

DISCUSSION BULLETIN
published by the Trade Union Commission

GENERAL MEMORANDUM

December 1976
No. 5
\$1.00



Table of Contents

	<u>page</u>
<u>Reports and Perspectives</u>	
-Northeast GW by Macki, 3 November 1976	3
-Northeast PW by Klancy, 3 November 1976	5
-Northeast II by Harris, Park and Daniel, 27 November 1976	7
<u>Further on Shop Floor Representation</u>	
-Confusionist Terminology by Douglas, 14 December 1976	11
<u>The TDC and RO Press Coverage</u>	
-Reply to Douglas by Brule, 18 December 1976	15
<u>General Memorandum</u>	
-What Underlies the Trade-Union Discussion by Knox, 20 December 1976	18

GW TASKS AND PERSPECTIVES

by Macki

The past year has witnessed the GW fraction continually shrink as prospective members were withdrawn for other assignments. The fact that only one friend remains surfaced and with a high political profile will determine the course to be undertaken.

Our one friend, due to lack of political reinforcement, has been forced to do mainly propagandistic work in the union (resulting in election to both the national and provincial labor congresses). However his role as a shop steward has forced him to be an exemplary activist on the shop floor, and agitate around specific issues in the union meetings (firing of a victimized ORO, strike motions, etc.).

The increased management harassment and the lack of a stable base have encouraged our friend to respond selectively to issues in attempting to mobilize this passive support.

GWO, historically a militant union, is only beginning to encounter the speed-up, layoffs of automation, that GWI has faced over the last four or five years. Consequently, the GWO bureaucracy has not even made a pretence of a fight against layoffs, and as a result, the GWO membership is very passive and craft conscious. While our friend works in that area where the automation is being presently introduced, the bureaucracy has seen fit to ignore the situation, as the majority of members is not yet affected. Our friend has much trouble regularly combatting the anti-GWO sentiment amongst his fellow workers, who were almost all formerly in the big T6 union. However, his role as shop steward has generated a real and earned respect from the workers.

With this in mind, the tasks and perspectives of GWO center around increasing propaganda heading into a contract year, addressing the automation question, wage controls and the bureaucracy. The increased harassment coupled with the speed-up will undoubtedly lead to firings (as has already happened) giving our friend a basis to agitate and do united-front work drawing in possible contacts.

GWO is not all that ORO concentrated, at least in the Northeast. The only ORO is the chief steward who is a supporter of CPC(M-L). Always an economist opportunist, this person has taken of late to criticizing the bureaucracy while putting forward his own useless slogans. He presently appears to be building a base of support on his authority as chief steward and possibly a stepping stone to the bureaucracy. As the main opponent, an OTO was fired/quit, the main political opponent remains the chief steward. Our friend has as much authority in his section as the chief steward, and hence is able to debate him quite successfully at union meetings.

The social-democratic fake-militant leadership of the union is gradually losing its large support and the possibility exists to run our friend for president in the spring, doing a lot of propaganda.

The present need is to either reinforce our friend or recruit

someone from the union, the latter being the most preferable. While our friend has a number of supporters, who will come to union meetings to vote our motions or elect our friend, we have been unable to consolidate any. Regular sales of the RO papers at our friend's work location should be continued. In the past period three or four fellow workers have consistently bought the press. Our friend is considering initiating an RO press reading class to stimulate political discussion and perhaps draw any possible RO contacts.

Our friend should continue to keep his stewardship, as his authority is partly earned from this role, as well as his three years in the position. In the upcoming period of contract negotiations and wage controls, the perspective remains contacting, propagandizing and selective agitation. There can be no caucus perspective for the next period and stable reinforcement would take about one year (full-time non-union and probationary period).

--Macki
3 November 1976

[Note: The local T&P discussion produced a motion naming one likely candidate to seek work in GWO as a priority. This, however, cannot take place until said friend can be freed up from his current assignment.

--Daniel
6 November 1976]

PW TASKS AND PERSPECTIVES

by Klancy

There are two people presently in the work place--Klancy, who has been in PW for about ten months, and Carmen, who just started work and will be off probation at the beginning of December. There is also one contact at the work place who started work about the same time as Carmen.

Much of the T&P discussion centered on what the conception of our work in PW would be, given the fact that it is infested with OROs (the local president is a Maoist), so that the work itself takes on a dual character of ORO and TU work. Also as one of the perspectives of having people in PW, which is a campus union, was to supplement the work of the campus fraction as well as using it as a training ground for ORO and TU work, it was felt that the relation between PW and the campus fraction and the work Klancy would do on campus should be clarified.

Insofar as PW is ORO infested, Klancy has raised her profile more rapidly than is usually the case in other TU situations. However, the OROs in PW are also big on having a variety of different committees and groups around such issues as automation, education, etc. As these are attended mainly by the OROs, tending to take the character of blocs between the OROs, and are ignored by most everyone else, it was felt that these should be avoided unless there was something to be gained from them, i.e., contacts.

The rest of the T&P discussion centered on consolidation of the fraction. Since the fraction was established each meeting has been concerned with Klancy's intervention into union meetings which have been taking place quite frequently (once or twice weekly) as they have just gone through a contract period. As Carmen is still on probation, her integration and participation in the fraction has been minimal. It was proposed that Klancy meet informally with Carmen to aid in her integration into the work.

As far as the contact in PW is concerned no clear perspective for his relation to our work was outlined, given questions concerning his political development and ability to do TU work with us at this point in time. However it was established that Klancy would contact him in order to keep on top of his work record etc. and familiarize him with the character of PW.

T&P Motions

1. recommend that Leonard become a full voting member of PW; that Klancy become a full voting member of the campus fraction.
2. that our friend Klancy sell at lit tables and events and be made available for campus meetings when the need arises.
3. that our friend Klancy's profile as an RO supporter be reinforced by her use of both RO newspapers.
4. that we generally see our friend Klancy as having a high propagandistic profile while avoiding the numerous committees

and ad hoc groupings that arise in this union and centering mainly on local union meetings and contacting.

5. that we see our friend Carmen in this period of probation participating in the internal fraction life conversing regularly with Klancy over the work place and maintaining a good work record and attending relevant campus fractions.
6. that Klancy be the fraction contact with Roy.

[The preceding motions were presented and voted for unanimously at the PW fraction meeting on 25 October and at the RO local meeting on 30 October 1976.]

--Klancy
3 November 1976

NORTH EAST II PERSPECTIVES
(EAST AND WEST)

by Harris, Park and Daniel

The following is a draft written from notes made by Park and Harris and presented by Park at the 31 October local meeting as part of a general T&P discussion. Following the thesis are motions passed at this meeting.

1. While the implantation into II East and West is an integral part of the WHIP program and a perspective of establishing working fractions in this area, this implantation must remain subordinate to the maintenance of the RO as a national entity and its international commitments. That is, while we in no way underestimate the importance of this implantation in terms of overall strategy and are deeply committed to a membership maintenance program for those friends working in the industry, we also realize the RO's organizational commitment to maintaining a real presence in the Northwest. If organizational reinforcement for the Northwest cannot otherwise be found, we understand that a radical solution might well mean the ripping up of one II fraction in order to send them needed personnel.

2. Levi, who is not presently implanted, but who has a considerable amount of trade-union experience, must take all necessary steps toward obtaining employment in II. It is possible that successful implantation of Levi could free a presently employed friend in the industry for assignment in the Northwest. As well, if Taylor is freed up from his campus assignment and is unable, within the next period, to gain employment in GWO, then he should also apply to II. While it is preferable to maintain at least three friends in each location, it would be possible to maintain a holding operation in either the East or West location if the fraction heads remained in their plants.

3. Our friends in II East and West have little trade-union experience. While both fraction heads have worked in the GW fraction and both have had experience in the RMG-supported GW grouping, neither have any experience as active trade unionists. This situation demands that the fraction rely heavily on consultations with the TUC and work closely with the local leadership, especially Maki, an active trade unionist and leading committee alternate.

4. As our friends in II work in two distinct work places, the present fraction should be split into two, II East and II West. Harris is projected as head of the West fraction and Park is projected as head of the East II fraction. In this period and until the fractions' tasks become separate, joint fraction meetings should be held.

5. Although there is an II plant farther east than the II East plant in which our friends are presently employed (II Far East) which is larger than II East and which has a history of militancy, the projection is to remain at II East for the present time. Not only is II Far East twice as far from the city as II East, but attempting to transfer might mean splitting up the already small forces. II East is a young local but it nests supporters from the IS, CCL(M-L), TCG

(a small underground Maoist cluster), CPL and, likely, the CP.

6. One friend in II East and one in II West work "B" shift while our other four friends work "A" shift. Not only does this make scheduling fraction meetings difficult, but it also makes it extremely awkward for fraction heads to maintain regular contact with our friends on the "B" shift. Following the probation period the two friends on "B" shift should attempt to transfer to "A" shift. If at all possible, future implants should attempt to get on the "A" shift.

7. II West consists of two plants on one industrial site. Kirk works in the "T" plant while our other two friends work in the "A" plant. Workers in both plants belong to the same union local. There is no projection to have Kirk seek a transfer to the "A" plant.

8. After finishing the probationary period, our friends project the development of profiles to be in accord with the guidelines approved at the NA/OC meeting of 27 June 1976:

In the coming period our No. 6 friends who have completed their probation should begin evolving toward a profile as concerned trade unionists with firm opinions on key social issues. The following are general and necessarily not exhaustive guidelines to orient the friends in the process.

1. Learn the contract with the perspective of establishing a reputation as someone who knows the rules and can be turned to for advice.
2. Evaluate your work area as to its problems and the attitudes of your foreman, union reps and co-workers.
3. Develop a network of reliable friends.
4. Avoid the OMOs.
5. Read OMO newsletters and leaflets and appear thoughtful and curious about union issues.
6. Develop a profile as socially aware individuals with definite opinions on key issues. This means the elaboration of anti-racist and anti-sexist views and a cautious and thoughtful indication of anti-government, anti-company and anti-capitalist views.

9. While there is no projection for verbal interventions at union local meetings in the immediate future, it is recognized that attendance at these meetings is essential in order to develop a feel for the life of the locals. Our friends project that the fraction heads will attend their first local union meetings after their attainment of seniority status, in order to ascertain general attendance level and OMO supporter presence. Our other friends will attend subsequent meetings after they are off probation.

10. The fraction education program initially projected is too ambitious considering the fact that our friends are also involved in the internal education program of the local. The intention is to revamp the initial program so that it is still able to cover the projected material without an unrealistic and overburdening amount of reading and preparation. The class entitled "History and

Development of RO-Supported TU Work" should be projected as a local educational to be given at the end of the present series. The same can also be done with the class on "class-struggle militant" work. The class on company contracts should proceed as scheduled, but it must be noted that ongoing attention must be paid to learning the contracts. A class on the history, constitution and by-laws of the union should be retained as a fraction educational given to a combined fraction meeting in the new year. The other projected classes, including those centered on readings on the industry in the RO press, should be dispensed with, but our friends are strongly encouraged to read the listed articles. The fraction heads must encourage discussion on these articles both informally and within the fraction.

11. At the present time and for the foreseeable future, the average workweek of our friends is on the order of 48 hours a week. Driving time to the work locations is 45 minutes to 1 hour. This schedule means that our friends have precious little time for other assignments or leisure. Some of our friends are more pressed for time than others by virtue of the fact that they also perform a number of tasks or have charge of special assignments. Keeping in mind that a considerable amount of emphasis must be put on membership maintenance, we seek to ensure that our friends' workloads are not excessive, attempting to free them up from assignments that interfere with political integration and development, while encouraging our friends to keep or take on assignments that they can handle.

12. Known OROs with supporters in II West are supporters of the IS, CPL and CP, with CPL supporters being the most conspicuously active. In II East the IS, CP, CPL, CCL(M-L) and TCG have supporters operating, with supporters of CCL(M-L) and the IS being most active. It will be necessary to monitor their press and have regular reports on industry-related articles in the fraction.

13. If the political views/sympathies of the IIers become known prematurely this will eliminate the possibility for a normal gradual emergence and could lead to their isolation. After probation, OROs will be the main concern around security. However it is important for the political sanity of IIers that they not be completely cut off from the RO and its work. Since there is little overlap between the RO's ORO work and the Stalinists in II, it is projected that IIers could attend RO classes and forums and LSA and RMG forums after probation. In neither case would they intervene. Meetings likely to be attended by the Stalinists or IS or meetings related to the industry must be avoided. IIers can also begin plant sales although not at those plants known to contain OROs active in their plant.

14. While the II fraction has not been in a position to display a character of "incapacity" or a "retrograde" character it realizes it is at least just as weak as the North American, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest fractions. As such we note the motion that was passed on the West Coast on 4 July 1976.

15. The fraction must prepare for the upcoming TU conference.

A special combined meeting of the fractions should be held for a preliminary discussion of the conference material.

Motions passed at the No. 1 October Northeast local meeting:

1. We reaffirm that the Northeast local T&P are based on the need for organizational consolidation and cadre building and that our main work in the next period will continue to be internal education/membership maintenance (especially II), recruitment and propagandizing around the full program. Public political work in the next period will continue to concentrate on the USec, primarily the RMG (we note the rumored fusion of the RMG/LSA). We must also continue to do political battle with the IS and WL. In addition we note that certain exemplary interventions not directly sponsored by these OROs may well be warranted.
2. That one additional comrade be assigned to work with Leonard with campus as their first priority. That Taylor stay in campus fraction until replaced. The desired replacement is Ames or Delgado if available.
3. That when replaced in the campus fraction Taylor's industrial priorities are GW first, II second.
4. That Ames and Levi have as their goal any good job in order for Ames eventually to get a night job and Levi to get into II.
5. If one more additional friend gets into II, i.e., seven, then one friend in II can be freed up for transfer to the Northwest, seeking to maintain three friends in each work location.

--Harris, Park, Daniel
27 November 1976

CONFUSIONIST TERMINOLOGY
AND SHOP-FLOOR REPRESENTATION

by Douglas

So far as I can tell, the dispute over shop-floor representation (see exchange of letters in TUC Discussion Bulletin No. 2) is largely a terminological one. I am for calling for "elected working line stewards" for every foreman, while the WC/II fraction is for calling for "one full committeeman" for every foreman. While I believe my formulation is superior, is the one our II fractions have generally used, and was the demand approved in the TUC motions of 10 March 1976 for the upcoming bargaining period (some 2-1/2 months before the exchange of letters, which gave the WC/II fraction time to motivate a different demand if they felt it warranted), nevertheless it is not a very important question.

Further, Robinson's letter and the fraction motion, rather than clarifying the issue, only served to further confuse it. While I agree with most of the points in Robinson's letter, they do not deal with the issue in dispute. Robinson's letter includes a number of important arguments--the need for a strong shop-floor network, the need for the right to strike, the insufficiency of the present grievance procedure/union representation set-up--but these were not in dispute.

I do regret my attempt at irony which apparently was lost on the WC/II fraction. Thinking that I was polemicizing against a demand for one full-time committeeman for every 20-25 workers, I tried to poke fun at this: "I even wonder what a committeeman for every foreman would do! Write a grievance every five minutes and then start over with each worker every hour on a new one?" This ill-fated attempt at irony apparently led the fraction to believe I had a conception of "filing ever more grievances" which is "overly legalistic." I should have kept in mind an injunction of Comrade Jim's at an ed board meeting: that only the most skillful writers should make attempts at irony, for it is frequently not understood and is taken literally.

I do, however, think the fraction had ample evidence, prior to the exchange of letters, of my advocacy of the right to strike over all grievances and its close link to the demand for line stewards. I had made these points in a "Perspectives on the Contract" document in February and had written or edited three leaflets for national bargaining conferences in that same period, not to mention past leaflets of the NA/II fraction. I did not raise the right to strike issue in my letter questioning the formulation "one full committeeman" not because it is not closely linked, but because it was not the issue in dispute.

To minimize confusion, let me outline the linked positions I support:

- 1) For the right to strike over all grievances on the department and local level, without International authorization.
- 2) For elected working line stewards, fully empowered and pro-

tected by contract (which would include the right to leave their job, being replaced by a utility or relief man, when some worker in their area needed them or if they had to take some action).

3) More full-time union representation: reduce the ratio between workers and committeemen (an open-ended formulation, just as a "substantial wage increase" is, but which could be quantified; today if it's one committeeman for every 250 workers, for example, we could demand one for every 150, or 100, or whatever. But like the wage issue, I think we generally want to leave this open-ended and not get bogged down in the figures).

When I first read the WC/II fraction's leaflet calling for "one full committeeman for every foreman" I drew the conclusion that I think most of our friends in II would draw, and that most other II workers would draw: that this is a demand for one full-time, non-working committeeman for every foreman. Because that is what "committeemen" are in the vast bulk of the union!

Robinson says,

"You have confused our demand for 'full (power) committeemen' with 'full-time' committeemen. Not even our present-day committeemen are necessarily full-time. Many of them work a nominal hour on the line at the start of the work day before suiting up to go answer calls."

When I read this, I was quite incredulous. Do their committeemen really work?!? Have we seen them work? I know of no other large plant in the union where this is the case. There are very small plants that do not have a large enough workforce to meet the terms of the contract to have any full-time union reps. But in all the major plants, committeemen are full time. To get the committeemen to work even five minutes on the line is unheard of, would be a major company attack, and I cannot imagine it being tolerated under normal conditions.

This is the case in the heartland of the industry, where nearly two-thirds of the union is located. If conditions are different on the West Coast, perhaps the relative isolation of the plant from the bulk of the union has resulted in an erosion of what is common practice elsewhere.

Though this is conjecture, I suspect the real reason behind the fraction's choice of the term "full committeeman" is related to a dispute in their local over line stewards, particularly since Robinson's letter begins on this point. Line stewards are a non-implemented provision of their local union constitution but are not covered in the local agreement with the company. As I recall, there was a dispute in the local over implementation of the provision for line stewards, with the Maoists pushing for implementation and the fraction warning of the dangers of this without contractual protection. Perhaps in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the Maoists they have decided to call for "one full committeeman" instead of "line stewards." It was this possibility I had in mind

when I invited the fraction to explain their motivation for the "full committeeman" demand, which has not been used by our other II fractions nor, I believe, has been used by the WC/II fraction until recently.

If the WC/II fraction has not substituted the "one full committeeman" demand for the demand of "full protected and empowered line stewards" (this is not clear from Robinson's letter which mentions both and skips over the problem by saying "we can work out the terminology"), then there is a real terminological/conceptual jumble. Are you then calling for both "one full committeeman" and "one line steward" for every foreman? That would appear to be nonsensical, since they would appear to be the same person.

Barring some extremely strong local reason, I believe it is an error to call for "one full committeeman" instead of "elected working line stewards" for every foreman. Aside from how it is explained in discussion bulletins, it will mean to most workers full-time union reps for every foreman (or in the possible case of WC/II, nearly full-time reps). It is this that I don't think is "believable" or a felt need of most workers nor is it necessary to accomplish our goal of a "strong network" of shop-floor representation capable of emptying the plant, or stopping work in a given department. This could be accomplished quite handily with elected working line stewards, more committeemen and the right to strike over all grievances...and our leadership. There is a strong felt need for something other than the present grievance procedure and occasionally seen committeemen, and the demands above meet that need.

In addition, the steward/committeeman distinction and terminology have a strong history in this particular company (WC/II's). It is not accidental that the line steward provision languished in their local constitution. This is a vestige of the old stewards' system which was destroyed along with the stewards' power to call work actions and replaced by the grievance procedure and committeeman setup. This was a long and bitter struggle.

Initially, the union's organizational structure provided for one steward for approximately every 25 workers. These were the real backbone of the union. Particularly after the victory in the winter of '36-'37, the workers flexed their muscles and resorted to direct action often and easily, and these stewards often called quickie strikes and department sit-downs over grievances. Between the initial agreement settling the major sit-down strike in early 1937 and the subsequent union-company negotiations which ended a month later, there were 18 significant sit-down strikes, often called over harassment of militant union workers who were resuming work.

The company was going wild and demanded an end to this state of affairs. Though the union negotiators sought recognition of the stewards system, they relented and accepted the company proposal of a multi-step grievance procedure and five to nine committeemen for each plant to process these grievances. Additionally, the company secured a clause banning work stoppages until the grievance procedure

had been exhausted and the International union officials approved the strike.

This was not so easy to enforce. The stewards still existed and the workers were hot. There were 170 sit-downs in the next four months and innumerable quickie strikes. The corporation approached the union demanding a supplementary agreement authorizing company discipline including firing for those who authorized strikes without International approval. This was aimed directly at the stewards. The International executive board agreed. And at its convention near the end of 1937, the union amended its own constitution to forbid strikes without International authorization. This was opposed by a small group of delegates led by the SWP's fraction head in the industry.

Things remained pretty turbulent until World War II. The no-strike pledge gutted the stewards' power and encouraged management to flout even the cumbersome grievance procedure. The union hierarchy concentrated most of its energy on enforcing the grievance procedure and curbing work stoppages. Though there was a big increase in unauthorized work stoppages especially in the later years of the war, the union's policies had gone a long way to destroy the stewards' system.

In 1946, the newly elected union president authorized the department directors of the second and third largest corporations covered by union contracts to agree to supplementary agreements authorizing the discipline and dismissal of those leading unauthorized strikes. The witch-hunting purge initiated in 1947 went the rest of the way to cleaning out the whole layer of reds and militants who had played prominent roles and were often stewards. By the mid-fifties, with a few local variations and hold-outs, the stewards' system and power had been largely crushed; the one-steward-for-every-foreman principle had largely been replaced by the grievance procedure and a few full-time committeemen, who were increasingly cogs in the bureaucratic machine. This was also part and parcel of the union's post-war bargaining strategy: relatively high wages and fringe benefits in exchange for allowing management virtually a free hand within the plants, allowing for the enormous leaps in speed-up and productivity which has made this industry so profitable.

We do not want to go back to the "good old days" by abandoning full-time union representation or committeemen. Indeed, we demand more of them.

We want the right to strike over all grievances and the strengthening of the union on the shop floor through a system of elected working line stewards.

--Douglas
14 December 1976

REPLY TO DOUGLAS ON RO PRESS COVERAGE

by Brule

In his second document, comrade Douglas asserts that he went through several stages in his thinking on the issue of the TDC/UMW. It does in fact seem that Douglas is making a serious effort to come to grips with his political methodology. Nonetheless, I believe the document contains formulations sufficiently contradictory and awry to call into question how much Douglas has evaluated his past errors.

In the first section of the document, Douglas disavows his earlier position of entry into the TDC; subsequently, however, he criticizes the paper for being too harsh in dealing with groups like the TDC. Notwithstanding his assertions that these criticisms are "secondary," Douglas makes a strong case that he is willing to throw out programmatic considerations in the face of the TDC's ability to attract a certain layer of militant trade unionists.

Douglas claims that the articles unfairly characterized the TDC as a simple amalgam of bureaucrats, reformists, and I.S.ers, omitting the fact that it also consisted of militant workers and was quite heterogeneous. Moreover, according to Douglas, we were wrong to characterize the TDC leadership (e.g., Camarata) as "aspiring bureaucrats" and "simple careerists," since a "process" of change and development was involved. In particular, Douglas says he "winces" at formulations like the following:

"The only difference between the TDC and Louis Peick is that no one has bothered to buy off the TDC yet."

Now, first of all, Douglas allows himself to be suckered by the I.S./TDC's own characterization of the TDC. "Membership" in such an organization is largely illusory. Anyone who pays a few bucks and signs a card can be a "member." Most of those who were members around the time of the contract have long since dropped away. Those who stayed for any period of time were a much smaller group, with fairly consistent reformist political positions.

Moreover, the TDC was not politically heterogeneous nor was its leadership politically amorphous, either. Months before the Detroit wildcat it had a clearly defined reformist program. We knew that it was initiated by supporters of the I.S., a hardened social-democratic outfit. Adapting to its predominantly white male trade-unionist base, it consciously omitted any demands against racial or sexual oppression, or in defense of the Farmworkers against raiding. It took the Teamster leadership to court. At the time of the onset of the nationwide strike it carried illusions in the state, urging Teamsters to send telegrams to President Ford asking him not to invoke a Taft-Hartley injunction. The TDC national executive--despite the presence of several I.S. supporters (who abstained!)--passed an anti-communist provision for its constitution. (It took us quite a while to find this out, since this not-so-democratic organization never reported the results of these meetings to its membership!)

The TDC leadership, including Camarata, fully embraced and

defended these positions. Significantly, there was never any opposition to these positions from the left within TDC. Not even Douglas argues this. Since there was no fundamental political distinction between the TDC and the Teamster bureaucracy we were entirely justified in characterizing the leadership as "aspiring bureaucrats." In fact, if this is false, and the TDC was genuinely in flux and a section of its leadership was open to revolutionary politics, then there ceases to be any principled obstacle to advocating entrism into the TDC! Douglas' position is inherently contradictory and inconsistent: he wants to disavow entrism, but persists in denying that the TDC was a relatively hardened reformist formation run by fake socialists and bureaucrats-on-the-make.

Douglas' criticism of the paper's handling of the Detroit Teamster wildcat is also disturbing. He argues "...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..." First of all, this is a trade-unionist, and not a Bolshevik, criticism. Given the simultaneously incompetent, adventurous and opportunist character of the Detroit TDC wildcat leadership, we certainly did not want to make our central intervention the demand that the wildcat be continued!

Moreover, this argument is very irritating in another respect. Douglas criticizes the press for not being hard enough on the TDC's betrayal of the Detroit wildcat at the same time that, by his own admission, he was pushing entry into the TDC! This simply does not wash. On the other hand, I am not certain that he grasps the contradiction and understands that the question of entrism into a group like the TDC inevitably entails generating illusions in the TDC and its economist program. Significantly, in his first document, he criticized the particular opportunist errors of the NA/II fraction, while asserting that he never had illusions in the bureaucracy.

What the miner wildcatters and the Detroit Teamsters have in common is that they both have strong trade-union traditions, combined with a low level of political sophistication, much less than exists in the ILWU, or even the UAW. As Douglas himself noted, the paper program of the TDC was to the right of the UNC (another I.S.-supported bureaucratic lash-up), reflecting the greater parochialism of the milieu. As for the contradictory nature of the miners' militancy, one incident reported in the NY Times is worth noting (unfortunately I do not have the date of the article): During this summer's wildcat, a miner (probably an RCP or PL supporter) got up to address wildcatters in West Virginia. As soon as he said he was a communist, however, the strikers attempted to lynch him, and he only escaped through the intervention of a newscasting team that happened to be present.

The issue raised by Douglas' document is actually fairly simple --the distinction between trade-union consciousness and political class consciousness. The gap between these was considerably increased by virtue of the prevailing social backwardness in the UMW and Detroit Teamsters. The various formations like the TDC that attempted to tap the discontent of the miners and Teamsters

consciously adapted themselves to the backwardness of their base. The distance between their politics and ours was so great that it was impossible to even think in terms of critical support, entry, etc. Unfortunately, however, the key consideration for Douglas was not these programmatic questions, but the simple fact that these groups attracted--for a brief period--numerous workers. Douglas is quite honest on this score: he admits that the TDC was not of the slightest interest to him until it became a pole of opposition in Detroit.

I am least of all interested in getting into an abstract debate over "contract blocs." As Comrade Douglas himself noted (before engaging in it once again in his current document!), this kind of idle speculation is dangerous, and generally serves as a cover for some kind of deviant political appetite. I do not believe we want to be pushed into positions like "you can never have a bloc around a contract struggle." In fact, the leadership of the Minneapolis Teamsters strike was a bloc between Trotskyists and militants who formed a majority on the Local 574 executive board against a minority of Tobin loyalists. However, what the Trotskyists did not do was to give up their program: on the contrary, it was their class-struggle principles that guided the strike. On the other hand, what characterized the T-2 contract-bloc discussion and, more obviously, the TDC situation, was an appetite to make concessions to alien political forces. Given the present relationship of forces in the trade unions, such "contract blocs" will almost inevitably involve making such concessions.

Rather than dreaming up hypothetical situations in which "contract blocs" may be justified, it would be more profitable for Douglas to concern himself with what is real. Why, after all, did he have such a strong reaction to our press coverage of the Teamsters' and miners' strikes. To engage in my own "speculation": the crisis of expectations in the RO wreaked a special vengeance in North America, where the comrades had particular hopes of achieving well in the trade unions. However, this did not occur; for the most part the class struggle continued on the same low ebb. The resulting frustration produced impatience and opportunism in our fractions. What distinguished the UMW and Detroit Teamster wildcats is that they were essentially the only noticeable rebellions against the bureaucracy in the major unions in the past period. Despite the evident political rottenness of groups like the TDC, I believe Douglas jumped after them for the simple reason that they were able to mobilize workers behind them, even if only briefly. I believe that it is this only partially deflected impulse to capitulate to the "mass movement" that lies behind Douglas' continued criticisms of the press coverage.

--J. Brule
18 December 1976

WHAT UNDERLIES THE TRADE-UNION DISCUSSION

by Chris Knox, for the TUC

Part One: Effects of the Period on Our Movement

a. The Period We Are Passing Through. The U.S. in the mid-1970's does not present a pretty picture, either for the working class or for the U.S. section of the international Spartacist tendency. The heavy worldwide inflation of the exceptional boom of 1971-73 has eroded workers' real wages drastically, and since then double-digit unemployment has once again become a norm, forcing even presidential candidates to make analogies to the Great Depression. New York and San Francisco, long considered centers of liberal bourgeois enlightenment, have become instead the headquarters of ruling class attacks on the labor movement for the purpose of driving down the living standards of the urban workforce. The black masses, pandered to with hypocritical liberal promises a few years ago, are now the target of renewed racist attacks in the form of anti-busing campaigns and white "community control" designed to enforce neighborhood "ethnic purity."

Motion and consolidation to the right characterize the entire U.S. bourgeois political spectrum. The mood of the U.S. ruling class is one of greater openness, arrogance and determination. The paper-mache liberalism of the late 1960's and early 1970's has been completely ripped away, revealing a bourgeoisie which loudly proclaims that workers' wages are to be cut, unemployment lines lengthened, and that blacks and women are to remain in their places or else. Perhaps the best indication of the sharp rightward shift is the rush in the halls of state legislatures to defeat ERA amendments, and the equally thunderous stampede to pass new laws for the restoration of the death penalty. Furthermore, the international position of the U.S. remains strong vis-a-vis its main imperialist rivals, and the domestic arrogance of U.S. imperialism is matched by an increasingly noticeable thirst to recover from the Vietnam debacle and once again be able to intervene militarily around the world at will.

The present period, while characterized by sharp motion to the right, is nevertheless in the main not analogous to the 1950's. The aggressive U.S. imperialism of the post-war period combined its declaration of an "American Century" and world-policeman role with a mass-based domestic anti-communist crusade. Illusions in a myth of post-war prosperity and in the supposed purity of purpose of American bourgeois democracy fostered widespread complacency and a sense of naivete throughout most strata of society. The decade of the 1970's is instead taking on a profoundly cynical cast, in which the bourgeoisie no longer denies that things are bad (and getting worse), but merely insists on its right to rule anyway.

All classes are infected by this cynicism, which grows out of disillusionment with the system, combined with a lack of evident solutions. Unlike the Korean War, the Vietnam War severely eroded faith in the avowed purposes of U.S. foreign policy and undermined anti-communism, while the Watergate scandal laid bare bourgeois political hypocrisy on the evening news. Watergate clearly hurt both parties

more or less equally. It is noteworthy that while the SL prediction (Perspectives and Tasks of the SL/U.S., August 1974) that Watergate would put the Democrats in the White House proved correct, Carter didn't dare use the scandal as a club to beat the Republicans, and the Democratic victory was no landslide.

The characteristic pressures of the period are producing increasing frustration with objective conditions, decreasing confidence in the future and a general turning away from many of the traditional props of the capitalist system throughout the petty bourgeoisie and working class. The Catholic Church battles for public money to finance its school system as the "faithful" abandon it in droves. With worsening economic conditions weighing on it like a great weight, the bourgeois family structure shows increasing instability through high rates of divorce and remarriage. The turn to the narcissism of "self-fulfillment" gimmicks like new religious cults, drugs and health foods is pervasive. For the working class, however, the dream of escaping alienated labor by rising into the petty bourgeoisie--a traditionally strong restraining influence on class consciousness in the U.S.--necessarily becomes dimmer as the job lines lengthen.

As the bourgeoisie becomes more arrogant and the working class and petty bourgeoisie more disillusioned in the system, the traditional role of the trade unions as the last line of defense of capitalism becomes more important. The encrusted bureaucracy played this role to the hilt in the recent elections, dragging out every conceivably revivable illusion and making a maximum effort to resurrect the old "Roosevelt coalition" of labor and blacks in the Democratic Party. The Meany-Woodcock-Fitzsimmons gang's continued holding of the line on wage increases has resulted in falling comparative wage rates for U.S. workers as against workers in other major industrial countries. With the onset of heavy layoffs and drastically increasing unemployment in 1974-75, the labor fakers went all out to prevent any militant response, channeling protest instead into reactionary protectionist schemes and bourgeois utopian jobs legislation such as the Humphrey-Hawkins bill.

The SL projected in August 1974 that enormous pressures were building up at the base of the labor movement, threatening to shatter the hold of the encrusted and brittle labor bureaucracy and resulting in a series of elemental and explosive labor struggles. This projection retains its general validity, with the note that an upsurge has not occurred as soon as expected, and with the recognition that further delay in significant outbursts is likely. The near general strike of spring 1976 in San Francisco demonstrated the ease with which the ossified labor lieutenants, given the right intersection of circumstances, could lose control of an elemental, class-struggle upsurge. Striking coal miners in the hills of West Virginia--about as far removed as possible from the petty-bourgeois cultural milieu of San Francisco--made the same point. The events in the mine fields showed the qualitative identity between the newly elevated Miller wing of the bureaucracy and the old buzzards still haunting Bay Area labor temples.

Elsewhere, however, the union bureaucrats played on demoralization among the workers over rising unemployment rates and past defeats, and managed to hold the lid on outbursts. The present collapse of the very narrowly based economic recovery of 1975-76, and the projection of increasing unemployment, makes the chances of an immediate escalation of class struggle small. Since the economic strike is the only perceived form of class struggle in the U.S., an increase in unemployment in the coming year will probably have a further depressing effect on the class struggle, especially at first. The pressures at the base will continue to mount, however, and the consciousness of the working class can be turned around rapidly, as San Francisco showed. Given the right intersection of a rather less abrupt decline in employment with a militant strike in a major industrial center, class-struggle militants can still expect to encounter opportunities. As we pointed out in the "Perspectives and Tasks" document, such opportunities as do arise are likely to be fraught with the danger of our friends being thrust prematurely into leadership of major struggles.

Yet it is the general stagnation of class struggle, rather than opportunities posing the danger of premature leadership, which we must recognize as the major aspect of the objective situation at the present time. Dealing with this general stagnation, and with the cynical, personalist and escapist moods connected with it--and with their effect on our ranks--is the biggest conjunctural problem facing the SL/U.S., and its trade-union friends in particular.

b. The Fake Left Moving Right. The existence of a general stagnation in the class struggle, imposed largely through the "class peace" policies of the trade-union bureaucracy, and affecting the entire left, has already been noted. In the 1974 "Perspectives and Tasks" document, we attributed our surpassing of four of our central competitors in strength and influence as due "less [to] the SL's forward movement than [to] the major reverses suffered by these organizations," which flowed mainly from "the collision of the over-ambitious goals and inflated expectations peddled to their members with the sharp decline in labor and social struggle in the 1971-73 period."

Since then, the period has continued to be a rocky one for the left, in particular for the centrists and Maoists. The contradictions inherent in the game of fake revolutionist, with its attendant gimmicks, fictions and underlying opportunism, have made existence in this period very difficult if not impossible for centrist organizations such as the RSL, the (unmourned) CSL, and the ex-IT. The impulse to cave into the pressures of the period has meant a rapid evolution to the right for most of them, as exemplified by Spark and the Landau group, both of which long for the warm bosom of the SWP, and by the RSL, which is trying to ape SWP-like "mass movement" pop fronts.

Qualitatively reformist organizations such as the SWP and CP, which long ago gave up the difficult pretense of revolutionary politics, have benefitted quantitatively at the expense of the centrists

within the general rightward drift. Following a left-right split in 1973, the IS has consolidated on the basis of rejection of the Trotskyist Transitional Program, craven capitulation to left-liberal bureaucrats, and hard trade-union economism. Political bandits and mavericks such as the Healyites and PL enjoy a dubious and lonely continued existence through the mechanism of vicious slander and trade-union opportunism respectively. The Maoists, meanwhile, who have also evolved to the right over the past several years, are now going through an exquisite (for Tortsyists!) and possibly terminal crisis of confidence in the deformed-workers-state bureaucratic ruling elite through which they define their political existence.

The grossly opportunist and, in some cases, adventurist behavior of the ostensibly revolutionary organizations in the near-general strike in San Francisco in spring 1976 brought home the bankruptcy of the U.S. left when faced with the prospect of a real class struggle situation. While the consciousness of the active minority of workers made noticeable advances, the left organizations were increasingly revealed as helplessly unable to influence the forward motion of the class struggle, and, in general, hopelessly rightist. While the CP (predictably) concentrated its fire on the left in order to protect the bureaucracy, the SWP and the RCP actually opposed implementing the call for the general strike!

There is a reason for the galloping motion to the right on the part of the centrists, and it lies in the nature of centrism: for these weather vanes of the left, program is determined by whatever happens to be popular at the moment or by what forces are available to tail after or capitulate to. "Program" is required by the simple fact that they find themselves together in an organization one day and decide that they really ought to have something to stand for. Thus the Ellensites left the SL unsure of their positions on just about everything; Passen and Gregorich spent months looking for a political excuse to avoid talking to the SL; the RSL came together and split from the IS prior to deciding what its position on the Russian Question was, etc.

c. SL/U.S.-ist Perspectives. For revolutionists, the program of revolutionary Trotskyism is the sole basis for existence. Gimmicks, fictions, fakery and cliquism have no place in an organization which genuinely seeks an international proletarian revolution rather than new get-rich-quick "solutions." The SL's practice of recruitment on a sound political basis and setting realistic organizational goals has enabled it to survive the present period without a major faction fight, split, or hemorrhaging of the cadre. However, as the 1974 "Perspectives and Tasks" document pointed out,

"...the SL is not immune from the internal pressures besetting our opponents. Many of our recruits in the past period were attracted to the SL because we combined a serious industrialization policy with a program and tactics capable of developing an alternative revolutionary leadership to the union bureaucracy. If our trade-union work does not show evident progress toward this goal, there is bound to be a certain demoralization

and doubt within our ranks. And in general, stagnation imposed by objective circumstances or failure to take advantage of the real or apparent opportunities will lead to frictions of the type that have debilitated our opponents."

In the years 1973 through 1975, the SL/U.S. and iSt made decisions on perspectives and priorities which placed an especially heavy drain on the inexperienced and already taxed leaderships of the domestic U.S. locals. In summary, these decisions were 1) to concentrate leadership cadre in the Bay Area in order to intersect class-struggle opportunities which were better there than elsewhere, 2) to build up forces in the C.O. in order to facilitate international work and Workers Vanguard production, 3) to draw heavily on the personnel as well as financial resources of the U.S. section for international work itself, and 4) to take Workers Vanguard to a weekly frequency in late 1975.

These perspectives were undertaken with the overall needs of the international Spartacist tendency foremost in mind. International work offered the opportunity for a real break with the earlier national isolation of the Spartacist tendency, for growth and for vital opponents work aimed at laying the groundwork for the establishment of a democratic-centralist, international Trotskyist league. Workers Vanguard was made weekly because of the pressing need for an effective, interventionist propaganda organ, and the C.O. was given priority in order to adequately implement these perspectives. However, these priority decisions resulted in a drain of leading cadre from the locals, and has made the pressures of the present period more difficult to bear, especially in the midwest branches, the New York local and among our trade-union supporters, who often lacked adequate fraction leadership.

The weekly Workers Vanguard was established on the basis of a firm determination to go forward rather than tread water. This was especially important because, as Jan Norden noted in "The Transformation to a Weekly Workers Vanguard," (Party Builder No. 1, August 1975), a weekly frequency for a main organ was an historically established norm for a Leninist propaganda group of our size, and our failure to achieve it even earlier reflected a weakness in experience and lack of depth of our leading cadres compared with our predecessors. However, the weekly WV was also partly projected on the basis of an expected upsurge which has been delayed. The current stagnation in the class struggle and general lack of opportunities for Trotskyist intervention in mass arenas creates the episodic impression that the weekly WV is too advanced for our present level of activity, and gives rise to the question, "was it a mistake?"

The question is narrowly conceived. While the SL/U.S. experiences an extra burden as a result of this decision, the entire iSt would be ill-prepared to face precisely a period such as this without the weekly WV. The weekly paper serves to hold together our cadre and membership at a time when internal fracturing is a real threat. Although a weekly paper combined with minimal work in mass arenas represents a certain imbalance in our overall work, WV is

providing an avenue for carrying forward our propoganda in ways which would otherwise be less possible than in a period with more interventionist opportunities.

Though the weekly WV was in part based on the estimate of an early upsurge, it was not a mistake. It is sustaining our movement, and the international work in particular. In the absence of a regular international organ, the weekly product of the WV ed room is most eagerly awaited--and utilized--in Berlin, Paris, London, Toronto and Sydney. It is an excellent Marxist weekly, and it lays the basis for our growth as a propoganda group in the next period. Return to a bi-weekly would be a significant setback which we would liquidate other, lesser priorities in order to avoid. We would only accept such a defeat if the central cadre were no longer able to effectively continue to produce the paper.

d. Morbid Manifestations and Rotten Liberalism. The pressure on the organization shows up in innumerable ways, some small and unimportant, and others critical to the most important areas of our work. Most of them should tell us that while we are not of this society in any sense of allegiance, we are certainly in it, and subject to many of the same moods which permeate particularly the lower and younger layers of the petty bourgeoisie and middle layers of the working class. There is a generally increased desire to concentrate on personal concerns, including the heavy time commitment of raising children; there is a rising incidence of fractured couples, with its attendant personal demoralization, dislocation and poor political functioning; and there is a sufficiently frequent indulgence in various faddish behavior and low consciousness to be a constant worry to local organizers.

In addition, there is an increased rate of resignations "for personal reasons," reflecting simple failure of will on the part of the comrades involved, or lack of confidence in our program or organizational future, rather than oppositional political currents. Resignations explicitly to avoid the financial commitment of the party pledge are also a factor: narcissism costs money. Resignations have nearly throttled our growth to the point of net zero as of the end of 1976, although recruitment from several sources around the country continues unabated, and shows every sign of remaining strong. A moderate growth rate, based on recruitment at the current rate together with continued weeding out of the weakening elements through quits, can thus be projected for the SL/U.S. for the next period.

The pressures of the period are producing morbid manifestations, however, and can be expected to continue doing so for a time. A turning toward personal concerns and a pattern of resignations for personal reasons are neutral in their effect on internal party life when compared with recurring acts of indiscipline; verbal abuse of party functionaries such as sales directors, treasurers and organizers; and conscious evasion of party responsibilities (such as making sales or payment of a party pledge). To the extent that such acts acquire consciousness in the party it

could only be called sabotage, and should tolerant attitudes toward such acts become pervasive, it could only be called rotten liberalism. This would constitute the back-door entry into our movement of a programmatic degeneration based on pessimism, loss of faith in the Marxist program at the most fundamental level, and an open attack on Leninist norms of organization and party-building. It is essential to the life blood of our movement that conscious sabotage and rotten liberalism be fought--if necessary, through a purge.

Although the morbid manifestations tend to be spread more or less evenly throughout the ranks, the general pressures of the period tend to weigh most heavily on our most vulnerable and most submerged elements, i.e., our trade unionists. The stagnation in the class struggle, poor regroupment prospects with (practically non-existent) leftward moving centrist formations, and general motion to the right, all combine to make the normally narrowing experience of trade-union work even more narrow, the day-to-day routine more purposeless, and the difficulties of work less endurable. The lack of class-struggle opportunities in the unions makes union work more isolating, and the general rightward motion makes other forms of political work less interesting. Although we have successfully established several bases for useful trade-union work in the future, every resignation of a trade-unionist subtracts years of unrecoverable seniority from our movement.

The pressure on our trade-unionists has a financial aspect: our trade-union supporters always seem to be broke. A steady and reasonably good income should be one of the compensating factors for a political individual working an industrial job, especially in the absence of dependents or other heavy, long-range commitments. Yet our trade-unionists seem increasingly to succumb to one of the occupational diseases of working for a living: spending too much money as a form of escape. Poverty can become a severe liability in the event of an on-the-job (or other) injury, or firing or other form of political victimization. In the words of one right-wing social-democratic employer known to the organization in New York, "A broke worker is a pliable worker." One of our supporters in the "North American" city, forced out of his II job because of a severe back problem, sets a good example: having lived reasonably well while working, he nevertheless has managed to live on savings for a prolonged period out of work. Another friend in the same city who has been chronically in debt for most of his years in II is now demoralized to the point of wanting to abandon the job.

e. Picket Lines and Voting Booths. While the morbid internal signals of the period have retained a generally individualist character, some gross errors and programmatic generalizations of opportunist impulses have begun to be made. These have centered on questions arising from trade-union work. Most point squarely in the direction of liquidation of our program into various dream-schemes for quick success or capitulation to imaginary layers of "advanced workers." The worst would render the most basic principles of the workers movement into so-called "tactical" questions.

The most serious of these generalizations was Cobet's argument that crossing "informational" picket lines was a tactical question, provided one was not in the striking union itself or actually replacing the labor of the strikers. The "informational" picket line is a cynical concession to post-war anti-labor legislation by the trade-union bureaucracy. As is true wherever the right to strike has been challenged by scabbing, etc., the picket line in the U.S. is the historic battle line of the class struggle--a battle line which has been drawn in the blood of the workers for over 100 years. Although honoring picket lines can and does often result in the militants being run out of the industry, real authority in the working class cannot be achieved in any way other than by respecting the most sacred lessons of labor history. Debs' American Railway Union, the last attempt to bring industrial unionism to the railroads, was blacklisted out of the industry following the cataclysmic defeat of the bitterly-fought Pullman strike of 1894. Yet its best militants went on to form the core of the Socialist Party, and Debs himself emerged from prison a working-class hero and authoritative leader for life.

The cynicism of the bureaucracy is matched in this period by the cynicism of the rank and file, which undermines its own strikes and turns the "battle line" into an open highway for scabs. The bureaucracy masks this surrender with two key arguments: that those entering will not replace struck labor; and that the bosses' state, which has illegalized real picket lines (through the "secondary boycott" law, etc.), is somehow "neutral" in the class struggle. It thereby liquidates the most important lessons of all the great working-class struggles--in particular of the industrial union strikes--since the Civil War!

Even the most widespread lack of consciousness on this question among the ranks of the workers in a given period does not alter the fact that the battle line is the battle line, however. Despite the difficulties of the period, we must respect these lessons rather than look opportunistically for back-door ways around them. The recent near-general strike in San Francisco showed how quickly the fundamental principles of the workers movement can spring back to life despite decades of betrayals and apparent calm. One of our friends in BI, having managed to honor the picket line of a minor group of workers in the plant in a different union under very difficult conditions, now has authority which would otherwise have been irretrievably lost, and another friend is suffering extensive employer victimization for having demonstratively honored a campus picket line.

The choice for the working class is simple: either picket lines will be honored through the maintenance of the basic principles of the class struggle, or the unions and the working class itself will go down in the whirlwind of evermore aggressive and bloody reaction. This "choice" is really no choice! So it is with the basic principles of the class struggle, and so it is with us. The picket line antedates Leninism in its fundamental character within the workers movement. The "tactic" of crossing picket lines has no place in the workers movement, let alone in the ranks of revolutionists!

A similar failure of basic class consciousness made itself felt in the voting booth incident, in which three of our friends in an industrial situation voted counterposed to each other for two different bureaucrats in a union run-off election. There were no fundamental differences between these two candidates, and our friends had run their own candidates in the election. Our friends' own literature advised the workers not to vote for either candidate in the run off! Though rationalized as a "private act," one of our friends also voted for a shop-floor representative and then bragged about it to the representative!

The cynicism of this act, reflective of the cynicism of the trade-union bureaucracy, was its most destructive aspect. The repetition of such incidents would quickly rob our friends of any and all credibility in the unions, either as would-be leaders advocating a class-struggle program, or as simply honest trade-union members who do what they say they are going to do. There is no such thing as the "privacy of the voting booth" in trade-union elections! The act was a political violation of our program in that it implied that one misleader is better than the other for reasons which are entirely ephemeral, insubstantial and episodic. The counterposed vote of our friends for the two candidates is sufficient commentary on the worth of the various arguments prevalent on the left for giving "critical support" to (i.e, tailing after) one wing of the trade-union bureaucracy or another: support the left-talking faker, out with the incumbent traitor, etc.

The picket line discussion and voting booth incident have a common, underlying thrust which can be summed up in the form of the question "when can we betray?" Although these two cases are by far the most gross, this thrust underlies other discussions in our movement as well. Some of these discussions involve genuine tactical questions. However, the thrust to find a way "around" principle, to observe the Trotskyist program as a static abstraction while circumventing it in practice, must be seen as our greatest political danger. The impulse to be formally correct but opportunist in practice is a reflection of the pressures of the period within our ranks.

The question of what is principle and what is tactics is a fundamental one. Maintaining a flexible panoply of tactics within the framework of a principled application of the Marxist program is what separates the revolutionists from centrists and reformists of all stripes. In a period such as the present, it seems "easier" to capitulate to the right than to swim against the stream in the struggle to implement working-class principles. As with nearly all revisions of Marxism, however, a fundamental subservience to the opportunities of the moment or conditions of the period must be disguised as a "tactical" application of the program in order to retain credibility. Our struggle to root out tendencies which throw away basic principles in favor of "tactical" expediency is what chiefly distinguishes the SL from its competitors in this period.

f. Resist Unfounded Pessimism. Many of our members and friends in the trade unions came into politics in the early 1970's and have never been through a downturn before, and the pessimism of the period must seem more deep-going and permanent than it actually is. This pessimism infects our ranks, and forms the basis for a turn inward toward personal concerns and apolitical demoralization. It also underlies the "when can we betray?" impulse. Rotten liberalism and "tactical" revisions of Marxist principle have a certain common underpinning in loss of confidence in the ability of the working class to make a revolution. Confidence in our program strongly militates against pressure to cross picket lines or undermine Leninist norms of functioning in the party, but loss of such can lead to both.

Toward the end of the Cochran-Clarke fight in the SWP, Cannon wrote a letter to Dobbs on the "Unfounded Pessimism about the American Working Class" which he found prevailing within the opposition. Referring to Engels' conclusion that there would be "socialism again" in England once British domination of the world market was removed (a statement which reads well today!), Cannon condemned the opposition for thinking that the American working class was hopelessly and permanently corrupted because of thinly based factors which would change with time.

No one in the SL today openly propounds fundamental historical pessimism, but those who project hopelessness in our program and organization by undermining both in various subtle ways might well take note. Do you believe that our program and organizational course are correct, or must they be changed--or is it no use bothering at all? Please speak openly.

To the vast majority of our ranks who are confident of our course but dismayed by the present difficulties, it is necessary to know and understand the episodic nature of downturns. The working class is far from defeated, and pressures continue to mount leading to a renewed outbreak of class struggle. We have no guarantees of final victory, and things may get worse before they get better. But there will be great class confrontations. If we avoid selling ourselves short in advance--and we will avoid it--we have a long and productive future ahead of us.

Part Two: The "North American" Imbroglia,
or Where Are Douglas and Hillquist Coming From?

a. Why the NA City Was Degraded to an OC. The PB degraded the "North American" city (NA) to an organizing committee because of the voting booth incident specifically, and because an alien political drive, arising chiefly from an impulse to betray our political program in the trade unions, seemed to be the guiding political methodology on every question. The range of these questions included the concrete work--and mistakes--of the North American II fraction. It also included other, somewhat more general questions arising out of II work, such as an appetite to bend our criteria for critical support to bureaucrats--in particular to shop stewards--to the right. Finally, it extended to other questions of apparently growing "abstractness." Douglas raised criticisms of articles in the paper dealing with the TDC centering on sensitivity to the latter as a more significant phenomenon than the paper gave it credit for. In the course of this, he made the "abstract" projection that we could enter the TDC. An analogy to a "contract bloc" was made, and this gave rise to a discussion as to whether we could enter contract blocs.

Comrade Douglas played a dominant or leading role in many of these discussions. Despite the presence of many fine comrades in the branch membership and leadership, the question "when can we betray?" tended to permeate the leading body, and thus the branch as a whole. The voting booth incident, for instance, remained undiscussed in any party body except informally, and went unreported to the center for months. The entire leadership was paralyzed by a few flippant arguments (see Luxen to Tott, TUDB No. 2, November 1976, p. 11).

We now have several written submissions on aspects of the NA situation by Hillquist and Douglas. In particular, Hillquist's first document on the history of the NA/II fraction played a useful role in initiating discussion. These documents tend to treat the issues separately, however, and in many ways only add to the confusion rather than clarifying it. They do not speak to the unifying question of why the voting booth incident occurred, why there was a general rightist thrust in the local, why NA had to be degraded to an organizing committee. They miss the point of what unites the various campaigns in the North American II fraction with the other, more "abstract" political discussions in the local. In particular, the abstract "speculations" of Douglas are in the main diversionary. In reality the discussion is concrete, not abstract; and it is in the present, not in the "speculated" future.

The unifying and alien political drive underlying all the points in the discussion is toward political liquidation into mostly imaginary layers of "advanced workers." From the fraction dream-schemes of committees without members to the abstract "speculation" on when we could enter this or that, this drive is an opportunism searching for an opportunity which in the main doesn't exist. It is a frustrated opportunism. The "speculation" of Douglas is in the main a rationale for a present-day appetite which remains unsatis-

fied rather than a real corrective to either trade-union work or the paper's editorial policy.

This atmosphere of opportunist appetite produced the voting booth incident. By the time NA was degraded to an OC, the air had been heavy with this scent for some time. The fact that we did not commit public, political errors of principle going beyond the voting booth incident is due solely to the fact that this rightist thrust was caught and stopped internally through the intervention of the national leadership. This was done through TUC objection to dropping the busing demand from the NA/II labor-black defense campaign, the PB voting booth discussion (and degrading NA to an OC), and the July 4th 1976 West Coast CC guidelines putting a temporary freeze on II work. It is interesting that these interventions hardly appear as a factor in most of the Douglas and Hillquist submissions.

b. The NA/II Fraction and the TUC. Hillquist's "Critical History" tends toward overstatement and implies total corruption from the beginning, which is an exaggeration. The fraction showed a great deal of energy and drive, and had problems common to all new fractions. Furthermore all of our fractions have tended to make similar errors. However, the NA/II fraction tended to be unable to learn from its past mistakes, and to be increasingly unbounded by political principle and a proper sense of priorities. In the last analysis, it is impossible to deny Hillquist's assertion that the fraction displayed illusions in the bureaucracy.

Douglas argues that the fraction always covered itself in its written propaganda from the charge of openly spreading illusions in the bureaucracy in the plant. One should hope so! This answer does not settle the question. The fraction clearly expected results from fancy maneuvers which were unlikely, and more than once was surprised by the betrayal of the local II unit president. The fraction systematically tended to substitute maneuvers for a base in the plant which it did not have. It is not true 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 unit president," (Douglas, "On the North American II Fraction," TUDB No. 4, p. 10). The labor-black defense campaign in particular, as well as other fraction operations, demonstrated a repeated tactical dependence precisely on possibilities flowing from the "left-talking" qualities of the unit president. Each individual instance of "schmoozing" or trying to get some union official to endorse a position does not constitute "illusions," of course, but the pattern was one that can only imply illusions of advancement through gimmicks rather than political recruitment and growth. This is only the beginning of it, however.

Hillquist seems to miss the significance of the labor-black defense campaign as a qualitative worsening in the fraction's record. It was here that illusions in gimmicks became combined with an unadulterated thrust toward political liquidationism. It is shameful that the fraction wanted to drop the busing demand from its program after having been justifiably proud of its record in fighting for

precisely this demand in the previous election campaign (which was clearly the high point of the fraction's history). The fraction wanted to drop this demand not because there was a real, city-wide labor-black defense united front or any possibility of it, but explicitly because the demand was unpopular, and the raising of it might therefore interfere with getting a committee set up. Such a committee with, as usual, no base would have been a cheap "victory."

At the time Comrade Douglas tended to make the argument that it would not be unprincipled to join a labor-black defense united front which did not have busing as one of its points. Of course not, if there had been such a thing! There was no such thing, nor would it be very likely to occur that way. The "speculative" argument about a tactical variant which might be principled was raised in the context of a concrete and present argument reflecting a liquidationist thrust which the author later backed off from. This has become a pattern. Among other things, the pattern denies that a principled error can be made through a bad tactical application.

In his document on NA/II Comrade Douglas does not mention the intervention of the TUC--in particular of Comrade Crawford--against dropping the busing demand in this campaign. Instead, Douglas implies that the Center approved the whole campaign from the beginning (TUDB No. 4, p.6). Only the general outlines of the campaign were approved in the beginning in a discussion which included Comrades Robertson, Douglas, Knox and one or two others. Following the TUC's successful intervention to halt the dropping of the busing demand, the question was taken up at the trade-union discussion at the summer camp of August 1975, when it was becoming clear that nothing was going to happen in NA on busing that year. All were agreed that the impulse to drop the busing demand had been a mistake. Comrade Crawford made a salient speech warning that too much fancy maneuvering with the bureaucracy in the absence of a political base "could lead to a very rightward direction of politics very easily" (discussion on tape in CO files).

The labor-black defense business greatly increased suspicion of NA, and of Comrade Douglas in particular, on the part of comrades in the Center, although one wouldn't guess it from the written discussion thus far. It also increased suspicion of Comrade Douglas among the West Coast CC group, which is one reason he got such an attentive reply to his letter on shop-floor representation.

Douglas, claiming to understand the problem of the NA/II fraction, reproduces a quote from The Third International After Lenin in which Trotsky denounces maneuvers which arise out of "the impatient opportunistic endeavor to out-strip the development of one's own party" as "fatal to young and weak parties." Very well. He then proceeds to defend the fraction's proposal to initiate a newsletter in the plant with a formal heading on it. This proposal was made just following the reduction of NA to an OC for the voting booth incident! Douglas' claim that the proposal was geared toward getting away from undependable allies and initiating a more straightforward presentation of politics has formal logic on a certain level, but it ignores the fact that the same political purpose

can and should be accomplished with leaflets and that the newsletter idea represented an expansion of the fraction's activity precisely at a time when its political competency was at issue.

The newsletter proposal followed hard on the heels of a series of proposals from Douglas for linking up the national II fraction prior to the 1976 bargaining conventions of the union. These conventions, particularly the first one in spring, were predictably highly bureaucratic and stultified. Linking up in this fashion, with none of our fractions having a real base or established track record, could only serve to alert the bureaucracy to our presence. At the bargaining convention itself, thousands of leaflets were distributed and a meeting held which attracted no one. The linking-up and newsletter proposals were gimmicks of a piece with the maneuverism of the rest of the fraction's record. They were based on an over-reading of the possibilities of the situation, and tended to substitute going through organizational motions for the (missing) reality of a base in the unions.

At its July 4th West Coast plenum, the CC took stock of the overall situation in II and decided to put a general freeze on II work during the remainder of the contract period. It was hoped that this action would "embarrass and damage" the operational leaderships of the II fractions in their intended plant work, and "give them the necessary setback in their personal connections such that they may re-emerge at some date as better communists, and so that perhaps within the fractions a new and more stable, principled and balanced leadership will be facilitated in emerging" (see TUDB No. 2, November 1976, p. 7). Douglas and Hillquist immediately raised motions in the NA branch which were ostensibly in support of these "CC guidelines," but which more likely than not would have had a counterposed effect by opening loopholes in the guidelines for escalating shop-floor activity (ibid, p. 35).

Hillquist's general conclusion for how we should have avoided the errors of the NA/II fraction tends to be a simplistic orientation toward the rank and file: "The initial campaign of an isolated, inexperienced and not yet emerged fraction should address an issue that presents itself as a felt need of at least a significant stratum of the work force." Further, "The fraction should have pursued a policy in this period based on the ranks rather than on reformist misleaders."

On the contrary, our fractions must not be based on the ranks any more than they are based on the reformist misleaders. We will no more be slaves to false consciousness in the ranks than we are slaves to bureaucratic committees and propaganda blocs. The implication here is a minimalist-maximalist one: that we will only undertake tactics which conform to the immediate felt needs of the ranks. This thrust tends also to be liquidationist and tends to unite Hillquist and Douglas. Comrade Douglas' letter on trade-union work prior to the 1975 conference (DB No. 26, August 1975) had the same flavor of emphasizing opportunities based on felt needs of a trade-unionist character. We will remain prepared to undertake campaigns on issues far removed from the immediate felt needs of the ranks, such as de-

fense of busing!

In the main, however, Hillquist is right. The appetite to take our meager forces, completely lacking in a base in the ranks, into all kinds of fancy maneuvers--contract blocs, election blocs, entering bureaucratic committees and caucuses--is inherently politically liquidationist in this period. This does not mean that making blocs is "unprincipled" in a general sense, but only that its tactical application under present circumstances probably is! We must concentrate on acquiring a base and slowly recruiting and laying the groundwork for future work. In general this means doing less, and looking for opportunities in which we can bring forth salient slogans which combine a felt need of the ranks with an important political point, or which are an exemplary propagandistic intervention.

c. The TDC and All That. The labor-black defense campaign showed an impulse toward political liquidationism in the service of a scheme to bring together a committee which would allegedly result in a mobilization of black workers for labor-black defense. Dropping the busing demand was necessary in order to bring these workers together since, while they were all for defense, they were hostile to the NA busing plan. The (abandoned) position of Douglas for entering the TDC was motivated on the grounds that we must not fail to reach the TDC membership; his continuing criticisms of the articles in the paper are motivated on the grounds that we avoid alienating the TDC membership.

What implicitly unites these positions is a conception common to many centrists that there is a fixed and hard category of "advanced workers" which must be won to socialism through a process merging with, and struggling for leadership within, the "layer." Various forms of political liquidation become the hallmark of tactics based on this conception since bringing over this "layer" is seen compulsively as the sine qua non of building the party. Impatience is often the wellspring of such a policy; and frenzied campaigns, lurching from one "tactical" search for the layer to the next, is the result.

It is axiomatic that consciousness is never uniform within the working class, that there is an active minority in any struggle and that the vanguard party must be built through regrouping the best, leading elements of the class into the party. But there is no uniform "layer" between the party and the class. Leaders thrown up by the class in the course of its struggles are invariably flawed in many ways corresponding to the limitations imposed by the arena--and the oppression--from which they emerge. These leaders come and go, and their political course is heavily influenced by the established, bureaucratic leadership of the class. And it is also axiomatic that a slack period such as the present is generally characterized by the absence of "advanced workers."

Comrade Douglas seized on the TDC at the moment that it attracted a little following--highly episodically--at the time of the con-

tract expiration. He tended to dismiss defining political characteristics of the group, and saw only the following, missing even its episodic quality. Furthermore his view was NA-parochial.

It is hard to see how entering the TDC could have had anything to do with furthering the struggle for the Transitional Program--the basis of all our work in the trade unions. It was formed by an organization which defined itself in its last faction fight as opposed to the Transitional Program as irrelevant in this period. Its program was limited to minimalist contract demands designed for acceptance by the bureaucracy. Its practice of taking the union to court is diametrically opposed to the struggle for independence of the unions from the state. As everyone knows, the latter point is one of the cardinal differences between revolutionists and those like the I.S. who give critical support to liberal bureaucrats like Miller and Sadlowski. It is hard to see how we could tell the workers to join a formation whose candidates for office we would have to refuse to support!

Of course it is possible (especially for Comrade Douglas!) to speculate on situations in which we could enter formations whose leaders we would refuse to support. Most mass formations, such as soviets or trade unions, would fall in this category. But this is not what we are discussing!

The question of entry and critical support in this context is not simply governed by the consideration of where the masses of workers are. Lenin advocated entry into the British Labor Party because the BLP was (and is) the historic party of the working class in England and its leaders had authority as the leaders of the British working class. These leaders had to (and must) be exposed in order to clear a path for the building of a revolutionary vanguard party. We enter the trade unions in the U.S.--despite their openly capitalist program--for similar reasons: they are the historically evolved organizations of the American working class, and we have to expose their pro-capitalist leaders, from Pete Camarata on up. The TDC, besides being incredibly puny and insignificant by comparison, is an alternate leadership formation operating within a union, and as such constitutes one of our competitors for leadership.

An entry into such a formation must have some definite connection to the advancement of our program for changing the union. Entry implies a measure of political confidence in that we call on the workers to join as well. We must have a political basis for this. Why should we call on them to simply reimplement the program the union already has?

Comrade Douglas' basis for backing off the enter-the-TDC position seems at least at first to have been based on superficial arguments and he notes that he "continued to be unclear" on the question of entrism in general. What is noteworthy about his present position is that all the original sensitivity to a highly episodic basis of support for the TDC in NA continues to be expressed through his criticisms of the formulations in the paper. Of course it is necessary to make these formulations accurate and tactically sensi-

tive. But Comrade Douglas resists making definite characterizations and hard formulations. With such a method it is possible to always see angles, elements, parts-of-the-whole and gradations, while never coming to political conclusions.

Militants who come up from the ranks in the trade unions, desiring to lead militant struggle and clean up the bureaucracy, are often well-intentioned and certainly not inherently evil. Yet it is absolutely inevitable that if they stay on a course toward union leadership without coming to an anti-capitalist, class-struggle program, they will betray. In the absence of recruitment to the vanguard party or one of its caucuses, the Larry Wings, Pete Camaratas and miners wildcat leaders of today will become the strikebreaking bureaucrats of tomorrow.

Furthermore, the process of transformation will be rapid. The revolutionists are minuscule in number and social weight compared to the bureaucracy, which holds all the cards as the authoritative leadership, and calls all the shots on how the game is played. Trotsky pointed out that in modern unions in the epoch of imperialist decay, the old workers democracy--"democratic unions in the old sense of the term"--can no longer exist. The increased growing together of the bureaucracy with the state, the extremely reactionary pro-capitalist political consciousness of the bureaucracy and the speed of modern communications all combine to make the half-life of the "honest militant" low-level union leaders extremely short. Compromising decisions come thick and fast.

d. Two Tactics (On Contract Blocs). In one of its most recent interventions, the NA/II fraction displayed softness in presenting a program for the II national contract, typified by the reformist-sounding manner in which the slogan "30 for 40" was presented: "'30 for 40' is the key, historic slogan of the union: 1976 must be the year when it is won!" This called for a simple, basic restatement: the revolutionary program--the Transitional Program--cannot be formulated in terms of a series of trade-union reformist contract demands!

The contract is a compromise with the employers, a stopping place in the class struggle, a necessary evil in a non-revolutionary period. Class-struggle militants, having attained union offices, will of course attempt to lead the best possible contract struggles which achieve the most in the way of immediate gains for the ranks. But the uniqueness of their leadership will be expressed precisely by their attempt to lead the struggle in ways that go beyond the simple fight for a better contract. Nevertheless, revolutionists will always have a series of key slogans to be advanced in such situations, and will attempt to group the largest possible number of workers around them on this basis.

If Comrade Douglas insists on speculating about such future situations as indicating the in general principled possibility of entering contract blocs, he is free to muddy the waters on this

question as on any other. In this case, the waters are muddy indeed. It is vital to know what we are talking about. What is a contract bloc? A united front? A bloc? An organization (such as a caucus)? A trade union? It could be any of these things. It could be a large, mass formation or a small, leadership combination. In other words, it is a generally useless category for speculation.

Nevertheless, Comrade Douglas' proposition, that we could "initiate an organization based essentially on a contract struggle," is a very right-wing formulation in the context of his arguments and thrust. What is the program of such an organization? Or is this question to be considered irrelevant, as in the case of entering the TDC? Comrade Douglas' abstract speculation of an organization, if programmatically limited to contract issues, would probably indeed be "reformist and unprincipled" and not something we would want to enter, let alone "initiate."

The CLA "initiated" a union in Minneapolis which was "based essentially on a contract struggle" in a sense, but it was not limited programmatically to contract issues. The Trotskyists had a bloc within the union with the militants against the reactionaries, but it was based on militant, class-struggle organizing and not limited to "contract issues." Nor was it an organization.

So much for the speculative side of the argument. Now what are we really talking about? The "contract bloc" discussion is in fact simply the fallout from the TDC entry discussion and the softness of the NA/II fraction on the contract program. (There was also speculation in the fraction on remaining in the unemployment committee as the union headed into the contract period, in which it was assumed that said committee would have a trade-unionist contract program.) Thus the speculative contract bloc discussion grows directly out of a "tactical" appetite toward very unspeculative, here-and-now, trade-unionist contract "struggles."

What is a "contract bloc" in this period? It is clearly the meeting place of small-change reformist combinationism. A "contract bloc" in power is nothing more or less than a union under reformist leadership (yes, of course, we could enter that!), but a contract bloc out of power is simply a reformist (or more likely sub-reformist) pressure group within the union: two-bit politicians with a better laundry list!

In every contract struggle, we will always have our program, which will focus on several key demands to meet the situation. It is quite possible that we can initiate united fronts or blocs on this basis, but our program will have a political thrust extending beyond the "contract struggle," particularly as the latter is presently conceived by the trade-union bureaucracy and other assorted reformists. For instance, in the recent II contract intervention, one of our key slogans was aimed against the union president's close links to the Democratic Party in an election year. We are not in principle opposed to making blocs on contract issues under our slogans, but we are in principle opposed to limiting our programmatic intervention in the unions to proscriptions for a "bet-

ter" stopping place in the class struggle, or to hiding it behind the mask of some nondescript small-change combination.

Yet the possibility of the united-front tactic is open in principle on the question of contract demands as it is on practically everything else. Our slogans for a contract struggle will always contain a component consisting in what we think can be gained in the contract given the relationship of forces. The Trotskyists, for instance, had their position on what the 1934 strike should settle for. They had to argue for this position, bloc with the workers that agreed with them against those that didn't, and suffer Stalinist criticism from the "left."

The closer we get to actual strike leadership, the more carefully we will present to the workers exactly what we think can be won in the situation, and we will make united fronts on this basis when appropriate. The West Coast II fraction had to face precisely this situation in 1974, and the result was an instruction on tactics. (Comrade Douglas may have missed his best example, so we will provide it for him, while submitting, however, that we are actually on very different ground from Comrade Douglas!) The West Coast II fraction came close to initiating a sit-down protest strike against an impending mass layoff at the plant. The fraction issued carefully calculated, limited demands: 1) unlimited recall rights, 2) unlimited unemployment benefits, and 3) make the government support and continue SUB benefits. The tactical approach was governed by the understanding that a sit-down strike for unrealizable demands could only end in a disastrous defeat, and the recognition that getting the company to negotiate with sit-down strikers would constitute a victory.

Such a strike, had it occurred, would have provided a very dramatic and salient example to other II workers throughout North America as to the course they should take. Other demands--30 for 40, expropriation of the industry, oust the bureaucrats, workers government, etc.--were retained in the propaganda to indicate the programmatic thrust, but separate from the fraction's estimate of what could be gained by this one demonstrative action at its plant. You can't win 30 for 40 in one plant. The fraction was of course prepared to make a united front with the devel or his grandmother around the immediate strike demands.

It is inadvisable to rule out in advance categorical areas in which we would never under any circumstances make a united front or bloc. No doubt circumstances will arise in which we will want to bloc on "contract issues." But every united front has a horse and a rider, and herein lies the key difference between the "contract bloc" tactics of Comrade Douglas and the example of West Coast II or Minneapolis. When we are in command of the situation politically, we may be able to express the thrust of our program through immediate demands which are in fact quite limited. This is not likely to occur until we have deep roots and strong forces: at present, such opportunities are limited. In the meantime, no amount of speculation about what is "principled" will transform political liquidationism into its opposite.

e. Functioning of the TUC. Hillquist's "On the Operation of the TUC" is in the main unexceptionable observations. There is an audible undertone in this discussion, however, of an attempt to shift the blame for the various North American rightist deviations upstairs to the national leadership. Douglas avoids mentioning the intervention of the TUC to halt the dropping of the busing demand, but on the unemployment committee he attempts to unload a rightism charge on Crawford. Attacked by Samuels for going after Crawford, Hillquist wrote an entire document attempting to defend himself against the charge; meanwhile, on the near-sit-down strike of West Coast II, the TUC was "so tangled up in the details" that it "not only developed...illusions in the bureaucracy but elevated them to the status of an accepted RO myth."

Hillquist's general thrust is to want more positive leadership by the TUC. In periods of slow or non-existent class struggle, life in the individual union or on the shop floor is generally opaque to the national leadership. Campaigns and other tactical undertakings have to be approved or disapproved on the basis of the internal consistency of the argument. Vision of the real situation in the union or on the shop floor is entirely through the eyes of the fraction. In periods of greater class struggle, in which the blinders of "normal" trade-union economism begin to fall away, the essential dynamic may become much more visible and accessible to general party tactical direction. City-wide general strike situations, or particular mobilizations of a section of the class such as the LRBW (DRUM) movement in Detroit, are examples in which positive tactical intervention by a national leadership becomes possible.

Thus in a period such as the present, positive tactical initiative by the TUC is generally impossible. Initiative rests with the fraction leaderships. This makes the role of the TUC basically negative: it must accept or reject fraction proposals. As a result, the past period has shown the need for good fraction heads: an organizer's sense for applying our politics to arena work is mandatory.

Hillquist misses the mark on West Coast II. Illusions in the bureaucracy were not pronounced, nor was the TUC "tangled up in the details" of the incident. Responsibility for the tactical guidance on this generally exemplary intervention rests primarily with the national chairman. The fraction erred in one instance in holding off its own intervention in the expectation of action at a union meeting by a shop committee member; however, its general pattern was not one of "illusions in the bureaucracy," and the incident certainly deserves its "myth."

It was completely correct for the WC/II fraction to attempt to get the shop committee to take responsibility for leading the sit-down. Any other course would have presented the danger of adventurism, with the fraction in an exposed position. It is not possible to solve the danger of "illusions in the bureaucracy" simply by going around it, ignoring the fact that it is the established leadership in the minds of the workers. It is necessary to expose the bureaucracy. In part this is done by attempting to get it to

take up class-struggle policies. This must be done in such a way as to show the workers that we are completely serious in the attempt to get the bureaucracy to take up this or that policy while at the same time entertaining no illusions that they actually will, and all the while warning in the appropriate manner that they will betray.

The TUC made mistakes in the past period. It missed both mistakes that were being made (it approved all the major campaign plans of the North American II fraction) and opportunities that could have been seized upon. In the main, however, the problem of the TUC in the past period is not so much the problem of the TUC per se as it is the problem of generating and training competent local leaderships, in particular, fraction leaderships. In a slack period especially, in which the shop-floor dynamic is opaque to the outside world, trade-union work should be primarily within the purview of the locals.

f. Conclusion: We Are Here. The theme of the founding conference of the Spartacist League in 1966 was "We are here." Despite premature expulsion from the SWP with only a handful of people, lack of a deeply rooted cadre-continuity with our predecessors, no editor for the paper and innumerable other difficulties, we had made it to the founding of the Spartacist League. This in itself was an achievement of no mean proportions, and a useful lesson to draw for more impatient would-be cadre with little experience in the problems of building a Leninist organization.

After sending a handful of mostly petty-bourgeois youth into the plants in the early 1970's, most of them with little experience in either trade-union work or party building, we might say the same of SL trade union work now. Our trade union supporters have had a first crack at the problems they face and have discovered the nature of some of those problems. Despite setbacks and difficulties, we have established a few toeholds for future recruitment and growth. This is about all we could realistically expect.

Gaining authority as working-class leadership takes a long time and necessarily involves many exemplary struggles and many setbacks. One cannot simply walk into the unions with a handful of "boys and girls" one week and expect to send the Meany-Woodcock-Fitzsimmons gang packing the next simply by declaring a caucus. The recent II link-up proposals had such an air of unreality about them. Real authority comes hard. Comrade Waters, after five years and after being the only radical ever to return to work after a firing in LI, now has a little real authority. Much time and many struggles have afforded three of our T-2 leaders some of the same. Most of the rest of our fractions haven't done anything.

It is axiomatic that we must do something in order to gradually gain this authority, but it must be the right things. "Leaflets that seem to have been parachuted in from Moscow" won't do it, frenzied campaigns based on political liquidation in order to reach imaginary layers of militants won't do it and shop-floor rank-and-fileism

attempting to go around the bureaucracy won't do it. From time to time however some real opportunities have presented themselves, and will continue to do so. Good fraction leadership will take advantage of them quickly when they arrive, and not try to suck "the main chance" out of its thumb in the meanwhile.

--Chris Knox, for the TUC
20 December 1976