

The EC document takes off from our experiences of last year and proposes the best way for us to continue to build the revolutionary movement this year. There are a number of important parts in the strategy it proposes. There are four key parts: mass work, transitional politics, recruitment, and political training of new members. I should point out here that although the sections on women, black liberation, and the Red Tide are important, I haven't included them because they have not been the center of conflict.

WORKERS  
POWER

Mass Work

The EC argues we should continue our mass work in essentially the same way we did in DDC. It describes the method: "Mass work involves mobilizing a significant proportion of the people affected by an issue around a limited program designed to deal with that issue. It...can be applied to a work group of a dozen or an industry of hundreds of thousands."

In the section on working class unity, it explains why we build mass work: "...we are out to create united working class action... (our past caucuses) often meant that people couldn't act with us on one issue unless they had our view on another. With mass work, ... we begin to break down our self imposed isolation..."

The counter document agrees with this view.

Transitional Politics

This is the new advancement for our work. It says: "...the organizations we create with our mass work must have a political life, too. Not a political life that is separate from the main economic or democratic demands of the movement. Not a political life imposed on it from the outside, but one that arises precisely out of the main struggle." Any rank and file organization will come up against political roadblocks from the bosses and their government. These have to be dealt with politically: "...there can be no successful agitation without politics; even if the agitation is of a limited and sectional kind, it must still give rise to a political position."

But up to this point nothing new has been said. There are no major breakthroughs here. Why all of this was said as far back as 1894! The next quote is long, but its worth reading:

"The economic struggle...teaches the worker to stand up for his own interests, it elevates his courage, it gives him confidence in his own strength and consciousness of the necessity for unity, it places before him more important tasks demanding solution. Prepared thus for a more serious struggle, the working class proceeds to come to grips with these vital questions. The class struggle in this more conscious form creates the soil for political agitation, the goal of which is to change the existing political conditions to the advantage of the working class...In order to get hold of that trifling issue capable of rallying the workers to the struggle, it is necessary to understand which abuses most easily excite the workers interests, to choose the most auspicious moment to start, to know what methods of struggle under the given conditions of time and place are the most effective... The role of revolutionaries is one of constant agitation among workers on the basis of their everyday needs and demands...It is understood that the views of the revolutionary agitator will determine the path along which he will lead the crowd. He must always be one step ahead of the masses, he must illuminate the struggle for them, explaining from a more general point of view the irreconcilability of their interests with the employers and thus he must expand the hori-

zens of the masses!"

This quote is from a pamphlet entitled "On Agitation", written by A. Kremer and Martov. It became the theoretical basis for economism.

I should point out that I haven't read any of the books I mention. Not because I'm incapable, but because I haven't had the time. But luckily, the book Lenin by Tony Cliff saves all of us a lot of effort. I'd even suggest that new members read it along with an older member. Its worth the effort in helping to understand some of the problems we'll face in building the IS.

Cliff also quotes from a history of the Russian revolutionary movement that says: "The roots of economism are best sought in the agitational method...Whereas in theory agitation was political, in practice it remained confined to economism. From agitation, which pushed politics into the background as a matter of tactical expedience, it was only one step to Economism proper, which subordinated politics to economism as a matter of principle. Economism thus came into being in Russia in 1896-97, in the wake of the emerging mass labour movement." (Emphasis mine).

We are also in the wake of an emerging mass labour movement. But ours is not emerging from decades of Tsarist oppression and poverty, as our ancestors in Russia was. Ours is emerging from decades of liberal capitalist democracy and prosperity. The experience of Russian workers made them more revolutionary than the experience of people who lived through the past 25 years. That means even more than in Russia, the danger of Economism is real.

There are similarities between the two quotes from Cliff's book and the documents of this year that should leave us uneasy. Kremer's description of how agitation builds unity and confidence among workers and places before us political tasks demanding solution sounds familiar to the descriptions of mass work, working class unity, and rank and file movements political tasks described in the EC document.

But the statements of the counter-document come even closer. When it goes so far as to say, "... (given workers cynicism) all political positions are suspect, what is needed is a winning strategy.", the parallels come too close for comfort. Even more disturbing is Resolution B3-1, Section 4, put forth by the counter-document: "Mass work around a limited program does not stop us from raising politics, it gives us the chance to put forward political ideas in the most important way-out of the struggle. "Transitional politics" advances the political life of the rank and file movements by taking up issues as they become relevant to the immediate struggle. For example, strikes raise the issue of injunctions and draw out the role of the courts and capitalist justice. The battles of the rank and file movement give it a natural political life (as both TDC and Upsurge have). It is our job to develop that consciously to point the way to socialist politics and socialist organization."

I believe that the counter-document fails to understand the question of transitional politics. To a certain degree, even the EC document is unclear on it. There is not a stage of political understanding that a person must go to first before going on to the next. The things mentioned (the employer's offensive, working class solidarity, etc.) are basic working class politics. A quote from Lenin: "For the secretary of any say, English, trade union always helps the workers to carry on the economic struggle, he helps them to expose the factory abuses, explains the injustice of the laws and measures that narrow the freedom to strike and picket, explains the partiality of the arbitration court judges who belong to the capitalist class, etc., etc. In a word, every trade union secretary conducts and helps to conduct the economic struggle against the employers and the govern-

ment: the revolutionaries ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people who is able to react to every instance of tyranny and oppression... (and) to generalize all these instances into a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, to set forth before all his socialist convictions and democratic demands..."

It's a sign of how far working class politics have been removed from the working class, that we have to fight to bring them back in. These basic ideas of class struggle unionism are even seen as radical ideas. It is essential that, particularly through the fractions, we put increased effort into building in the rank and file movements a group of workers who see themselves as class struggle unionists. But that is in fact only trade union consciousness. In and of itself, it is not transitional. What it provides is a jumping off point from which to more convincingly make the arguments, to make the transition between working class politics and revolutionary socialist politics.

I am not trying to stop the healthy push towards giving leadership to mass work, to the turn towards agitation. I am not arguing that we maintain some abstract political purity. Something Lenin wrote makes it clearer: "For the socialist, the economic struggle serves as a basis for the organization of the workers into a revolutionary party... the task of the socialist is to bring the economic struggle to further the socialist movement and the success of the working class party... Agitational work activity among the masses of people must be of the broadest nature, both economic and political, on all possible issues... We must use this agitation to attract growing numbers of workers into the ranks of the revolutionary party... agitation must serve as a means of widely expanding the political protest and more organized forms of struggle. Today our agitation is too hemmed in; the range of questions it touches is too limited. It is our duty therefore not to legitimize this narrowness, but... to deepen and expand our agitational work."

There's the right relationship between agitation and revolutionary politics. We build mass struggles not simply in order to build unity, win demands, build confidence, and have people learn from experience about the nature of capitalism. We more importantly see it as a means by which we can draw revolutionary conclusions with larger numbers of workers.

But how is the transition to be made?

### Worker's Power

It is crucial to be realistic about the position of comrades in an industry. To take full advantage of the possibilities of leading and shaping the workers movement which lies open to us, they must be the best trade union militants at this time, they must be the best class struggle unionists on the shop floor. We must address ourselves to the issues of the moment, however small or economic, however large and political. But this means there is a limit to how far IS worker militants can go in drawing out revolutionary conclusions in the actual course of agitation. For our militants to be forced to end every talk before a union meeting or in a shop with an abstract call for revolution, would soon leave them isolated, unrespected, and totally ineffective. Yet for the building of a revolutionary movement, it is essential that revolutionary conclusions be drawn from mass work.

The key is Workers Power. The EC document says, "It is Workers Power which will carry the burden of developing transitional politics and thus carry revolutionary socialism into the new working class move-

ment we are helping to build. There is a sense in which our politics will take up where the politics of mass work organizations leave off, and that is the key to recruiting to the IS." After admitting the paper has lapsed into economism, the EC says, "The predominant emphasis in IS over the next year will remain agitation, but we will start to receive the full benefits of that emphasis only when we are successful in integrating politics into agitation."

To give an example to make this clearer. The experience of the UPS strike in the Midwest and the entire experience of the Upsurge movement over the past year has raised a number of political issues. The role of the union, the role of the government, the need to defend victimized militants, and the need for stronger organization, are all questions that must be decided by the Upsurge movement if it is to succeed. We should work in Upsurge to bring these discussions to everybody who has been involved as an Upsurge activist and through these discussions make the politics of the Upsurge movement more solid and more consciously working class and class struggle politics. At the end of these discussions, the Upsurge organization should publish its own pamphlet on the lessons of the past year. Such a pamphlet would certainly be widely read and influential in shaping the consciousness of UPS workers.

Out of that effort, our task is to take these lessons one step further and to generalize them into a need for socialist revolution. This is not what the Upsurge movement will probably do (although there's always hope); we have to pick up where it leaves off, take advantage of its work, and build a stronger revolutionary movement.

It is this method that we must apply to all our agitational work. If we don't do it, our trade union work will produce nothing more than social democratic political movements. It is WP that will be our primary tool in using this method. The EC makes a number of points on this: "... (we) must make increasing efforts to insure the IS has a political presence in our agitational areas... There are many ways to create the IS political presence, but probably the most important is Workers Power... (but only) if we use it widely and consistently so that it becomes an accepted part of the labor movement." It also points out that "A worker's paper will be read even by people who loathe its politics, (so they can) know what is going on in key parts of the labor movement... a worker's paper begins to be a source of explanations about what is going on in the world."

To reach such high standards in using the paper, we must do three things. One, the fractions must pour articles into the paper so that the paper can become respected and sought for the breadth of its coverage. Two, the fractions must take responsibility for drawing out the key political lessons out of events being reported, these lessons being both those of class struggle unionism and revolutionary socialism. And three, our members in industry must use the paper as a way to open up political discussion with other workers.

As Workers Power becomes more professional at developing the transitional politics, it will give our militants a way by which to draw revolutionary conclusions out of our mass work. But the counter-document sees a different role for WP. While criticizing the lapse into economism, it says, "... an important element is lacking - material that conveys our strategy for advancing the movements we are involved in and articles that make the employer offensive and class struggle unionism more than just an abstract slogan." (Emphasis in original).

The examples it gives are disturbing. Articles on how the increased use of scabs requires sit-downs, on how the increased use of injunctions requires 'labor political action', whatever that means. It seems as though the counter-document sees WP not as a vehicle for pushing political conclusions of a revolutionary nature, but instead

as a tool for the use of trade union militants to strengthen their work in building class struggle unionism. Its discussion of WP is very weak in the actual document, and one amendment proposes columns "...that deal with "how to fight the class struggle"(such as on grievances, organizing job actions, use of NLRB, OSHA, etc.)..." It is absolutely agreed that we should carry columns that try and put the actual problems of the rank and file in a historical light, such as "automation"; but when its suggested that valuable WP space be used to cover the kinds of technical questions that are covered usually by rank and file newsletters, I begin to doubt the counter-documents grasp of the proper use of WP in developing transitional politics.

### Recruitment and Political Training of New Members

It's interesting that the two documents give different reasons for the failure of the Worker Membership campaign to hold workers. Both documents call for open recruitment while concentrating on the fractions, they have very different ideas about training new members.

The EC document says, "If we had put as much effort into involving our new members into the work of the IS as we did into recruiting them, the rate of turnover would have been lower...we learned that the integration of new members ...must be seriously organized."

The EC document places the main failure to hold new members on the organization. It proposes steps to take care of that problem: "It also became abundantly clear that the political development of our new members was being hampered by the lack of suitable political material from the center...something only now being rectified by the creation of an education department and the projected publication of our workers Power magazine."

also, the EC addresses the problem of developing worker leadership: "Our policy is to...promote new comrades into the leadership... Our solution to the problem of tokenism is to approach the task of integrating, training, and developing new leadership as seriously as any other task in building the party..."

More importantly, the EC document says; "...increased activity comes with training and increased commitment...(but) it is our job to make increasing demands of our new members...Separate, long-term standards for the new worker members...will become a sort of second class membership."

The counter document has another view. It says: "Our last years policies-recruitment aimed at people who come to only one meeting, recruitment aimed at "we are the best fighters, join us"- is insufficient." It also says there were different levels of political commitment, inferring that we lost people not because we didn't work with them politically, but because the people themselves were not political enough.

But the counter-document doesn't move then to a position of recruiting people on a harder political basis. As a matter of fact, it states: "With the cynical attitude (of American workers), all political positions are suspect. What is needed is a winning strategy". But a winning strategy for what? It gets clearer later on. "We should produce strategy pamphlets for our various areas of work that relate to on-going caucus work, rank and file papers, contract fights, etc., to a class struggle strategy in the industry and the union. That deals with overcoming racism and sexism, building a national movement, political strategy, and ties into the fight for socialism."

It seems from this reading that new members will be recruited not to revolutionary socialist politics primarily, but primarily to

class struggle unionism. It also proposes that training be taken over by the fractions and based on these documents. The tendency to pull away from political discussion goes further. The counter-document talks about "abstract" political education as being much less useful than the experience of new members at conferences, "...learning to draw lessons from their own experience." The opposition of these two types of training is totally false. The greater a person's knowledge of the world and the history of the revolutionary movement, the more thorough a person's grasp of politics, all that much greater will be their ability to draw out revolutionary conclusions from their own experience.

In order to give the correct leadership not only to the revolutionary party, but also to the rank and file movement, members must see beyond the immediate fight against the employers. They must see how everything fits into building a political movement aimed at revolting against the employers, their system, and removing them from political power. That is our strategy, and our trade union work is part of it, not an end in and of itself. Without this understanding, our organization will eventually find its members being lost to social democratic ideas and it will mean our defeat.

Without consistent political training, new worker members will never be able to serve in the leadership of the organization, never be able to bring their experience to bear upon making the revolutionary movement more effective. Instead, workers will sit on leadership bodies merely for show. This tokenism and the patronizing attitude that goes with it will only lose new members and harm our reputation in the class.

### Summary

While the original EC document had weaknesses, they were largely corrected by the added resolutions. It does present an improved understanding of how to continue our work and build a revolutionary party out of it.

The counter document is, I believe, a result of the pressures of the Teaster campaign in particular, but our turn to agitation in general. In most ways, it is a conservative document, calling for the organization to de-emphasize even further its politics, and instead make the fraction work and the trade union arena central to the IS to the point of relegating the party as a whole to a secondary and generally insignificant role.

But the source of this document does not lie in opportunism. Its support grows out of the conservatizing effect that mass work in this country has on revolutionaries. I can't go into detail of my own personal experiences, but I won the position of Rec. Sec. of UAW Local 1851 by arguing clearly for the principles of class struggle unionism and by giving leadership in the way described as "mass work" in my local.

But I never carried my politics beyond this point. I should say that I was known as a socialist to most of the membership, although I did not join the IS until some months after our plant was shut down. Because I was operating without any political guidance or perspective, the question of building up among key individuals a firm political understanding of why to do this rank and file union activity, I saw a tremendous opportunity pass me by. I had, after a year of struggle forced a right wing president from office and being Rec. Sec. and having the support not only of the most militant sections of the local, but also the broader membership, I was able to take over effective leadership. I could have led an incredible struggle out of the local. The membership had approved of my plans to organize picket

lines at Blue Cross Trustees meetings to demand cheap insurance rates for laid off workers, given their approval to a public stand by our local against the UAW support for Mayor Rizzo on the basis that he was a friend of the labor bureaucracy and not the rank and file, that support for such a racist was an insult to the black community, and that in truth his election would benefit neither white nor black working class districts of Philly, and given their approval to set up an unemployment committee in the local.

But though I had won overwhelming votes of approval to carry on a struggle around both economic and political issues, I could not turn that into mobilization. What I lacked, what I had failed to do was build a politically cohesive organization which could take advantage, in fact could recognize the possibilities, of the situation. I was willing to work with anyone, but only someone who understood the long term benefits of such efforts would be willing to put their time into it and help mobilize people.

Building such an organization is a political task, and its strengths lie not primarily in numbers but in the political cohesiveness of the people in it. Those people who were the most open to socialist ideas were the people I tried to involve. But what I failed to do, because I didn't understand it myself, was explain how this trade union work was the first step in building a revolutionary workers movement. Older union activists supported me in words but were unwilling to really help build a fight. It was the younger workers that would have been the key, but without a clear connection between the work in the union and a socialist revolution, I never was able to get into perspective how to organize them.

In addition, because my politics remained personal and had no real connection to my trade union work, they were never a source of conflict. But without that relationship, the work did not go far in building a revolutionary movement. And it also meant that the trade union work was in many ways superficial.

Our members, involved in giving leadership in a mass movement, are faced with the same predicament. If we tone down our politics, if we concentrate on our trade union work, we could bring many more people around us. Since we are committed to building the revolutionary movement, but are feeling most immediately the pressures of the rank and file movement, the result is a desire to ease up in our presentation of the revolutionary politics we share.

My experience taught me that that type of activity, while looking good in the short run, is superficial. Not only isn't the revolutionary movement not built, but the lack of political cohesiveness in the organization of the rank and file means that it is unable to take advantage of political openings.

The only answer is to raise the political level of the rank and file organization. That's the task facing us in the unions. We must build class struggle unionism in a conscious way. Having that set of beliefs is not how we should define membership in rank and file groups; we fight to keep them open to anybody. But we must build a pole within the work itself.

To the degree that the counter-document transfers this work out of the rank and file movement and into the IS, it is a disaster. The result is to undercut both the politics of the IS and to avoid the political struggle in the rank and file movement. In the long run both strategies are disastrous.

The counter-document speaks to the real problems of our comrades in industry. The problem must be dealt with by the organization. It means more leadership from the center and the fractions. The center must be sensitive to these problems or else it will lose the confidence of the members. But it must be firm against the type of back-

sliding represented in the counter-document.

Most importantly, our members in industry must look closely at the counter-document and I hope reject it. They are still carrying the burden of our work. It is worth ten times as much if one member in industry comes out of this debate more steeled for the fights ahead than if ten members who remain aloof from the day to day work (if there are that many who do anymore) come out with a better theoretical understanding.

But whatever, the counter-document should be defeated. To the degree that it is implemented if accepted, it may mean some short term growth for the organization. But if fully carried out, it would result in five years in turning the IS into a social democratic organization, one in which the revolutionary sections would be forced to cause a split.

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