

Introduction to: MOVING THE IS FORWARD: REPLY TO THE EC

Dear Comrades,

The EC and their supporters are adding page after page to take up every major and minor point that could possibly be debated in the Building the IS discussion. The volume of paper has added considerable confusion to the situation, because much of what is written is peripheral to the basic question before the Convention.

The short paper that follows takes up some of the commonly circulating statements that we feel deserve a response. But it is important that we do not lose sight of the basic questions.

Our viewpoint is based on our experience of the past year, and the major lessons of that experience. It is not an attempt to describe or achieve, in the following year, a "well rounded Revolutionary Party." Rather we lay out a fighting campaign to change the character of the organization, in the direction of a workers' combat organization.

This campaign must aim at linking our recruitment strategy to our mass work approach. And around building our organization through the fractions. The fractions must be strengthened politically and organizationally, and brought into a more central role in the organization.

It is this focus, this campaign, that is up for debate at the Convention. And no less than a campaign will do, for the tasks facing us are the crucial ones that we will succeed or fail on.

Our success this year will lay the basis for the first chance in a generation at a mass revolutionary movement. Our failure will mean we could miss that opportunity.

We ask that comrades take this question just as seriously, and not be diverted into a dozen side roads. Our future depends on it.

**BUILD A WORKERS' LEADERSHIP -----MAKE THE IS A FORCE IN THE CLASS**

## MOVING THE IS FORWARD: A REPLY TO THE EC

By Supporters of "Build a Worker Leadership/Make the IS a Force in the Class Position"

The EC has now put out more than 23 pages of documents designed to convince delegates to vote against the alternate resolutions. For 15 pages of the longer document, the EC explains how dangerous the ideas are that the resolutions represent. But in case you are not convinced, you are also urged to defeat the resolutions because they may not be so different from the EC's position.

We don't intend to match this outpouring of documents. But we do think that a number of commonly circulated statements do need to be answered.

1) **WHAT IS AT ISSUE:** At last year's convention we set ourselves two principle, but related, tasks: That the IS would transform itself into a workers' organization and that we would lead in mass agitational work within the working class.

We originally believed that successful agitational work would require first recruitment in our priority industries. As late as January, the National Secretary explained to the NC how our IBT contract campaign could not succeed if we did not first recruit numbers of Teamster activists. In fact we failed to recruit before the contract campaign. But because of our mass work approach of collaboration and involvement of a number of rank and file leaders, and because of a massive concentrated effort based on sound analysis, we succeeded in mounting a successful campaign.

Over the past year we have failed to recruit and hold many worker members. And this despite our successful Teamster work. We believe this means that half of our perspective for the past year collapsed and that what is required this year is political and organizational mobilization of the entire organization toward transforming it into a worker's organization.

2) **CAMPAIGNING:** We believe that the key is strengthening the fractions. Some people have said, "But the EC talks about strengthening the fractions in their labor document. Why they recently added a new resolution on strengthening the fractions. Some of the resolution came from their document and they even added some specifics and a commitment to develop the fraction leadership."

We assume the EC does want to strengthen the fractions. The fact is that the EC includes this as part of a long list of things that it wants to do--and not very near to the top either. In the first EC reply to our document the EC lists its eight points of focus, but building or strengthening the national fractions are not among them?

We have learned over the past years in the IS that our resources are limited. The temptation is always for conventions to pass long lists of things that we all want. But, since we can't do everything, the easier things get done rather than the most important. Or else accidents or whim settle our priorities. What we have learned in the past year is that if we need to make substantial changes in the organization we need internal campaigns to accomplish them. We have to focus the organization on the task. We have to be willing to bend the stick. And we have to be willing to withstand charges that our approach is not "balanced" or that we have left something out. The EC 17 page reply tells us about all the scarce resources. That is why we need a clear priority for the next period--the fractions must become strong effective units.

We believe that the convention has to mandate this campaign. But the EC, while telling us about scarce resources, proposes no priorities for the convention to decide on--just a shopping list of good things with fractions way down on the list.

3.) RECRUITMENT-FOCUSED?: When we wrote our resolutions we wanted to avoid the meaningless debates about words. So we took the formulation straight from the EC Document (but not mentioned in their resolutions). The EC said:

...rather than the scatter gun approach of our last recruitment campaign, we will be specifically targetting for recruitment workers who are already leaders in the work or who are being developed as leaders out of the work.

We used this formulation so that the EC could not continue to play both sides on this question. In fact, the EC does not agree with its own formulation. In a document circulated by Mark L. and others in support of the EC position they argue against going after workers who "represent more than themselves." They argue that we should go after the "fresh forces" and that our approach should be that we want to break these "fresh forces" away from our collaborators.

Mark and others argue that workers "who represent something more than themselves are not key" because of their small numbers and also because of their political timidity.

This is an incredibly conservative view. It is saying that the only workers we can win are the ones who have no political ideas of their own. That there is no need to bother putting forward our political ideas because we can't win anyone with them. Instead we will win workers by showing them what great agitation we--the IS-- can lead. Our analysis is that Capitalism is in crisis and that our ideas can win over those who have illusions in trade union reformism. That is what we are talking about when we say we have to organize and prepare the materials, pamphlets, etc so that we can recruit at the "level of strategy."

Transforming the IS requires more than merely having more worker members. It means that these workers must become leaders in the IS locally and nationally in order to make this an organization workers can know is theirs.

But workers are not all the same. In the class struggle some will play more of a leadership role than others. It is those who can lead in the IS because they are "leading the work, or who are being developed as leaders" who will be key in transforming the IS because it is they who can turn our mass line into mass work.

The idea that we can approach mass work with the idea that we are there to collaborate with other rank and file leaders, but we are simultaneously ripping off their base, is a disaster. It is a sectarian folly and will only result in isolating us if we take it seriously. There is not basis here for collaboration, and the mass work will fail. At the same time, unless we engage these workers in struggle we have only a weak basis for moving them toward our politics.

What most rank and file activists have in common is trade union reformism. Their activity in movements is based on a belief that something can be won through them. And the more active or leading activists generally feel more responsibility to the movements (TDC, UPSurge, etc) and are often more committed

to reformist ideas. They may see the IS as "good people" but also as primarily a source of potential isolation for themselves or the rank and file movement.

Our drive has to be to win these activists to our strategy. We have to demonstrate that our strategy is the only one that can consistently advance and broaden the rank and file movement and that our strategy is based on socialist principles (no commitment to profit, etc). This is the way to win recruits and closer collaborators.

Naturally we cannot win all or even most of our rank and file collaborators. Especially the older, more established, or "name" leaders usually will not be won. But we must win a section of the rank and file activists. We must make the IS a wing of the rank and file movement. This drive will not "limit" our recruitment. By linking our strategy for recruitment to our strategy of mass work, we will be paving the way for mass recruitment.

4)WEAKENING THE CENTER: The EC keeps raising the idea that building strong fractions means weakening the center. In fact it works the other way around. What we have now is a situation of chaos and decentralization. Lacking strong national fractions as intermediate bodies, centralization and coordination exist only to the extent that the EC is capable of being on top of the situation in every local fraction in every branch. Since it is true, as the EC says, it does not consist of superhuman types, the EC can not be on top of everything. What it is not on top of (while focussing its efforts in other areas) ends up doing their own thing or collapsing. We need an organization that can operate in three "TDC's" at once, not one that collapses under the weight of one major campaign.

No organization can be strong and centralized without strong units along the chain of command.

Of course the EC has overall political responsibility. There is no suggestion that the fractions "share power" with the EC. Fractions are clearly subordinate to the EC which oversees the general line and intervenes on specifics as necessary. In fact, this makes the EC more effective, because it provides a better transmission belt (a two way operation) between itself and the local work.

This is not simply an organizational question. What is really at issue here is developing the institutions of a strong national secondary leadership in the IS with our industrial leaders at its core. This is not done by wishing it into existence. You can not have strong bodies except by giving them responsibilities to carry out.

Does a strong secondary leadership weaken the center? It is the only way to strengthen the center and expand the organization at the same time. The only danger to the center comes when the center itself is weak and unable to provide proper leadership. Then personnel from the secondary leadership will fill vacuums. But this should be nothing to fear since it is this process which makes part of the difference between a living growing dynamic revolutionary organization and a sterile group with an ossified head and no future.

5) FIGHTING CONSERVATISM WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION: Yes, we are all aware of the pressures on the organization, and especially the worker members, towards conservatism. That is part of the reason that we are members of a revolutionary organization. We also insist that the EC is subject to conservatism due to isolation, and just plain mistakes because it is not on the front lines of political battle.

The EC's answer to responding to the pressures of the working class, is to try to quarantine the "conservative worker bug" within the organization, although perhaps let small amounts in like a vaccination: Add more worker members to the NC, but not enough that it might make a difference. Strengthen the fractions, but don't give them any responsibilities. Countering conservatism by simple commandism from the center will not work over any substantial period of time.

We are offering another way: Insist that the worker members take responsibility including the organization as a whole. By taking responsibility for our general work, worker members will have to approach things OUT of the context of their own immediate work situation, yet they can draw on their own experiences. Secondly, by making the NC real and building strong fractions, we are creating the places where the politics of the organization have to be confronted in terms of the work of the organization. This does not exist within the organization today. Instead the EC relies on commands, or fails altogether in combatting this conservatism.

6) THE FRACTIONS AND RECRUITMENT: Focusing the organization on the fractions is not just the way to develop and refine the correct political line. It is also our transition of the kinds of units that can most easily recruit and develop workers as leaders.

The IS cannot yet be based on factory branches or cells. But it will be the fractions, not the branches, which will provide the transition to the factory branches.

It is now agreed by the EC as well that recruitment will take place primarily through the fractions. But why? Since we expect to recruit on the basis of our work in industry, it is the industrial fractions which will be the most relevant units. It is the fraction that most contacts will first work with and will be most exposed to. That is why we say that it is important to focus on the fractions: This is not a retreat from politics as the EC charges--just the opposite. We are insisting on bringing politics into the fractions, and moving toward ending the separation which tends to make the politics happen in the branch, and industrial work in the fractions.

The EC seeks to maintain, even reinforce, the old division, "Fraction training will be on industry/union lines, with branch training in other areas." (from the newest amendment on fractions) If we are going to successfully bring our politics into our work, and recruit our contacts to our politics, it can only happen if the fractions develop a political life.

A second important feature of the fractions for recruiting is that they can show developing worker leaders that the IS is an organization where worker members play leading roles in building the revolutionary organization. This

is important to workers in this country who have been taught by capitalists, from the beginning, that socialist organizations simply seek to use them as pawns.

7) NC SLATE-A DIFFERENT CONCEPTION, A DIFFERENT ROLE: In the past the organization has had the conception that the NC could be some kind of a general leadership body and that its members were the roster of the "best leaders" or "stars" in the organization. In some cases NC status was the reward for taking on difficult assignments. In others, being stripped of NC status was punishment for not carrying the EC's line internally.

But as a body the NC was a failure. The NC could not, and did not, lead and the NC meetings made almost no other contribution to the organization despite the enormous amount of time and expense to hold the meetings. Virtually everyone agrees that the NC was a waste of time. This will not be solved with the EC's proposal to try harder this year with the buddy system, or make the NC meetings closed, or better prepare for the NC's.

The problem is one of role. The NC had no role in the organization this past year. It can not substitute for a day to day full time leadership. EC discipline, and consequent block vote on the NC, AND its conception that the EC's job is to "fight to carry the NC" meant that the NC could not serve as an effective collaborative leadership body. Nor did "carrying the NC" mean much when only a small portion of it brought to the NC the problems and direct experience of carrying out the external work and the conservative pressures of the working class.

We are proposing that the NC have a specific role in the organization-- that it be one place where we attempt to get the interaction or synthesis between the EC's program, developed from generalization, and the direct experience of our worker members. It is also a place where our worker members must take the responsibility for leading in the organization.

Despite the EC's attempt to confuse the issue, the differences between the actual slates are a result of the different roles projected for the NC. The number of people who will be in industry on the EC slate is at most 12 of 29 (not 14 of 28) or 41%. The number of fulltimers is 14 of 29 (not 11 of 28) or 45%. On our slate the percentage of members in industry is 52%. We would aim for a higher percentage, but at 25 the NC is already getting too large to be an effective body.

8) DOES THIS MEAN WE ARE AGAINST ORGANIZERS?: We do not underestimate the value or importance of organizers. But there are many ways that full timers have input into the organization. Organizers are in regular communication with the EC as well as our local work. We are for continuing the organizers' conferences. Full timers are leaders by virtue of their jobs in the organization.

But only full timers can be organizers, WP staff, fraction administrators. These are necessary full time jobs, and worker members can not provide a lead in these areas. Nor is the organization in a place today where we can "make the best worker leaders into full timers," (Glenn) even if that were desirable. Our roots in industry are too weak today. In this period we should be moving to strengthen our leadership within industry. (A ton of good politics and outside work could not make up for our failure to have one person who was a part of the Detroit TDC.

Today, (we are not dealing with some principle) the weakness in the IS is the lack of a worker leadership in the organization. That is why we propose a specific role for the NC and why we must focus the organization on building strong fractions.