather accurate picture of our friends' vulnerability. Specifically, they pin-pointed which kinds of jobs would be physically difficult, if not impossible, for our friends to perform.

The first sign came when one friend with relatively high seniority was removed from his long-held job shortly after he had filed several grievances--one of them filed jointly with other workers. This company action would have made a good basis for an NLRB harassment charge (or at least the best our friends have had to date). A grievance was filed, but the matter was not pursued at the Labor Board. It was not clear at the time that consistent transferring from job to job was one way in which the company would probe for weak spots in our friends. It is precisely because our friends are good workers and "smart" in their conduct that the company was forced to probe. Our friends continue to be handicapped by the fact that the company was able to harass them by taking rather subtle advantage of their physical weaknesses rather than having to resort to more obvious techniques. A charge at the Labor Board after the initial transfer of Black, even if ultimately withdrawn, might have discouraged the company in its pursuit of Black.

The fact that this opportunity was allowed to slip by resulted largely from the relative inexperience in dealing with this form of harassment. The DLF/DO counsel failed to explore fully what might have made a successful Board case in the belief that a more definitive action by the company was necessary. By the time it became clear that the company was building a discipline record to

enable it to "legitimately" fire our friends, they were forced to go to the Board in an effort to save their jobs.

Both the fraction and the DLF/DO looked to the Board for assistance in saving the jobs. We learned, not surprisingly, that the NLRB is not primarily an agency for saving the jobs of victimized militants. To establish a case of harassment as a result of union activity it is necessary to show: 1) concerted activity and 2) either company harassment for which the company offers a reason that is clearly a pretext or harassment in the form of disparate treatment among employees (e.g., X's medical restriction is not honored by the company but 15 other employees with restrictions are given jobs they can perform without physical harm). Even if all these factors can be established, the Board will defer to the established arbitration procedure unless union animus (i.e., "hostility") is established. This is what is commonly known as the "Collyerizing" process. (The case in which this procedure was first used was NLRB v. Collyer Wire, hence, the term "Collyerizing.") The amount of animus it is necessary to establish is inversely proportional to the seriousness with which the Board views the case. Thus, in the leafletting cases, which in the Board's view "go to the heart of Section 7," union inaction and disinterest may suffice for a showing of animus. In cases of simple harassment and discharge, absent an obvious Section 7 violation, the test for showing animus is much more stringent. If the union officials have gone through the usual motions of filing grievances, etc., union animus will be almost impossible to prove despite a solid reputation as an oppositionist within a union (e.g., Waters' case was "Collyerized").

In the case of harassment like that experienced at Mid-Atlantic, the NLRB will be helpful but only in a limited fashion. They will take a charge and they will investigate, but in all likelihood they will not issue a complaint. If the charge is withdrawn or "Collyerized" both the company and the union will see it as a setback for us, but the company will also know that our friends are prepared to fight, that they are laying the foundation for a legal case in which its own activities will be scrutinized. The union will know that while our friends are not going to sue them, the arbitration process will be watched by the NLRB. Interestingly enough, one of the company's demands in Waters' case was that there be no further legal proceedings based on her discharge and that those in existence be discontinued! There are advantages to be gained by going to the NLRB and other state agencies in harassment and discharge cases and they should not be ignored.

--V.W., 15 December 1976

CORRECTIONS

The following proposed corrections to documents in previous TU bulletins should be noted:

From Hillquist:

I wish to express my appreciation for the in general excellent job done of editing my history of the NA/II fraction. At the same time I would like to bring your attention to two errors in the document distributed by the center.

1. On page 5 of the document, in the last sentence, which begins with "Finally, whether" and ends with "take advantage of it," the words, "the fraction" should appear between the words "failed" and "would."

2. On page 9, in the final paragraph, the second sentence (the fraction produced a leaflet for the occasion which called for a sit-in demonstration!) should be punctuated with a period instead of the exclamation point which appears in the edited document.

If possible I would like a note indicating at least the second error distributed along with the document, since that exclamation point adds emphasis and therefore a political significance, where none is intended.

--25 November 1976

From Watson:

On page 39 of the TUC Discussion Bulletin No. 2 the NA/II No. 6 Fraction "Profiles and Security Guidelines" are reprinted. However, they are incorrectly dated 5 October 1976, giving the impression that these two motions were passed at the same time as the longer Tasks and Perspectives (reprinted on page 36 of the Bulletin) was discussed. Actually the "Profiles" motion was passed at a joint fraction meeting on 26 June 1976 and would have been superseded by the 5 October Tasks and Perspectives (which went through the No. 6 fraction only in outline form, was not voted on; it was written up by Watson in collaboration with Douglas, Waters and Clarke; and was subsequently rejected as a violation of the West Coast RO motion on II and the NA II joint Fraction Shop Floor Motion); the Revised Security Guidelines were passed at a joint fraction meeting on 21 June 1976.

Also the 5 October Tasks and Perspectives incorrectly states that there was a six-month layoff in the plant in 1975; actually the layoff occurred in the last six months of 1974.

--13 December 1976

From Hillquist:

Everyone present at the 17 July 1976 joint NA/II meeting was contacted in regard to the following correction except Waters and Clarke who could not be reached. All contacted approve this correction:

We affirm:

1. that the vote tally which appears in the TUC Discussion Bulletin No. 2 in "Addendum to NA/II No. 2 Report on Plant Orientation" is incorrect;

2. that the vote tally which appears in the "NA Joint II Meeting Minutes" of 17 July 1976 and approved at the NA joint II meeting of 19 September 1976 is correct, namely,

3. that the vote on the three motions was by roll call, and

4. that the vote on Douglas' motion was:

in favor: full Douglas, Tott

opposed: full Hillquist, Perry,
Clarke, Waters,
Watson, Redding,
Hunter

cons Adler, Tanne, Marv

5. that the vote on Hillquist's motion was:

in favor: full Hillquist, Tott

opposed: full Perry, Clarke,
Waters, Watson,
Redding, Hunter

cons Adler, Tanne, Marv

abstaining: full Douglas

6. that the vote on Watson's motion was:

in favor: full Perry, Clarke,
Waters, Watson,
Redding, Hunter

cons Adler, Tanne, Marv

opposed: full Tott, Hillquist,
Douglas

7. that in all other respects, that is, the wording of the motions, what appears in the Discussion Bulletin is essentially correct.

--18 December 1976