

"POLITICAL SOLUTION" OR POLITICAL CONFUSION?

A Reply to the "Resolving the Crisis" Document

INTRODUCTION

Still another grouping has appeared on the horizon. Recently, various groups decided not to enter or remain in the Majority Caucus. At a meeting in Chicago these groupings dubbed themselves the "Political Solution" caucus. They adopted, as their political basis, two documents: one from N. Y. dealing mainly with organizational methods and practices; the other from L.A. which deals with a much broader range of questions. This document is being written in response to the L.A. document. We will deal mainly with its major political arguments, leaving the questions of regime and organization for another time and document.

This response to the L.A. document, written by Joel J., was written before that document was redrafted and mimeographed. The second version, which will be more widely read than the first, does not differ in any significant political way from the earlier draft. Some changes in formulation or wording was done, but they did not effect the basic arguments or conclusions. While I have tried to make some changes to correspond to the second draft of the L.A. document, time prohibits a systematic revision. Although a phrase here and there may appear in quotes that is not in the second draft of the L.A. document, the basic politics of this critique did not need any real changes made by Joel, I stand by the political criticisms of the document that is now the political basis of the "Political Solution" caucus.

ECONOMIC CRISIS EQUALS THEORETICAL UPSURGE

Every faction, every political tendency or grouping in a revolutionary organization requires a political basis to justify itself. Naturally, the more profound and far-reaching the political basis the greater the justification. The document written by Joel J., claims to have found a full blown distortion of Marxism in the analytical method used by the IS for the past few years. Now, as anyone who has been around Marxist politics for more than a few days knows, there is nothing more profound than a distortion of the Marxist method. If this distortion does actually exist, and is the method by which the IS draws up and discusses its perspectives then, of course, not only is the leadership bankrupt, but the entire cadre and membership, which has shared in the formulation and discussion of these perspectives for years, is thoroughly mistrained.

Fortunately, the vast and timely task of retraining the entire organization in real Marxism, as opposed to class economic determinism will not be necessary. It will not be necessary because the distortion of Marxism that Joel J., claims to have unmasked is not the method of the IS or of any section of its leadership.

The distortion that Joel J., claims to have discovered is vulgar economic determinism. That is, the EC, in fact the IS, is accused of basing its perspectives on the notion that economic crisis automatically brings a massive and immediate response from the working class. Joel quotes one of the 1975 Convention documents, interestingly not the document which actually deals with our labor perspectives, but one on changing the way the IS operated as an organization in the past. The quote says,

The objective development of the capitalist crisis, a tendency toward massive inflation and high unemployment which the ruling class

cannot control, will necessarily create a massive reaction from the working class. The whole history of our class demonstrates this to be true. (emphasis added by JJ)

Bolshevization of the IS, 1975

From this quote Joel draws the conclusion that the EC, which presented this document, believed then, and now, that the day the crisis starts is the day the working class responds. The reason the EC believes that is because it doesn't take into consideration "subjective" factors - like the state of organization and what workers are thinking, etc. We will show that this is simply nonsense. But, first lets discuss this quote.

The quote from the 1975 "Bolshevization" document was not, then or now, a short term prediction. Let's be clear. Neither the EC, which proposed the famous 2½ year perspective, (which appeared in the Labor Perspectives) nor the Convention which discussed and passed it virtually without dissent, predicted as Joel puts it, "mass upheavals in basic industry, in 1975-77. In case you are reading this fast, we will repeat this point. The EC never predicted mass upheavals in 1975-77. This is simply one of the myths that has become part of the underground folklore of the IS. No, the quote from the Bolshevization document was one of many such long term predictions about the growing crisis of world capitalism. And, comrades, it is true. If it is not true, than Marx was a fool and revolution is a utopia.'

Marxists have always believed that capitalist crisis brings about working class response. This is an indispensable, though very general, part of our long range perspectives. Of course, the precise form and timing of the response is not answered by this basic piece of Marxist theory. But it would be a truly serious distortion of Marxism to believe the opposite - that is, that there is no correlation or relationship between capitalist crisis and working class motion.

The Communist Manifesto, written in 1848 on the eve of the "Bourgeois revolutionary upheavals in Europe, Marx and Engels wrote:

The growing competition among the bourgeois and the resulting commercial crisis make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing makes their livelihood more and more precarious; the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provisions beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots.

As a short term prediction this was not generally correct. In the years immediately following 1848, the workers of Europe did not form unions everywhere or engage in revolts. Some places and in some trades they did, in most they didn't for many, many years. But, of course Marx was not saying that crisis, wage cuts, and unemployment produce immediate results. He was, however, saying that economic conditions, in particular, capitalist crisis, do produce, over time, in different forms, a working class response. Without this piece of essential theoretical underpinning no perspective, no prediction, is possible. Without it, all the political, social, and subjective factors become jumbled mass of unrelated factors.

Without the notion that material conditions, in the long run, and in complex ways to be sure, determine consciousness, you do not have Marxism, but one or another version of bourgeois sociology or political science that is, you have nothing.

So, it is natural and correct that statements like that quoted from the 1975 "Bolshavization" document appear throughout the literature of the IS and, indeed, of every serious revolutionary organization in the world. If Joel wishes to find a reaffirmation of this notion, we will save him or anyone else the time by repeating right here. The growing crisis of capitalism, in the world and in the US., will necessarily produce a massive response from the working class. As the crisis grows deeper, in general, the response will be greater. This, we insist, is the cornerstone, the foundation, of our perspective for world revolution. This is not economic determinism, but elementary Marxism.

At the same time, such a general formulation is by itself, not enough on which to base a perspective. Joel is right about one thing; you must take into account a mountain of factors. Not just subjective factors, but material conditions other than the economy: history, the specific of each industry, in fact, of each plant, work place, or local union, etc., etc. According to Joel J., the EC does not do this. The EC it is alleged, looks only at the Consumer Price Index, the Unemployment Rate, and similar statistics in determining its perspectives. A picture is painted in which a land full of individuals, insulated behind the impenetrable shield of EC discipline, hot house perspectives out of economic figures.

First of all, perspectives are not arrived at in this manner at all. They are not hot housed by the EC. Our labor perspectives, which is what Joel is talking about, are the results of years of experience, discussion, heated debate, consultation, work by the various fractions and their leaders, the ideas of literally hundreds of people. Each year, for the past seven years, the leadership attempts to synthesize and update the experience of the organization's industrial work. As documents these perspectives cannot include, on paper, all of the reasoning and discussions that have produced the basic ideas. But, in all cases, they are the result of the experiences of all the fractions, as well as general analysis of the economy, trends in the labor movement, the political atmosphere, the role of different sections of the class, etc. Far from being excluded, the subjective factors tend to be the primary specific factors around which changes and refinements are made.

Of course, we have often been wrong or made mistakes about the consciousness and state of organization among the workers of various industries. While we never predicted the much publicized "mass upheaval" of 1975-77, we have often misestimated the possibilities in this or that union or industry. For example in 1974, we underestimated the response of telephone workers to their contract fight. Because of their serious defeat of 1971-72, we thought that telephone workers would not wildcat generally. We were wrong, they did in many places. Our estimate of the possibilities of 1974 was based primarily on subjective factors. What we actually have learned, is that workers do not respond in a direct manner to their past, level of organization etc.

In this respect Joel J., in fact, treats us to a new, and certainly very crude distortion of Marxism. Rejecting the notion that you can predict how workers will act from immediate economic conditions, he cooks up the theory that you can predict how workers will act on the basis of their history in the immediately preceding years. In particular, Joel would have us believe that you can tell what workers will or mostly won't do by whether or not they have faced defeats.

Joel J., tells us that if we had only remembered the defeats of the rank and file of the early 1970's we would have known, that CGC was a mistake.

In an early draft of his document, he specifically says, if we had taken into account the GMAD defeats of those years, we would not have tried CGC. He is saying we would have known this in advance and therefore would not have been so foolish as to try it. Joel's profound new theory is wrong in so many ways that we can only oick out a couple to respond to.

First of all, if we had applied Joel's criteria to the Teamsters union we would not have attempted TDC or Upsurge in the first place. In 1970, Teamster in the freight industry wildcatted all across the country. In their experience, this wildcat was a disastrous defeat. And, indeed, the outcome of the 1970 wildcat in some places, notably L.A., St. Louis, and Cleveland, was a disaster. People were fired. Locals put in trusteeship in L.A. and St. Louis. The 24 hour strike loophole was filled by Fitz. S Stewards organization was seriously weakened in LA. And so on. Unaware of Joel's theory, these defeated Teamsters went on to organize TURF. After a year of precarious existence TURF split and collapsed. Three and four years later Teamsters, still unaware of Joel's theory, began to build TDC. UPSurge, by the way, came on the heels of years of defeated strikes and wildcats.

Defeats, of course, do affect how workers respond, but it is by no means so simple as Joel puts it. (Probably Joel knows this from his own experience in the AFT and IBT. But faction fights seem to require profound new theories.) The poor beleaguered CGC perspective was, in fact, based on an assessment of the consciousness of auto workers primarily black auto workers in Detroit (who, by the way, did not experience the 1970 GMAD strikes directly). It was not primarily based on economic predictions. The specific aspect of consciousness was the deep cynicism of black auto workers about their ability to affect the UAW. We believed that it was necessary to show them that some motion was possible. To do this we wanted to move the small forces that would move in as visible a way as possible. With some visible motion, we hoped enough cynicism would be overcome to get significant numbers (hundreds if not thousands) of black production workers into motion. The forces we thought we could move from the start were essentially our local caucuses (our base) the old UNC leaders, and the skilled trades. (ISTC) As we started things going we ran across Wiseman, (Contrary to underground folklore, the perspective was not designed for Bob Wiseman) We knew there were enormous problems and no guarantees. Again, contrary to IS folklore, we did not predict a mass upheaval in auto. We thought however that we had a good shot at getting some motion around the contract.

CGC generated only a tiny amount of motion among black production workers. Our mistake was not economic determinism, but our assessment that some visible motion would do the trick. It didn't. Our assessment that followed CGC was not, as Joel says that economic crisis leads to passivity, but that among other factors the defeat of the black movement has made many of the most militant black workers fearful of "being out on a limb". Is that subjective enough?

The Teamster perspective was also based primarily on factors other than the general state of the economy. In part, the IDT perspective that led to TDC was based on a mistaken understanding of how Teamsters viewed their own history. While it was not the only factor, we tended to view the 1970 wildcat and TURF as proof that Teamsters would fight. We believed that the 1970 wildcat was a victory because, in fact, it had forced Fitz back to the bargaining table. Only months later did we discover that most Teamsters viewed the 1970 wildcat as a defeat. That is, we started implementing TDC partly on the basis of a misunderstanding.

The fact of the matter is that working up a perspective is a complex process. The 1975 labor perspective grew out of the Teamster and auto perspectives in particular. It attempted to put that experience in a general context. This context included not only the economy and its direction, but emphasized other central trends as well. For example, it talked about the employers offensive, which is not the same thing as nor directly determined by, short term economic trends. It also emphasized the role

of the labor leadership as crucial to the possibilities for rank and file action. Most of what was predicted about the economy, employers offensive, and role of the labor bureaucracy has proved true. The economic predictions were somewhat off - particularly concerning inflation. And the much hoped for split in the UAW bureaucracy did not occur, or is not visible.

Most fundamentally, the perspectives documents are analysis of how the various class forces interact with each other as much as they are analysis of how the economy affects each of them. The 1975 documents, like those before and after also try to assess how other social events and movements affect the consciousness of the workers. These include the effect of the women's movement, the black movement, political events like Watergate, urban crisis and cutbacks. While we have made numerous mistakes and misestimates, the method of those documents and the discussions surrounding them has never been economic determinism. The truth is, the IS is one of the few organizations in the U.S. that even attempts such analysis. And these attempts are head and shoulders above anything else on the left here.

What the 1975 perspectives document actually predicted was not mass upheaval. It said that because of economic pressures, the employers' offensive and its particular forms in each industry, because of the unwillingness of the labor officialdom to fight, in particular their strategy of substituting electoral and lobbying work for collective bargaining, because the movements of the 60's had effected working class ideas, because the government lacked clear authority (this was 1975 remember), because the working class had shown its willingness to fight from 1967 to 1972, but had been relatively quiet from 1973 and had gotten lousy contracts as a result, because of these and other pressure facts, and trends we predicted that the 1975-77 bargaining round would see a significant growth of worker resistance.

Out of this resistance we saw the possibility of agitational work around the major contracts where we had members with any experience. The perspective said that if, the Teamsters got things off to a rousing start, it could encourage auto workers to do the same. (Contrary to what Joel J., thinks, we propagandized around just that notion in the pages of W.P. - Remember "If the Teamsters win, we all win.") We said that if that happened it could cause further breakthroughs in the steel, telephone and other contracts. The breakthrough meant specifically breaking the un-official, but real, guidelines that the employers and the government wanted to impose by winning the cooperation of the labor bureaucracy - which is just what they did.

We further said, in 1975, that successful contract campaigns in Teamsters and auto would lay the basis for national opposition groups, or at least the framework of national groups. We said that it was doubtful that this would happen in steel, but possible in telephone.

In the IBT, where TDC was successful, we did get a national opposition group. In auto, where CGC wasn't successful, we didn't get such a group. We can now see that it is unlikely that we will be able to get national organizations in steel or telephone.

Our predictions of 1975 were conditional. That is, each possibility depended, in part, on other events. While we never predicted mass upheaval we did overestimate the response of the workers to the situation. At the 1976 Convention and the October, 1976 NC meeting, we explored the reasons for this overestimation. While there were numerous reasons, the most important thing we learned and stated, before Joel J cooked up his theory, was that the weakness of the organizational and political traditions of the American working class inhibit its ability to respond to events. It is not just cynicism, or past defeats, or passivity. At the root of these is the lack of organization and political understanding of the sort that exists in Britain and throughout Europe. Ironically, we became most aware of these problems not in auto or through our defeats, but in the IBT in the midst of success. The simple lack of organizational and political know how among militant Teamsters made it difficult to get stable organization and allowed the local leaders to frequently out manoeuvre TDCers or UPSurgers at union meetings. We can also see, on a national scale, how organizational and political backwardness holds back the development of organized rank and file opposition in the UMWA. As Joel J. correctly points out, these traditions must be built and we have no choice but to play a part in that process.

From our understanding of the real weaknesses of the working class in the US we can refine our perspectives--and have done so in a document from the EC and accepted by the Majority Caucus. But we would be foolish indeed to leap to still another theoretical error: the conclusion that the very real organizational and political weaknesses of the class will mean that, as the crisis unfolds, workers will not respond at all or very much. In fact, the weakness of these traditions has another side to it. It is part of the reason that the American working class is so volatile. The high level of strike activity in the late 1960's was an example of that volatility. Often the very lack of organization creates a vacuum that can be filled by explosive action. (As we know, the problem with this is that most of this type of action ends in defeat. But the working class learns from defeats as well as victories.) The lack of an organized leadership at the rank and file level, also explains why we, in the US are able to lead something like TDC. In Europe, we would be competing with CPers and other political and accepted leaders. Here there is less competition at the rank and file level. The problems of the class can also be the opportunities for the revolutionaries--if we are willing to concentrate our small resources, as we did in TDC, and take bold initiatives.

To justify his new theory, Joel had first to perpetuate the myth that we expected a "mass upheaval" in 1975-77. To give his theory, that crisis does not lead to (economic voluntarism, must be the name of this theory) working class response, he has to distort history. We are told that although the depression came in 1929, there was no working class response, until 1933. (This is later contradicted during a discussion of the CIO, where the document tells us that there was "a titanic mass movement in the industry, which had been on for several years beginning in 1932-33." In fact, truly "titanic" struggles did not break out until later.) But there was mass struggle in the early thirties. While it is impossible to do justice to the entire history of the 1930's, it is worth looking at to see how things really do unfold and how workers do respond to economic crisis.

The Wall Street crash of 1929 set off the biggest depression in US history. This crisis was more severe in the US than in any other major capitalist nation--except Germany. But it did not happen overnight. The actual crisis took three years, 1929-32 to reach bottom--by which time industrial production had dropped by 50% and unemployment risen to 11 million. As the crisis unfolded the working class responded. Less than six months after the Wall Street Crash, long before unemployment reached its height, on March 6, 1930, over 1 million workers led by the CP demonstrated against unemployment across the country. In Detroit alone, 100,000 workers demonstrated on March 6. This massive showing had been preceded by CP led "riots" of several thousand unemployed workers in Cleveland and LA in February, 1930. By 1931, Unemployed Councils were organized all over the US and mass demonstrations and marches were common from 1930 to 33.

The level of organization of the working class in the late 1920's and early 30's was extremely low. The '20's had been a decade of almost unbroken defeats for labor. The number of union members was smaller than it had been at the beginning of the 1920's. The AFL dropped from 4 million members in 1920 to 2.2 million in 1931. The UMW had been nearly destroyed in Appalachia. Aside from the garment trades, only skilled workers in a few industries had any real organization. Virtually every significant strike of the '20's was defeated. Yet, when the crisis hit in 1929 there was a response, particularly by unemployed workers.

The early response to the crisis, however, was not entirely limited to the unemployed. In 1931, there was a significant rise in strike activity. In 1930, the AFL leadership had promised Hoover they would lead no strikes if he would grant some small relief programs. For the first 2 or 3 years of the depression the official union leaders refused to lead strikes. Yet, strike activity rose. In particular, there was a strike wave in the coal fields of Kentucky, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Most of these strikes were led by the CP--itself badly defeated throughout the second half of the 1920's. The Harlan County strikes of 1931 are the most celebrated, but there was intense and violent class struggle throughout the coal fields of Appalachia.

In the industries with little tradition of organization, the response took longer. But considering the severity of the Depression, that is the number of unemployed workers available to break strikes, the response was not so long in coming. By the Fall and Winter of 1932, three years after the Crash, workers in auto, and other basic industries began organizing unions on a local, underground basis. This movement was given encouragement by Section 7A NRA. This organizing erupted into a strike wave in the auto industry in the Spring and Summer of 1933. The AFL refused to lead these strikes or negotiate in their behalf. Most of the auto strikes were led by CP, SP and IWW militants--radicals filling the vacuum.

The early years of the Great Depression showed that workers were willing to respond, when revolutionaries were willing to lead. Naturally, struggle did not break out everywhere, all at once. But these early years laid the basis for much greater struggles to come. It is perfectly true that the weakness of union or political organization among American workers and the previous decade of defeats, effected how they responded, held back some industries and pushed forth others, even determined to some extent the scale of struggle. But the undeniable fact is that the American working class did respond to the crisis, almost from its start, and those revolutionaries willing to lead found a response.

Joel, also distorts British history to prove his theory. He says that British workers did not respond to the crisis of the 1930's because they had been defeated in the General Strike of 1926. Now, it is true that there was not a general, mass upheaval in Britain in the 1930's--although there were important strikes, e.g. textile, and an unemployed movement of large proportions. And it is also true that part of the reason for the low level of struggle in Britain in the 30's was the disastrous defeat of the 1926 General Strike. But the picture presented in Joel's little throwaway sentence is a false one nonetheless.

The crisis hit Britain long before it hit the US. In fact, the crisis reached high proportions as early as 1913. It was temporarily alleviated during WW I, 1914-18. In late 1919, Britain faced the re-emergence of its crisis. The crisis of 1913 was followed by a growing mass response, which brought millions of workers into unions. The shop stewards movement was born during the war and emerged in 1919 as a powerful force, led by revolutionary socialists. As the crisis grew after 1919, the class struggle intensified. The CP was founded, with the shop stewards being a crucial part of its base and the Minority Movement grew as a mass rank and file movement in the unions. A massive strike in engineering ended in the defeat of the strongest union in Britain--the Amalgamated Engineers. The General Strike was the final defeat in what had been a massive movement of the working class against the crisis of British capitalism. To a large extent this defeat was due to the treason of the trade union leadership and the mistaken policy of the CP in 1926.

The economic crisis of the 1930's did not hit Britain nearly as hard as it did the U.S. From 1929 to '32, industrial production in the U.S. dropped by 50%; in Britain the drop was only 16%. The U.S. did not reach the production levels of 1929 until the outbreak of war in Europe in 1940-41. Britain surpassed its 1929 levels by 1937. In the U.S. real wages dropped about one-third from 1929-32, in Britain real wages actually rose during this period - due more to a drop in the price of food than to any wage increases. In short, while it is true that the British working class was defeated, it is also true that the pressures on British workers were not as great because Britain had had its crisis 10 years earlier.

We go through all of this history because it is important that in the heat of this faction fight comrades not be mistrained. We want to show that the idea that the working class does respond to capitalist crisis is true. In fact, it is fundamental to any Marxist perspective. The fact that you cannot predict, with complete accuracy, the precise timing, forms of organization, and so on, is true enough. Many factors other than mere economics determine these and more. But it would be a mistake to score points in a faction fight.

OUT WITH AGITATION, IN WITH CONFUSION

Misconception, misrepresentation, and confusion reach an all time high, when Joel J. gets around to discussing our agitational approach to building the revolutionary organization. This section, entitled "The Best Fighters Will Build the Party", claims to have found still another "mechanical distortion of the socialist method." It is claimed that the IS said that we "could grow simply by giving a lead to the contract fight to come." Joel claims we said that people would join just because we were the best militants. Similarly he claims the IS view was that "militancy will automatically lead socialist politics."

This is a ludicrous character of the IS strategy for party building and of our agitational method. It shows a complete lack of understanding of a strategy developed not by the EC in 1975, but by Lenin and the early Communist International. This strategy came about in response to the purely propaganda and sectarian approach of the "left wing Communists" of the early 20's. It was applied to those Communist Parties that were still small and weak - notably, Britain and the U.S. The conceptions (and the terms) of the United Front, Mass Work, and Party Building were all part of this strategy and were developed together.

This strategy says, not that militancy automatically leads to socialist politics, but that revolutionaries can gain a hearing in the working class by leading the day to day struggles. We did predict that we could grow by using the agitational approach, but no one, except maybe Joel J., thought or said that workers would join without being convinced of the need for revolution and revolutionary organization. Let's look at some examples of what the real IS, not the IS of underground folklore, really did say, not only to itself but to workers as well. In the pamphlet, "The Struggle For Workers Power", written for the Worker Membership Campaign, we said:

These rank and file movements are the key to the strategy of the International Socialists. We totally support these movements and help build them. We help provide them with the experience and expertise needed to challenge the old establishment leadership. And we offer political guidance and direction to those sections of the rank and file movement that want to hear what we have to say.

As revolutionary Marxists who have an understanding of what is going on in capitalist society, we are able to gain growing influence inside these rank and file movements. We are given an opportunity to prove the effectiveness and usefulness of our political advice and guidance against their actual experience. And to the extent we prove correct, our members and our organization gain growing

respect and leadership within these movements.

It is our perspective to recruit to the IS the best, most dedicated, most experienced, most effective leaders from these movements. It then becomes the responsibility of the IS to help these leaders fully develop themselves to their fullest leadership potential. We do this through political education, through organizational training, and through the back-up and help that comes from being part of an effective and growing national organization. In turn, the people who join the IS bring their experience, their dedication, and their effectiveness into the organization - allowing it to grow, not just in numbers, but but in experience and effectiveness as well.

As the crisis of capitalism deepens, members of the IS will prove themselves to be the best and most effective leaders of rank and file movements that will grow to mass proportions. These movements, in turn, will sort out and select the most dynamic and dedicated working class militants, who will be open to recruitment to a revolutionary program, politics, and organization. It is in this way that the IS will be able to transform itself into a powerful revolutionary working class party, in the leadership of massive rank and file movements.

There is no automatic or mechanical notions in these paragraphs. As an outline of our party-building strategy they are as true today as then. It says simply that as the crisis deepens more workers will be open to recruitment and, in so far as, we are effective leaders of the daily struggles of the class, we will be able to take advantage of that openness to recruit and build the IS and then the party.

In "Conspiracy in the Trucking Industry," (Feb., 1976) we approached the same idea from a slightly different angle:

From the revolutionary socialist point of view every fight - a local walkout, TDC and UPSurge, a hard fought union meeting - is preparation for bigger fights ahead. Every fight teaches political and organizational lessons. Every fight shows more clearly the nature of the enemy. So for the IS workers there is no contradiction between the struggles of today and the greater one's to come: today's struggles make tomorrow's possible.

After all, no one is born a socialist. We who are now members of the IS had to be convinced and trained by events as well as by argument and discussion. The crisis of the capitalist system that goads the conspiracy on and that threatens our livelihood is, ultimately, the best recruiter the socialist workers' movement has.

The point of these long quotes is to show that while we do believe that crisis and struggle are the basis for building a revolutionary workers movement; we were never so idiotic as to believe that this would all happen automatically. If, indeed, we did believe such nonsense, far from pushing for industrialization, we would be able to recruit from the outside. Or if we believed that people would join just because we were the best fighters, without ever raising politics, without ever discussing revolution and revolutionary organization, etc., then why did we bother to put out any literature on these subjects. No! The whole charge that the EC, and obviously everyone else, believed such nonsense is all factional contrivance.

Contrary to what Joel claims, the TDU, far from being the refutation of our agitational approach, is the best proof of it. While it is true that recruitment here, like most of life, proved to be "a very complicated process," it is nonetheless true that this process proves our method. Our Teamster work is the area in the most aggressive and massive struggles, where we have proved ourselves to be effective leaders in practice, and as a result, where we have recruited the most workers, and by and large

the most effective worker leaders. It is true that recruitment is not "massive", but it is significant and very high in quality. It is also true that it took many months of working with those we have recruited. Perhaps the process could have moved a little faster, perhaps not. The point is that the process, of recruiting out of agitational mass work, did take place, did recruit, and will continue into the future.

We must take up here another one of Joel's folk legends. This one says we pretended that the "current vacuum of the leadership in the teamsters has simply destroyed the attraction of other stronger forces to whom the rank and file would still hope to turn: the courts, the government/legislation, even reform bureaucrats who are not yet on the scene but who are still expected to emerge to clean up the union." Who ever pretended such a thing? If we pretended this, why did Workers' Power, particularly during the TDC contract campaign carry articles on the other forces, such as government intervention, the courts, PROD, etc. The point of our agitational method is precisely to provide an alternative to these poles of attraction, not to be paralyzed by them or retreat into the world of propaganda. Unfortunately, it is this retreat that Joel's document is really all about.

In effect, one section after another of Joel's document throws out our agitational and mass work methods. While it is presented as a critique of the EC's application of agitation, it is in fact an attack on the basic strategy and methods of the I.S. In most respects its criticisms and even many of its conclusions - in so far as it draws real conclusions - point in the direction of those of the "left" faction. This document is saved from the sectarian fate of the "left" faction, by the fact that very few conclusions are drawn. In so far as the document has a program for the new leadership it proposes, that program would seem to be "flexibility", or to put it less politely, confusion. Let us be clear, however, if the conclusions that actually flow from the documents various criticisms and arguments were drawn out and implemented, they would lead us away from our basic task of building a workers combat organization.

From the confusion about what our agitational method is, the document moves into a series of discussions on our work, Workers Power, and industrialization that, taken together, point in the direction of a propaganda group, and essentially a middle class one at that. They say they are for an agitational organization, but they introduce - historically re-introduce - a series of propagandistic and sectarian concepts that would, in fact, make that impossible.

Of the many such concepts that appear throughout this document we will concentrate on four: 1) WP should be a propaganda paper and the specific type of propaganda they propose; 2) a sterile conception of how rank and file movements grow; 3) and related closely to 2, the notion that united fronts must be preceded by independent base building; and 4) the academic idea that industrialization must be preceded by a long period of political education. From their arguments for each of these, and even from some explicit statements in the document, it is clear that the authors do not believe that the IS can do significant agitational work in the working class at this time. Their conception of the organization and, therefore of Workers' Power flows from this

WORKERS' POWER: NO RETREAT

Workers' Power is not fulfilling the needs of the organization. Of that there is no doubt. WP reflects, to some degree, the current demoralization of some sections of the organization, the lack of self-confidence in our perspectives, and the confusion that exists as a result. The political level of the paper had not risen significantly, which means that it cannot effectively do the job now required of it. The October N.C. pointed a new more political direction for WP, but the faction fight intervened to head off and derail that process. Without a reorganization of the leadership and without a reorganization of the leadership and without the input of more politically developed people, the paper will not become what it must. A document on this question

will be presented in the course of the pre-Convention discussion. Here we wish only to defend the general political conception of what WP should be, against the sectarian notion presented in Joel J's document.

The conception of a revolutionary paper that we wish to work toward is Lenin's Pravda. Pravda was, after a process of development, a real workers paper. Its pages were filled with articles by workers, workers sold it, and even non-party workers took up regular collections for Pravda. Over the years, it was the readership of Pravda that became, finally, the membership of the party that led the Russian Revolution. It became in time, what Lenin had argued for in 1903, an organizer for the party. But it did not become this overnight. It took years to make the paper an effective organizer. The most important aspect of its development that allowed it to become a real workers paper and party organizer, was that reflected and acted on the life of the working class. Lenin had only contempt for clever, sectarian papers where "there is not a trace in it of either workers' initiatives, or any connection with working class organization. Lenin described a part of the process of becoming a workers paper:

The chronicle of workers' life is only just beginning to develop into a permanent feature of Pravda. There can be no doubt that subsequently, in addition to letters about abuses in factories, about the awakening of a new section of the proletariat, about collections for one or another field of the workers cause, the workers' newspaper will receive reports about the views and sentiments of the workers, election campaigns, the election of workers delegates, what the workers read, the question of particular interest to them, and so on.

To be a real organizer for the party, its paper must reflect the workers life, their struggles, etc. Papers like those of the most of the revolutionary left in America, papers that just comment on, analyze and educate about grand matters, or grand strategies, will never be party organizers in the Leninist sense. The paper must not only reflect the working class life, but it must be itself, a tribune of the people. That is, it must take sides, be ferociously partisan on all the questions of the day. As the party grows and sinks its roots in the class, its paper will become more and more of a real agitational tool for the masses of workers.

We, of course, are not at the stage where WP is in practice a mass agitational tool or a real workers paper. For now, it is still a paper for workers. But we know where we want to go. If we are to get there we must do as Pravda did and bring the life of the working class into the paper, as well as bringing our ideas into the working class. Most left-wing papers are sectarian and sterile because they believe their sole task is to bring their ideas to the workers. In fact, to this effectively, the workers must be able to see themselves, their struggles, their needs in the paper. So, there are two sides to developing a real revolutionary newspaper.

We have made, in the last three years, some important strides in moving WP in that direction. When WP was at its best, it was filled with interviews and letters from workers. We emphasized pictures of workers in struggle, rather than the usual sectarian practice of featuring photos of all our enemies. We tried, not always successfully, to have our work appear in WP in a way that would be recognizable to those workers we were actually working with.

All of this explains the agitational style of WP - that is, what Joel calls cheer-leading. It is true that WP cannot move thousands of workers around most of its appeals and calls to action. But this is completely beside the point. We never believed that WP could substitute for Convoy, shop bulletins, or strike leaflets. But WP must be able to speak to those workers among whom we are doing agitational work. And it must do so in a way that attracts, rather than repels them. It must do so in a way that shows our support and identification with their struggles and that points ways forward. That is also why the paper has an agitational style.

The content of WP, now and in the future is a combination of agitation and propaganda. It regularly contains articles and columns that analyze things, draw lessons, and otherwise conduct propaganda. But it also takes sides on the issues of the moment. Because it takes sides in a way that actually tries to point to something workers can really do - as opposed to just thinking about it is necessarily agitational. But as often as possible our cheers contain steps that workers can actually take to move things forward. For example, in WP we called for an argued for, through both agitational and propagandistic methods, a national freight strike before Convoy could. We did cheer on TDC, but we also pointed ways forward. Much of this overlapped with Convoy, but that is beside the point. WP reaches not only Teamster, but many other kinds of workers who we want to win to our methods of struggle. Even among Teamsters it was, and is important that they see themselves in WP.

It is also a mistake to believe that Workers Power should address itself exclusively to the most advanced; that is, provide them only with long range views. In fact, in order to speak effectively to those workers we work with or who are leading struggles on their own, we must be able to provide them with the ideas and proposals needed to lead the more backward. That means being agitational, and not merely propagandistic. In terms of Workers' Power's utility in our actual work it would be wrong, and utterly confusing to everyone, to have WP carry one line (a strike at Ford's alone will loose) and our members in the plants carrying another line (Strike Ford's). WP articles can go beyond what we say in momentary agitation, but not in a way that appears to contradict. Our contacts and collaborators would be well within their rights to ask us, why are we demanding a Ford strike, when our own paper says it will loose.

Joel's document proposes an entirely different approach. It is not just that this approach is propagandistic; it is fundamentally sectarian and bankrupt. They dredge the most tired of orthodox Trotskyist and new left sectarian methods. It is the method which explains, in great detail and with very profound Marxist profundity, why living workers, existing in this real capitalist world, cannot possibly do anything effective. It is a notion that proceeded backwards from the belief that only class-wide, or at least massive upheavals are strong enough to really win anything. Thus, they tell us in their document that we should not have told Ford workers to strike. Instead we should have explained "to them that a strike against Ford alone could not win." Similarly, we should tell Teamsters about the limits of TDU in the pages of WP. We should warn steel workers that if you get active around Sadlowski's campaign, you will be putting yourself under the control of bureaucrats.

This whole approach grows out of the view of the intellectual outsider - even those who work in industry. This view sees struggles, defeats and victories, as abstractions. In this view, victories and defeats are mutually exclusive and always easy to discern. Everything is clear cut and only needs to be explained - in great detail and profoundly, - for the class struggle to move forward. In fact, things do not work this way. When articles are written on the basis of this method, they are not recognizable as workers real experiences to the workers themselves. Even worse, this approach can only bolster the cynicism of the American working class by convincing them that the obstacles to successful struggle are even greater than one imagined.

In his book on the Free Speech Movement of 1964, Hal Draper noted that the student rebellion had to start among the more non-ideological

radicals because the old Marxists, better understanding the role of the university and the social weakness of students, knew in advance that such a movement could not win. This is the political wisdom that we find in Joel's document. It is a method, only abstractly Marxist, with which the IS broke years ago. It is the method of a dozen sectarian papers, not of Pravda. It is a false method, a phony brand of Marxism.

The truth is that the whole question of victories and defeat, of what is possible right now, is far more complex, but much more hopeful than Joel's document would have us believe. Just to take a couple of examples. The Teamsters wildcat of 1970 was both a defeat and a victory in the sense that they forced Fitz to get more money. But for many, as we have already pointed out, it was also a defeat. Indeed, Teamsters in L.A. and elsewhere viewed it as a defeat. In our view, however, it was over-all a victory, - an uneven one, but a victory. It was a victory because it showed that militant action could win gains.

When we argued this in WP #151, we did not use the defeats in L.A. as an argument for why freight workers should hang low in 1976. No. We used the victory on the money question as the thrust, a positive, as opposed to negative thrust, in arguing for a strike. Additionally, we made the positive arguments about how you resist victimization. But our method was to build from strength - to cheerlead - to show the way forward.

Another example is the 1976 freight strike itself. Our analysis emphasized that although it was a sellout, the ranks by organizing and fighting had forced concessions out of Fitz. The sectarians emphasized that it was a sell-out and that TDC, as a reformist trap, had not been able to prevent it. The sectarians would tell us that only a consistent class struggle caucus, with a consistent class struggle program could have led the way to victory. An organization that operated on the method of Joel's document would have substituted "strategy" for program, but arrived at essentially the same conclusion.

The IS method of agitating and propagandizing around positive steps that the workers in various situations can take, though not necessarily as individuals flows from the basic methods with which you have to build a workers movement and a revolutionary party. These include the actual methods of work we use in various unions and industries. Workers power flows out of these methods. Unfortunately, the propagandistic, teachy version of a newspaper proposed in Joel's document also flows from methods of functioning that he proposes.

THE RANK AND FILE: PURE AND SIMPLE

Joel's document repeats, without much variation, the "left" faction's accusation that the IS is drifting to the right because of the EC's insane lust for mass work. The argument says that since there is not massive motion in the working class, "we start looking for other forces which could possibly create that motion for us...particularly the "left" or out bureaucrats." As a result of this obsession for mass work at any cost we have abandoned building an independent rank and file movement. Closely related to this is Joel's statement that the "first requirement of entering any united front is a base of your own."

These political ideas lead them to a critique, of our auto and steel work or the critique leads them to the ideas. What is wrong with CGC and our support of Sadlowski and entrance into Steel Workers Fight Back is

that these involve blocks with bureaucrats. Joel says this tactic cannot be justified even if it brings rank and filers around, because we did not have a base with which to enter into a united front. Also if rank and filers come around because of motion by secondary bureaucrats, they will "continue to depend on them." In fact, we are told, that unless the movement is started by rank and filers or socialists, the bureaucrats will control it and we will be "used by the bureaucrats."

As an example of correct functioning, Joel says that in TDU, understanding we would be used by bureaucrats, we did not go for such endorsements. In other words, whether you start off with your own, rank and file base, or block and ally yourself with "other forces" such as local union officials is simply a matter of choice. The conditions, traditions, political life, structure, etc. of different unions can make no difference, can in no way basically affect how you launch agitational campaign, local union fights, etc., we are supposed to believe. When you set out to organize a campaign or fight, you choose between rightward drifting bureaucratic alliances and base building independent rank and file movements. This, comrades, is both childish and harmful.

To begin at the factual level, let's set the record straight on TDC and how it was started. In the first place, there is no significant number of "out bureaucrats," currently in opposition to Fitzsimmons to appeal to. The political life structure of the IBT is such that this sort of bureaucratic opposition is unlikely - at least until the rank and file movement is big enough to appear like good pickens' for some ambitious type. While there are rival baronies, or the remnants of them, they do not even pretend to have a democratic approach to things. However, in so far as there are local officials with an oppositionist image, the fact is that we did attempt to approach them, or to argue that TDC was the way forward. The Action for Hoffa types are a partial example of this. But, the first people that we actually attempted to contact, involve, and negotiate with, were the newly elected "reform-minded" officials in Memphis and a couple of other places. They did not want to stick their necks out, so we moved on. But there was never any question of Principle involved in who we dug up to help us start TDC. To repeat, our general assessment of things in the IBT was the ranks would move before any section of the secondary leadership. Naturally, we prepared the way. But we started with reality and not some abstract principle about first having a base before allying with anyone.

The idea that we are going to build an independent rank and file movement simply by recruiting pure rank and filers to become our base is simplistic and naive. Whether you are fighting a grievance in one shop, pushing a motion in a union meeting or organizing a contract fight, there will be hundreds of times when you must block with, ally with, or support other forces - some bigger, some hostile to you, some union officials or their rank and file flunkies/ If you are unwilling to maneuver and make alliances, then you will be no more than a propagandistic, or, more likely, just a loser. Like everything else in real life, building a workers movement, an independent movement turns out to be "a very complicated process."

Joel's argument reflects the lack of self confidence that comes from political confusion. It is reminiscent of the paralyzing fear of "cooption" that characterized the New Left. The document tells us that the bureaucrats are stronger and will therefore take anything we start with them away from us. Enter into an alliance, no matter how limited or short term, and you will be used. This view sees no dynamics no process of anything. According to this document the nature, terms, or context of the alliance can make no difference.

The fact is, however, that revolutionaries can use a movement or campaign dominated by bureaucrats to increase their base, influence their reputation as fighters and revolutionaries. Naturally, both the possibilities and dangers of such a tactical decision depend on the real situation, the balance of forces, and on what each of these forces wants to get out of the alliance or block. In the world of Joel's docu-

ment, bureaucrats, all of them, always want total control, and we always want total independence. If that's the way things really are, then there is no hope. But, the fact is, that the class struggle has many facets and layers, many forces competing with each other. These forces, like ourselves (or at least most of us), understand that to build your own power you must wage many limited struggles for specific goals.

For example, for their own reasons a local, even very conservative, officials may call a strike against the employers, or an employer. Like Al Costa, bureaucratic, gang connected head of an Oakland Teamster Local, or Howie Banker, conservative head of the big New York Telephone Local,. Or a bureaucrat like Ed Dempsey may oppose, certainly for his own reasons, the incumbent Local President of that telephone local, and strike out independently with out of state pickets - naturally in the most conservative and timid way possible. Should we, under circumstances like these support, block with, fight alongside of these officials so long as they actually carry out these fights? Or is this impermissible until we already have a base?

Unless, we really are just commentators on the class struggle, we would have to block with these officials against the bosses - who, it should be remembered are even greater enemies. And, in doing so, by being more consistently militant and tactically effective than the leaders, we can begin to build a base for ourselves, Struggle, even imperfect struggles led by bureaucrats, offer opportunities to put ourselves forward and to prove in action what we have been saying. Naturally, there is the chance we won't succeed, or you will not get as much as you thought you might. But it is completely sterile to think that it would be better to remain aloof, free from cooption, while handing out strategies to people who actually are fighting.

Contrary to the rightward drift theory, more or less critically, for years, a number of bureaucrats, opportunists, and people whose politics are far less than perfect on many questions. Ed Dempsey in CWA (1972 & 73); Ken Miesen AFT (1972) Jordon Sims UAW (1973); Morrisey, NMU (1973); Arnold Miller, UMWA (1973); and probably many more local candidates. All of these candidates were not the same and we did not say the same thing about them all of them. In each case, we attempted, where we had members, to build and expand our base. In most of these situations we were limited by the fact we had no operatives. In the AFT where we had people and CWA, we had limited successes. In any event we did not lose anything or come out with a smaller base because of such an alliance. In general, such campaigns helped us dig deeper roots; that is helped us begin to get a base in various places.

The united front and mass work were related tactics. As the 1922 Comintern Conference put it:

The tactics of the United Front imply the leadership of the Communist vanguard in the daily struggles of the large masses of the workers for their vital interests.

It is not only, as Joel believes, a tactic in which two or more forces, each with its own base in form an alliance. It can also be a tactic for enlarging your base.

The biggest independent rank and file organization in the history of the American working class was the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) of the early 1920's. It was run and controlled by the CP, with CP leader William Z. Foster as its head. In 1921 TUEL was a tiny group with a network of a couple of dozen people. The CP, until 1921, refused to work in the AFL unions and had no base there. To launch TUEL as a mass organization, Foster struck an alliance with the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), the local AFL city-central body in Chicago. His principle allies in the CFL was its President, John Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was a bureaucrat with generally, but not very specific, progressive politics. This alliance gave TUEL the legitimacy and authority it needed to launch its first mass agitational campaign (for industrial

unionism through amalgamation of craft unions in each industry). This campaign won TUEL its base, with Fitzpatrick's help. Fitzpatrick was in a far stronger position than the CP. But he was not able to control or gain the dependence of the rank and file. The Communists gained leadership in TUEL not by abstaining from the united front tactics because they didn't have a base, but by using that tactic to win thousands of rank and file workers to their banner through aggressive agitational work.'

The TUEL, by the way, supported numerous non-Communist candidates in the early 20's including candidates far to the right of TUEL and its program.

The tactics of the united front and of mass work don't refer just to alliances at the national level, or alliances of pre-existing organized forces. Mass work refers to work among the masses, not to the size of any particular campaign. If, in order to win a grievance, and in order to get some form of action in a specific work place, let's say a freight barn, you ally yourself with a shop steward who is opposed to TDU, that is a united front and you are attempting to engage in mass work. The tactical methods of mass work and the united front are just as essential to building a shop floor base or local union caucus as they are to national campaigns or union elections.

The fact is that our enemies are not just sociological blocks of the bureaucracy, the ruling class. In real life different sections of the bureaucracy and different levels within it are forced into conflict and torn apart by various pressures and forces. We must be prepared to take advantage of every such crack or split in the unity of the labor bureaucracy to weaken their position and strengthen the position of the RANK AND FILE. Independence is born out of strength self-confidence and political principle, not out of abstractions and purity born of fear.

In this respect, let's take the Sadlowski case. Joel J. would have us believe that by entering Sadlowski's campaign organizations, Steel Workers Fight Back, we would be increasing the control of a bureaucrat over the rank and filers involved, and that these rank and filers would tend to depend on bureaucrats. To believe that this is really the problem with the Sadlowski campaign and our approach to it, is to live in a complete fantasy land. In this fantasy land, the rank and file is now independent, not dominated by bureaucrats, and relies only on itself. Sadlowski threatens to end this idyllic situation.

The real situation in the Steel Workers union is quite different. The rank and file of the USWA are now dominated and boxed in by one of the most conservative leaderships around. This leadership perpetuates its dictatorial control through a highly organized and extremely bureaucratic machine. That is the real situation. The Sadlowski campaign represents an important step toward breaking up or at least weakening that bureaucratic machine. If Sadlowski were to win, his victory would break up that machine and open up a situation in which greater, not less, rank and file independence and initiative would be possible. - not inevitable, but possible. This is so far two reasons: 1) simply by depriving the machine of top positions, it would break its absolute hold on the union apparatus, and 2) because Sadlowski would put into effect some reforms that would further weaken the absolute control of the bureaucracy over union affairs - including weakening his ability to gain anything like absolute control.

It is childishness to say that Sadlowski will not be "one jot" different than Abel or McBride, as Joel says in an early draft. Sadlowski is a bureaucrat and an opportunist, but he is not the same as Abel or McBride, any more than Arnold Miller was the same as Tony Boyle. The nature of his campaign, with all its vagary and evasion, is such that he will have to deliver something to his base. Also, he is a reformer. We do not believe he will come through on all or most of his promises or that he will wage a consistent struggle against the employers. But, for all this, things would not be the same if he won because his victory will knock holes in the control of the bureaucracy over the rank and file.

Even if Sadlowski doesn't win, which seems likely right now, his campaign will have helped to build the independence of the rank and file in certain small ways. The fact that the machine was challenged and that that challenge even came close is important. It shows that opposition is possible. The fact that Sadlowski felt the compulsion to set up organizations open to rank and filers as the way to run his campaign is also significant. In District 31, it is estimated, some 200 rank and filers are active, to one degree or another, in Fight Back groups.

For us, the Sadlowski campaign is an event, like a contract fight, or union meeting, that offers opportunities to meet people, even small numbers of people, who are fighting for change. This campaign is not a strategy for building a rank and file movement or any such thing. It is one of a hundred events and opportunities along the road toward building that movement. In fact, in fact, it is shorter in duration and less demanding of energy than many such events we will face. It is one kind of mass work. Just as fighting for women's wash rooms is another. If you really want to use the agitational mass work method to build a workers combat organization then you must take advantage of the best opportunities that arise. They will not always be of the same type or scale. Clearly the Sadlowski campaign was the central political event in the USWA in recent months. To ignore it, or just to take a paper position on it, would be to pass up a major opportunity to meet people, gain experience, and build our reputation as fighters for the rank and file.

Let us restate, as simply as possible, the basic IS view of mass work and agitation and the rank and file movement. Our strategy involves building, over time, and independent rank and file movement; that is, a workers movement based in the unions that is politically and organizationally independent of the capitalist class and its main political agents in the workers movement, the labor bureaucracy. This is a long and complicated task in which the main elements are building the self-confidence of the rank and file militants, of winning them to a class struggle perspective in the course of common struggles, and of winning the best of them to revolutionary politics. Whether or not and when you make alliances with different individuals and groups is always a matter of tactics. We do not have a strategy based on allying with sections of the labor bureaucracy. But we do not rule out, either from principle or tactical inflexibility, such alliances. Regardless of what issues we fight on or what tactics we use at any moment, we believe that revolutionaries can give a lead in the day to day struggles of the workers - which include union elections as well as shop floor, economic and political issues. We believe that because we are consistent opponents of capitalism we can lead struggles beyond the limits accepted by all sections of the bureaucracy - not at every moment or on every issue, every time, but over the long run. Therefore, we are confident that we can lead rank and file workers beyond where union officials and bureaucratic reformers can lead them. For this reason we do not fear alliances with some officials, when those alliances suit our purposes.

It must also be said that Joel's document implies a rank and file purism that could never exist in real life. That is, the notion that what defines a rank and file movement is that it contains only rank and filers. This is both politically shallow and practically impossible. The independence of the rank and file movement will not be guaranteed by some clause excluding union officials. It will be guaranteed by ~~xxx~~ political consciousness. The basic difference between the ranks and the bureaucrats is not sociological, but political - the bureaucrats are partisans of capitalism and class collaboration. In spite of the strong incentives to remain loyal to the employers, as the movement grows some officials - probably very few - will break and come to the side of the workers.

It is also true, of course, that as the rank and file movement gains strength and power, it will elect its own people to union office. This, in fact, is an important goal of the rank and file movement. It will elect many of these officers long before the union is actually changed much in its structure, long before the militants and revolutionaries have full control. Thus, the new rank and file officials will be under

enormous pressure to accommodate and sell-out. Far from drawing the absurd conclusion that they should be expelled from the rank and file organizations once they get elected, we must fight to keep them in so the ranks can continue to control them. While the base of the movement must be the rank and file, the real thing that will keep the movement honest is its political consciousness and, therefore, its ability to control its own candidates once they take office.

In life things will even be more complicated, since in practice rank and file candidates may win before the movement is strong in organizational terms. We want these officials in, not out, of the movement because they can use their new power to build the movement. As well as actually making some changes, officials who are part of the rank and file movement can use their position to educate the more backward rank and file members as to why they should join the movement, there by building the movement. It would be a mistake to dismiss such possibilities because there are dangers involved, or because this looks to some sectarians like "change from above". Rank and file purism, in practice, means returning to the worlds of tiny shop floor groups with occasional bulletins and no influence with the workers around it.

For revolutionary socialists in the Leninist tradition, there is only one condition on every united front, only one "base" we insist on the complete political independence of the revolutionary organization, i.e., IS or the party. Lenin was always very clear that the party must maintain its right and freedom to organize for its politics. This fact should not be confused with tactical decisions about the rank and file groups, bulletins, various issue oriented organizations, etc. These are transitory formations. Decisions about their organizational independence are tactical decisions and nothing more.

Joel J's document goes farther than confusion on all of this. In the section entitled "The Road Forward," and "Agitation" the whole agitational method, mass work, united fronts, and, for that matter the idea that we are ~~xxx~~ engaged in the task of building a workers combat organization are all thrown out the window. Basically, the document says that because of the lack of self-organization in the American working class, "our agitational work will be limited in the present period." Local strikes are mostly defeats, and "action around shop floor or local union issues" do not lead workers to build rank and file movements. The conclusion that the document draws is that rather than any real focus on agitation, "we must be raising strategic ideas which relate to a broader analysis even if they can't be implemented immediately." As near as we can tell from the document, these strategies would center on the idea that workers fighting on the shop floor should "relate to the local, link up with other shops in their area, with other locals in their industry and with workers in other industries."

● Most of today's struggles are sectional, local and particular in nature. The nature of the employers offensive means that thousands of very particular struggles over particular working conditions take place all the time. Occasional broad struggles such as contract fights, union elections, etc. occur - and on the rarest of occasions general events like the April 26, 1975 Washington D.C. Rally called by the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department. But most struggles are very local and very particular. The truth is that actual opportunities to "link up" workers with workers in other shops, locals, and industries are rare and will remain rare for some time. Only when you have something like TDU, that is when you actually have organization or the opportunities for a national campaign can you link up workers in different locals and shops. These situations and opportunities are very important to us - and generally opposed by the arguments in Joel's document. Even in these cases, however, the links are within one union and the issues largely limited to the industries organized by that union. The links can be made in a real way here, for example, TDU, because there is a common focus for activity - reforming the union etc.

What Joel's document proposes is not a perspective that sees real links growing

out of agitational work, like TDU, They say quite clearly that, outside of the Teamsters, possibilities for agitation will be limited. These "linkups" are proposed as a substitute for real agitation that can, over time, lead to practical links between different groups of workers. In fact, the link-up idea is part, the very heart apparently, of the strategies we are supposed to be selling the workers in place of real agitation. These strategies, you will remember, are the one's that "can't (always) be implemented immediately." This conception is not agitational at all. It is an orientation towards a propagandistic approach to workers, our own industrial work and working class comrades. It ties in perfectly with their proposal for a propaganda paper that peddles strategies.

The IS, of course, proposes strategies in various industries, as well as a general strategy. Our general strategy is, to a large extent, a matter of propaganda that appears in Wp and various pamphlets. The quote used early in this document from the "The Struggle For Workers Power." was a propagandistic statement of part of our strategy. And even in industries where our forces are too weak to actually initiate a national rank and file movement, we argue for such a movement, . But, inso far as possible, we attempt to put forth strategies that can actually be carried out.

Naturally, there is no such thing as a strategy that can be carried out in one step. But we put the emphasis on pointing to the next steps that people can actually take to carry out the strategy. In TDC, for example, we argued that the contract fight was a step toward the formation of a rank and file opposition that could draw in workers from all jurisdictions. Thus, instead of telling freight workers to run out and immediately link-up with everyone else, we laid out steps that could lead to practical link-ups among Teamsters. Many of these steps have already been taken, many lie ahead. But these were practical steps, and not just grand strategic prescriptions that no one can do anything about.

What Joel's document proposes is a retreat to pure propaganda. Its viewpoint clearly rejects the idea that revolutionaries can lead real struggles today, and that by doing so can win respect and a hearing for our politics. They would have us cast in the role of advisors to workers, at best, and strategic crystal ball gazers at worst. It is no surprise, then, that the document goes on to render Industrialization little more than a holding action for the future in which there are few "immediate pay-offs"

HOLD ON TO YOUR JOB, WE'LL SEE YOU IN A FEW YEARS

If there is little to be done in industry, other than peddling strategies at its periphery, then, of course, there is no reason to emphasize industrialization. And, indeed, Joel's document does everything but do away with it altogether. Leaving aside the silly statements about the EC raising industrialization to a strategy, the word games that flow from that, the false statement that our industrial priorities are "the sum total of our external activity," and other such nonsense. We assume most people in the IS have eyes and ears and know this stuff to be bunk. What cannot be left aside is the attempt to gut our industrial strategy.

The view of the IS for some years now has been that in this period of growing capitalist crisis, through our industrial work, we can dig roots in the working class, participate in and eventually lead struggles in industry, recruit workers, and build a workers combat organization. That is what we are about, that is our reason for being. To do this we had to send people into industry - a tactic, to be sure. But there is more, . We had to, and will continue to have to, concentrate the scarce resources of the organization around industry and our industrial work. We were not just talking about recruiting workers out of industry to show off to students or to go around to other workers picket lines. We were, and are, talking about building the IS in industry. Building the IS in industry is part of the process of building a workers combat organization in industry - and it is this, not industrialization, that is the strategy for revolution. This strategy, the strategy of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, says that the

working class will make the revolution under the leadership of the revolutionary workers party. The leading battalions of that party, that combat organization, are the industrial working class.

But building a workers combat organization in industry is not a task for the distant future. It is not a task to be begun when workers are engaging in mass struggles, We want to be in the leadership of those mass struggles, when they come. To be there we must be in the leadership of the much smaller struggles of today - whether they are defeats or victories. We rejected years ago the theory put forth by the American SWP that what counts is numbers alone and therefore, the thing to do is first recruit large numbers of students and middle class intellectuals. We reject this same theory now that it is raised by the "left" faction and the British SWP (IS). Joel's document does not go so far as tying this notion up into a theory. But it clearly, winds up with this as its practical program.

This is essentially the same mistake the American Trotskyists made in the 1930's. Following the enormous victories in Minneapolis and Toledo, the newly formed American Workers Party (the Trotskyist party) turned from continuing its industrial agitation - outside of Teamster organizing - to a propaganda orientation directed largely at the base of the Socialist Party. The theory, then as now, was that you could recruit members from that party among its younger members who were moving left. The result of this disastrous mistake, was that the Trotskyists were not positioned in basic industry - auto and steel, rubber and electrical, etc. - and were unable to play a significant role in the CIO upheaval. The lesson, comrades, is that you start today, or you lose out tomorrow. And you cannot start by some weak holding action, when the real emphasis becomes one thing other than industrial agitational work. You are not positioned in the industrial working class simply by virtue of holding down a job. You have to have experience and respect - and that takes time and activity of a real agitational type.

The "left" faction has clearly rejected this idea - except as something for the distant future. Joel's document claims to hold on to the idea of a workers combat organization. But it clearly argues that we cannot build it now. That is, it argues that agitational opportunities are few and that "it is not in basic industry, in this period, that the working class is most in motion." (It does not, however, tell us where the working class is most in motion.) Seeing no prospects for action, recruitment or motion, the document asks industrialized comrades, and of course, worker members, to "stick it out." In other words to abandon the task of building a workers' combat organization for the foreseeable future.

In its place we are offered little more than a series of discussions of a generally abstract character; the "role" of revolutionaries in the trade unions, the nature of the labor bureaucracy, superseniority, etc. Along with these is the scholastic idea that a long period of political education must precede any industrialization that does take place, which means, of course, that we will not even be recruiting middle class people on the basis of industrialization in such an educational, discussion oriented group, the document rejects the idea, fundamental to Leninism, that it is the duty of the leadership to be in advance of the organization. It throws out Lenin's method of "bending the stick", a method without which no organization can move forward. It would return to the day when leadership bodies were showcases in which well educated comrades got to show off their profound knowledge.

We have faced many disappointments and failures in the last year. Numerous mistakes have been made, events and possibilities overestimated, and other underestimated. We began trying to correct these at the last convention and again, with somewhat more success, at the Oct., 1976 N.C. The 'left' faction intervened to short circuit this process. They seized on every failure, disappointment, mistake, and error to attack the fundamental strategy of the IS. In the process they have created a poll of attraction, increasingly a hard poll with a definite direction. The leadership of the

majority of the organization; that is, the EC, virtually all of the N.C. and the majority of industrial fraction leaders rallied to provide another poll. Past disputes and differences have not made this easy. The Majority has been behind the "left" faction in providing clear direction. The result is that the ideas of the "left" faction, though not its entire program, have found all too much fertile ground in the Majority. A number of comrades, of which Joel J., is only one, have been pulled toward these ideas.

The result, at one point, was the formation of a politically confused "third Force" grouped loosely around Joel J's document and as similar document from some New York comrades. Confused about the basic concepts of IS politics this grouping proved unable to maintain the unity of the majority. It may be that this group will return to the Majority when it realizes the seriousness of its tactical error. This, however, is secondary to the political confusion, and sectarian direction, that ~~this~~ "third force" is moving in. We call on these comrades to reassess their views, to think things through before they jump on any more band wagons. We believe they should be in the Majority, but we also believe that if the current political direction of most of the leadership of this "third force" is not arrested, they will themselves without any strategy, without any political anchor from which to make serious decisions about the future of the IS.

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