

INTERNAL BULLETIN

VOL. 15, No. 2

February, 1953

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THE STRUGGLE IN THE NEW YORK LOCAL

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Issued by:

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
116 University Place
New York 3, N.Y.

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THE STRUGGLE IN THE NEW YORK LOCAL

By Mike Bartell

For the first time in many years, our Local is faced with a serious controversy. We have had minor irritations crop up now and then in the past several years but this was to be expected in these difficult days. None of this was serious as long as the leadership was united. It is an entirely different matter, however, when two bureau members launch a sharp attack against a course with which they have been associated for years. Yet we have proposed no turn, no reorientation, nothing really new.

They have suddenly taken issue with our estimate of the objective situation and our tactical orientation; they have accused us of abandoning our proletarian orientation and turning our backs on the Negro masses; and for good measure they threw in a good deal of carping and sniping criticism. Naturally this was bound to precipitate a serious conflict in the Local, and these comrades must surely have realized the seriousness of their decision. Now, all of this would have been justified providing these comrades had had a new and superior course to propose and providing that their proposals had been rejected or opposed by their associates in the Local leadership. But I believe their decision to precipitate a struggle was terribly ill-advised, especially since they do not have a single serious proposal to offer nor a serious criticism of any of the activities that the Local has been engaged in for the past year or those proposed for the coming year.

Their greatest concern is to establish that all the authority in the world is on their side. Their entire case stands or falls on a series of selected quotations strung together in an attempt to prove that we are in violation of the national and international law of the movement. It is a long time since we have seen such a sterile approach to the real problems of the party. It is the method of scholastics who, substituting appeals to authority for thought, convert Marxism into a barren dogma instead of a guide to action. We will demonstrate point for point how harmful this method is to the movement in general and to the N.Y. Local in particular.

Now, let us try to unravel this controversy, put our finger on the issues that divide us and clarify our respective views.

I. ESTIMATE AND PROGNOSIS

Before we can outline our tasks and concrete activities, it is necessary to make an estimate of the conditions under which we must operate now and in the period immediately ahead. We have given a clear and unambiguous answer to this question. We said that, in general, the objective situation is one of extreme reaction, that moods of conservatism and fear are dominant among the masses, and that these tendencies will be reinforced in the immediate future. We concluded that our conduct, our tactical policy, must be determined by these considerations.

Our critics accuse us of having a dim view of the situation. They accuse us of "pessimism". Then after marshalling all the forces of authority, they throw the dialectic at us. We are lectured that we see only "one side" of the reality, the "surface side" at that and "statically" to boot. They see another side -- this period of reaction and passivity is "a preparation for class battles", and a "molecular process" is at work under the surface.

Now it is of course correct that the situation is not totally reactionary, and that there is "another side". However, many of the things they see on the other side are hallucinations. When they say "new layers of militants are emerging and together with old militants in the shops are searching and groping at various levels of consciousness for new ways of struggle", we wonder what country they are talking about. Where and who are these "layers"? And where is the evidence?

Their evidence is limited to some incidents with regard to the labor party in four union locals in the whole country. Of these, they were compelled to partially retract two of them. And even at that some qualifications are necessary. The UAW convention they refer to (which did not pass a labor party resolution) took place well over a year ago and was dominated by the reactionary Reuther philosophy. The UE as every one knows is an independent union dominated by the Stalinists and their allies. Their third piece of evidence, the labor party resolution passed by the general council of Local 600, UAW, is hardly evidence of a trend either, since this Local is the great exception that proves the rule in the CIO. This Local which is controlled by a coalition of independent radicals and Stalinists passed not only a labor party resolution but a resolution demanding clemency for the Rosenbergs. Their fourth example, that of District 65 of the Wholesale Distributive Workers Union, also an independent semi-Stalinist union, does not prove their case but proves the opposite. This union endorsed the candidates of the ALP in 1948, abstained in 1950 and supported Stevenson in 1952. All that happened in this union is that some educational speeches for a labor party were made at union meetings. Unfortunately, there was no response. These were the four pieces of evidence cited in their first bulletin. Since then, one other local of the CIO has passed a labor party resolution.

Now we do not deny that the Eisenhower victory has caused more workers to think about the need for a labor party. But there is absolutely no evidence to indicate a serious trend in that direction at the moment. If these comrades had wanted to determine the real score, instead of searching for evidence to prove a pre-conceived notion, they would have consulted the letters to The Militant from our comrades in the field summarizing the moods of the workers following the Eisenhower victory. They would have found that the reports from all parts of the country told almost an identical story: The dominant reactions were fear, apathy, confusion, "wait-and-see". Here and there were found isolated individuals -- and these generally radicals -- who talked about the need for a labor party.

What are the conclusions of Stevens-Ring after examining the "two sides"? Is the situation reactionary or progressive, the mass movement passive or dynamic? Is the country moving to the right or to the left? Are we on the eve of an upsurge or of deepening reaction? And how shall we then orient the party, toward the offensive or the defensive? Are our tasks primarily propaganda or mass agitation and action?

Our "dialecticians" have left us at sea. They have separated the objective reality into two different things, and let it go at that. From this we could only conclude that the party must move in two directions at once, or in a "middle-of-the-road" course. The fault lies not with the dialectic but with our would-be "dialecticians". The truth is that this "on the one hand and on the other hand" approach is not dialectics at all but eclectics. It has reached the point around here where you cannot give a straight clear answer to questions without being called "non-dialectical". There are comrades who apparently believe that an observation is not dialectical unless it is muddled and ambiguous.

In truth a vulgar pragmatist is far better off than such eclecticians. He sticks his head out of the window, observes that it is cold and knows enough to put on a coat. Along comes one of our self-professed "dialecticians" and says: "Hold on! It's not really cold. This is simply a surface appearance; there is another side. In the first place it is only 'relatively' cold. Compared to absolute zero it is positively hot. Furthermore, there is a molecular process at work which will in the end overcome the cold and produce spring".

"Very well", says the pragmatist; "now tell me whether it is cold or warm outside and how I shall dress -- for winter or for spring? Or somewhere in between?"

The genuine dialectician has no difficulty in solving the problem. "It is cold", says he. "For while there are indeed forces which generate heat on the 'other side', they are at present distinctly subordinate and recessive. The forces resulting in cold are overwhelming, predominant and decisive. Therefore, you had better put on a heavy overcoat. Furthermore, while there is a molecular process at work which will surely overcome the winter and bring spring, the forces that make for coldness are still gaining the ascendancy and will become even more dominant until a turning point is reached in the future. Therefore, you had best prepare for even more severe cold though you can calculate with absolute certainty that spring is in the offing in the not-too-distant future!"

The dialectic does not consist in merely separating out two or more different sides of a phenomenon. This is only the first stage of the process - or only "one side" of the dialectic, if you please. These different sides are not left strewn about as separate entities but must be re-assembled into a single whole only now with a proper understanding of its complexity and the interrelation of its various aspects. It is above all necessary to determine which is the decisive and over-riding aspect.

Now is the "molecular process" decisive for determining our conduct right now? If we proceeded on that theory, we would surely break our necks, for this "molecular process" is still very much under the surface and has far from matured. The contradictions maturing "molecularly" are decisive for determining our perspective and our fundamental strategy but our tactical course for now and the immediate future must be determined by the reactionary forces which are not merely surface manifestations but the dominant reality of today.

Now let us turn to the authorities that our critics are so concerned about. The political resolution of the last national convention does not leave matters hanging in the mid-air with an examination of the "other side" which they quote. First of all, it begins with the flat statement: "The class struggle is in a state of quiescence". It does not fail to draw a definitive conclusion as to the overall state of affairs which must of necessity guide our general conduct today.

"All these influences are at work beneath the surface helping to prepare the next turn in the situation. However, it must be recognized that they have far from matured to the point of introducing a decisive change in the relation of class forces. The symptoms of discontent which flare up in the unions subside after a time and remain episodic. There is no wide-scale anti-war movement among the masses.

"There must be a big shakeup in the whole situation before the psychology of the workers passes from conservatism to new struggles and radicalism." (Political Resolution, Fifteenth National Convention)

Now, we turn to Pablo, whose name has been dragged into this discussion. Here is his appraisal of immediate prospects for America made in his report to the Twelfth Plenum.

"The American bourgeoisie is impregnated with quite a different spirit than the European bourgeoisie. Besides its feeling of material strength, its relations with the masses of the country are more secure than in European capitalist countries. The triumphal election of Eisenhower, candidate of the most reactionary section in the country, is significant in this connection. It will influence the direction of American policy in the sense of a greater firmness and decisiveness in the counter-revolutionary crusade. In the internal sphere it will call forth a sharpening of the witch hunt and of the McCarthyite climate in general.

"The communist movement of that country is threatened with being soon thrust into complete illegality.

"Eisenhower's victory will widen the scope of the war economy in the United States and the influence of militarism over the whole life of the country.....

"The scope of Eisenhower's electoral victory in any case creates the most favorable conjuncture which the American bourgeoisie could hope for to precipitate the kind of counter-revolutionary war it is preparing. This victory is evidence of the broadest reactionary

polarization which the monopolist leaders and the militarist clique of the United States could hope for under present international conditions. They have succeeded in harnessing a large part of the nation behind the chariot of their reactionary policy which openly declares its intention of fighting 'atheist communism.'"

Spring is surely coming -- but winter has far from run its course.

Now let us see how we characterize the situation in Report and Tasks.

"The year 1947 brought an abrupt change in the conditions under which our party operated. The grievances of the workers, the Negro people, veterans, tenants, etc., which had accumulated during World War II burst forth at its conclusion in an offensive of considerable scope and power. Our party intervened energetically in these struggles, and turned its attention directly toward new layers of worker militants who were emerging out of the mass. We were rewarded by rapid growth in every respect.

"By 1948, this situation had turned into its opposite. Although on a world scale great revolutionary upheavals were in the making, in America the labor movement was in sharp decline all along the line. Conservative moods were becoming dominant among the workers. The witch-hunt had begun. The mass movement rolled back leaving us isolated.

"With minor ups and downs, this trend has continued for six years. In the past year, we have seen a deepening of reaction, culminating in the victory of the Republican party for the first time in twenty years. Furthermore, while all the conditions of social crisis are maturing beneath the surface, the readings of all social barometers indicate that the unfavorable climate will continue for a time and will probably get worse in the period immediately ahead."

It seems to us that one has to strain awfully hard to find this description "one-sided" and "static".

II. ORIENTATION AND TASKS

Our next problem is to determine what kind of tasks the party must set itself in view of these external conditions and the size of our forces. Our conclusion again is quite clear: objective circumstances have temporarily blocked off the road of mass agitation and action and once more imposed on us propaganda tasks in the main.

Here again our activities naturally have more than one side. At all stages the party engages to one degree or another in all three general types of work: propaganda, agitation and action. Thus in this past year, we have conducted propaganda through our forums and the circulation of our press; we conducted mass agitation in Harlem around some action slogans in the Harry Moore case, and we led tenants of East Harlem in struggle against the City Housing Authority. But this observation leaves us nowhere.

It establishes no guiding line for our work today, precisely because it holds true for all periods, including on the eve of the revolution. It is necessary to establish what must be the main, the principal tasks, to which others are subordinated.

The Political Resolution for the 1946 convention was entitled "From a Propaganda Circle to a Party of Mass Action." This perspective was based on the prognosis of a continued rise in the curve of the class struggle. It is apparent now that we misjudged the course of events and were compelled to retreat from the attempt to arouse masses and lead them in struggle for elementary objectives to the promulgation of fundamental ideas. Has this situation now changed? Is it proposed that we revert to the orientation of the 1946 resolution?

On what grounds can we win the allegiance of people today? That we are the best and most militant leaders, strategists and tacticians? This is undoubtedly true, but it cannot be demonstrated now. We can attract people today primarily on the ground that we have the only correct ideas, ideas which explain the great world events and which conform to the needs and interests of the proletariat and of human progress generally. It follows that our main tasks today, especially when we take into account our extremely meager forces, is the dissemination of ideas through our press, through lectures, personal discussion, etc. The same objective conditions which dictate this primarily propagandistic line also imposes on us the paramount task of the struggle for our legality and for democratic rights in general.

There is an inescapable corollary that follows from this: it necessarily narrows down the audience to which we address ourselves. Plekhanov distinguished agitation from propaganda roughly as follows: agitation means the dissemination of one or a few simple ideas to many people. Propaganda means the dissemination of many complicated ideas to a few people.

Moreover, this does not mean any few people. It means those few (relatively) "who are equipped to understand and willing to listen." Our opponents seize this phrase which appears in my report, and imply from it that I am belittling the workers, and they naturally rush to defend the honor of the proletariat. Our conception is distorted to mean that we want to turn our attention solely to the "petty-bourgeois Stalinists" while they are partisans of the proletariat. The class question is dragged in here by the hair. The American population in general is neither able to understand nor is interested in studying the conceptions of the 3rd World Congress. But since we are only able to recruit or expand our circle of sympathizers today on the basis of our world program, we are of necessity very isolated.

Stevens and Ring accuse me of "accepting" this isolation. As with so many of their criticisms it is not clear what they are saying. Are they saying that we are not isolated -- or that we can break out of our isolation in this period? If not, why do they take issue with this statement of fact? For my part, I always "accept" the facts of life even when I don't like them.

The fact is that on the one hand there is no leftward moving stream for us to swim in, and on the other hand, ideologically, there is a vast gulf separating us from the American population.

Shall we then direct our main efforts toward the average worker (or student or anyone else) today? Is it not apparent that we must seek out the more enlightened and advanced workers and intellectuals, those whom we can interest in our whole program? Here is what comrade Cannon had to say on the subject in his report to the last party convention:

"In some respects, the new situation is temporarily more unfavorable for recruitment into the revolutionary vanguard, than was the situation before the rise of the CIO.

"We were isolated then too; but it was not an organized isolation. There were openings here and there - where we could break through, where the old AFL bureaucracy was asleep or indifferent. The New York hotel strike and the Minneapolis strikes are examples. There was more opportunity for recruitment of individual militants into the party. Now, it may be said, the isolation of the revolutionary vanguard is organized. The organized workers tend now to move in a body, or to remain passive in a body...

"The world program recruits only the vanguard of the vanguard. Those who are interested in ideas, however remote they may appear to be. This was shown by the example of the Communist Party in 1919-30. It was demonstrated again by our own experience in 1928-1934. It took the crisis to radicalize the masses and set them on the road to the CIO. It was not the propaganda of revolutionists that wrought the first great change; it was the social crisis of the Thirties."

This same conception was contained in comrade Cochran's trade union report:

"For a whole period to come, we have to work in a limited milieu, we have to direct our efforts and literature toward those people who are most interested in our ideas, and who will give us a hearing. We cannot just shout promiscuously at the general mass, for that would be like hurling seeds into a storm, hoping that by good fortune a few would find their way into productive soil.

"Propagandizing in this period concrete individuals and groupings has great compensations."

It appears to us evident then that it is necessary to seek out the more advanced and politicalized workers and intellectuals be they in the unions, the student clubs, or Stalinist peripheral fronts.

Moreover, this conception is not a new one, especially for the New York Local. The attempt on the part of Stevens and Ring to represent the approach contained in my report for the 1953 City Convention as a shift or turn which they are resisting is a pure fabrication. We need only to compare the relevant paragraphs from The New York Local - Report and Perspectives, Feb.1, 1950, and the current Report and Tasks to explode this myth.

Three years ago, in the report unanimously adopted, first by the City Bureau, then by the City Committee and finally by the City Convention, we summed up the conclusions of the 1949 City Convention as follows:

"From these observations, (about external conditions) we drew a number of conclusions in terms of our orientation the nature of our work and organizational problems. While remaining alert for opportunities to intervene in the mass movement we shifted our emphasis heavily toward political work in the radical milieu, from agitation among the mass of unpoliticalized workers, to political propaganda among the most advanced, radical sectors, especially the youth in the Stalinist-Wallaceite camp...

"The balance sheet of the past year's work reveals that this perspective has withstood the test of experience.

"This perspective still retains its full validity and should guide our work in the period ahead. Objective conditions have not materially changed."

Now compare this with the corresponding paragraph from Report and Tasks, Dec. 3, 1952:

"In 1948 we began to adjust our activities to conform to the changed conditions. The changes in our general approach here in New York can be summed up as follows: we shifted the axis of our activities from mass action and broad agitation to concentrated propaganda and education; we turned our attention from the general mass of politically uninitiated workers to a narrower but more selective audience of left-wing groups, politically-minded workers and intellectuals, and student youth; from expansion of our organization and activities to retrenchment and more modest tasks.

"This course has demonstrated its validity and we have no need for any major change now. We need only to pursue it more consistently and carry out the indicated tasks more energetically."

The similarity is striking and unmistakable. Comrades Stevens and Ring have a right to change their minds, but it takes a lot of gall to then demand that we "square what we say and do today with what we said and did yesterday."

At the conclusion of the current report we summarized our tasks as follows:

"We should penetrate more deeply into the unions and into the left-wing political groups. We should center the activities of the local around propaganda work: regular lectures and classes, the sale of our press at selected spots, and systematic contact work. We must continue the struggle for civil liberties. We should carry on other activities, to be sure, but only such activities which can either be fit into this framework, or that will not seriously interfere with our main tasks."

One can agree or disagree with this approach, but in any case it is clear. Where do Stevens-Ring stand on this question? Are our

principal tasks propaganda, or mass agitation and action: shall we direct our main attention toward the "vanguard of the vanguard", politically minded individuals and groups, or -- toward the mass of politically conservative workers? These are clear alternatives and demand a clear answer if the party is not to flounder about aimlessly.

All that our opponents have to say on this score is that we must "act today as the revolutionary leadership of the masses." They obviously haven't the vaguest idea of what is meant by this phrase, since they make no attempt whatever to explain in what sense we can act "right now" as the "revolutionary leadership of the masses" nor how we would go about doing this. This is simply a sophomoric debater's point, an attempt to enlist Pablo in a fight against the Local leadership. They seized upon a general algebraic formula which Pablo applied to the entire "third category," which includes countries like Ceylon, Bolivia, etc. in the same general classification as the U.S. Now it is perfectly obvious that this formula cannot mean the same thing for Bolivia, which is in the midst of a revolution, and the U.S., which is in the grip of reaction. Yet they make no attempt to explain what precisely this could mean for the SWP. Do they mean that we are the revolutionary leadership of the masses today, or that we can become the revolutionary leadership in the period immediately before us? That these comrades have lost their balance is clear, but they have after all not lost touch with reality completely. How do they propose that we act like the revolutionary leadership even though we are not? What do they propose that we do in order to act this part? As we shall see, they propose absolutely nothing else than the elementary propaganda tasks that every party trade unionist has been carrying out to the best of his ability for the past few years.

In our estimation we can act as the revolutionary leaders of the masses only in the ideological sense. That is, we take upon ourselves the obligation to set forth the correct path, the program, the strategy and tactics which will lead the masses to power in this country. But we are not yet able to lead them on this course. We can only advocate it, and educate those few who are of a mind to take our views seriously and then have the courage to act upon their convictions.

But they reject this interpretation. This conception of our tasks reduces us to a "propaganda group," they say. They would have us believe that Pablo means that we should act in deeds, right this minute, as the revolutionary leaders of the New York proletariat. How, where do we start, and with whom? Our opponents disdain to answer such trifling questions. "Pablo said so," and that's enough for them. This whole method of attempting to use authority in a political discussion by quotations that are removed from context and not related to the specific reality, is repugnant and alien to our movement. It is the method of quoting scriptures against "heretics" without any concern for logic, rhyme or reason.

We have before us Pablo's report to the 12th Plenum, which is more recent and more specific in estimating the situation in America. You will observe there is no exhortation to us to act right now as the revolutionary leadership of the masses. In essence he judges that we had better expect, and prepare to ward off blows, to

hold our forces intact as possible for the battles of tomorrow. That in general is how we must view our main tasks for the period that lies ahead. Naturally we will not play dead in the meantime. We will fight every inch of the way for our rights, and we'll do everything we can to win new cadres through our propaganda activities. I think we have demonstrated in New York how it is possible to keep a lively, variegated and fruitful activity going even under these difficult conditions.

We conclude then that our main tasks for now are of necessity those which come under the general heading of propaganda rather than of mass agitation and action. Do our critics agree or disagree? We have not heard a clear answer.

Another question is then raised concerning our tactical orientation. Where is our main field of work? What is the axis of our activities? What must be the primary preoccupation of the local? Here we are charged with not making the unions and factories our main field of activity, Negro work the second major field, then opponents work third. Instead, it is charged, we have moved the third to the first, the first to the last and ignored the second altogether. We have substituted the "supplementary" for the "main," the "tactic" for the "strategy," and are putting off for "tomorrow" what should be done "today," etc. To the extent that one can make anything out of their criticism, this seems to be the heart of it, and it is the source of the greatest confusion.

Now we know that it is the working class that will lead the American revolution, and that our party is oriented fundamentally at all times toward the proletariat, and more specifically toward the basic organizations of the workers, the trade unions. We also know that the most powerful and revolutionary ally of the proletariat is the Negro people. We didn't need to be told that.

But to conclude from this fundamental strategic orientation that at every moment, in every locality, we are bound to apportion our time and attention and activities in a rigid order: trade union or factory work 60%, Negro work 30%, opponents work 6%, student work 3%, and maybe tenants work 1%, is an incredibly formal, simplistic, mechanical conception, and if really attempted anywhere (which naturally it is not) would lead to complete disorientation. In New York, the local would surely go into a nosedive and we would have nothing but shambles very quickly.

If by not following this "order" we are violating national policy, then so is every branch in the country. What do you think the branches are doing now? You can see at a glance from The Militant. They are conducting forums, classes, selling our press (and more and more at universities at that), doing contact work, conducting local election campaigns, etc. Worse yet, the national organization is violating its own line. Can anyone honestly say that trade union work occupied the major attention of the last national convention? Negro work, the "second" main field, was not even on the agenda, but was limited to a panel organized on the spot.

It is not enough to know certain broad general fundamentals to determine what kind of activities we must carry on at any given

time and place. It is also necessary to examine the possibilities, the forces at our disposal. To this they reply that if opportunities in trade union work, or Negro work have declined, then we must "pay even more attention," or "redouble our efforts." If these are not just empty words, it means that the less the openings and opportunities, the more the time and attention and forces we must devote to this sphere.

This could result in one of two things: either we undertake activities and actions which transcend the limits placed on this work by objective circumstances (not by our "orientation"), which will lead straight to adventures and victimizations; or we can create a lot of synthetic trade union activity at 116 University Place by sharply increasing the number of fraction meetings, setting up committees, frequent reports with little to report about, etc. which will only result in an increase of palaver, not trade union work.

Yes, our main and fundamental orientation remains toward the trade unions all the time. My report deals with this as point number one, and at some length. The report reaffirms strongly our proletarian orientation, and calls attention again to the need to place every possible comrade in a union situation. I stated that we had been carrying out this policy consistently in practice, and that as a result, we are better situated now than we were a year ago. This has not been challenged.

But what escapes these comrades is that there are times and places when we can succeed in building our fractions more successfully through activities outside the factories than inside. Thus, for instance, while we did not recruit a single member directly from the factories in the past year, we did recruit 2 young people who came to us from the Stalinist periphery and were then placed into union situations. We know of other cities where branches have succeeded in strengthening their fractions by recruiting students and intellectuals. We are a very small party. What we need above all are numbers, cadres, and we can't be choosy as to where we get them or what their present occupations are. The trick is to find even under these very difficult circumstances those fields of activity which offer some prospects and make the most of them. This demands the greatest flexibility. In reality, this is what the entire party has been or should have been doing.

A national orientation is not a blueprint for the activity of each branch. It is necessary to examine the peculiarities of the given city and the forces available for work. We are asked whether we claim that New York is unique? Of course it is, and we have said it a hundred times before. New York is not an industrial city; it is a commercial and small industry city, the political and cultural center of the country. You might even say it is a "petty-bourgeois" town. Furthermore, the composition of our membership has always reflected this. That is, in spite of all of our efforts, only a minority of our members have ever been factory workers.

New York has a far higher level of political consciousness than any other city. It has large Social-Democratic and Stalinist movements, each with its own powerful electoral party. In this respect it resembles more a European city than any other in America.

Now what our mechanical-minded critics don't understand, is that this is an advantage in this period. Don't they know that it has been precisely those branches in the purely industrial factory towns that have been the hardest hit in these years, that a number of these dried up and disappeared altogether, while others barely survive in a stagnant condition? Don't they know that in these cities they have been looking for universities where they can sell our press? These branches envy the lively political existence we are able to maintain here; they only wish they had some Compass Clubs or Monthly Review forums or universities in their cities. By and large those branches have survived the best which have had a broader political field in which to operate. We propose to take full advantage of this situation, while our super-proletarian critics propose that we unnecessarily and artificially impose on ourselves the conditions of Pittsburgh, Akron or Flint. That, in my opinion, is a sure road to ruin.

Stevens-Ring distort our conception of propaganda work as our principal task, as against mass agitation and action, to mean a "shift" of our main arena of work from the trade union movement to the Stalinist organizations. This is nothing but a fabrication designed to catch the unwary. We have not withdrawn, nor do we propose to withdraw any forces or attention from trade union work. We have and will continue to exploit every opportunity, no matter how small, that we can find. Our critics have failed to point to a single opportunity for trade union work which we overlooked or to make a single proposal for increasing our activities in this field. The stubborn fact is that the possibilities for organized activities in the field of trade union work are extremely limited, and no "campaign," or "re-orientation," or resolutions and motions, or additional meetings, reports or committees is going to substantially alter that fact.

If Stevens-Ring took their own "orientation" seriously, they would be compelled to propose a program of activities somewhat as follows: the organization of left-wing groups inside the unions, mass distribution of leaflets and literature at plants, open air meetings at factory gates, public meetings designed to attract industrial workers, consistent and extensive literature sales and distributions door-to-door in workers' districts and on the streets of Harlem, the organization of Negro masses in struggle for equal rights, etc. That is, they would propose to return now to the orientation of 1945-47. They do not propose such a plan of work now because it is apparently obvious even to them that such an "orientation" would be ruinous since it runs into a head-on collision with objective reality. Consequently, as we shall see, their pretentious "re-orientation" turns out to be nothing but empty bombast, a faction program, not a party program.

Have we proposed then to make the Stalinoid organizations, such as the Compass Clubs and the ALP, our main field of work? Nonsense. But not because we have any arbitrary rigid notions about first, second, third and fourth place. If this arena were big enough and fruitful enough to absorb our main forces and attention, we would not hesitate to propose this. (It should not be necessary to explain that we do not have to withdraw comrades from the factories, or refrain from sending others in, in order to direct

some attention to work in neighborhood left-wing political organizations.) We simply propose to assign as many comrades to this field as the "market will bear." That is, we propose in this field as in all others to direct attention and forces in proportion to the possibilities offered.

What then is our main arena for work now? The question is not so simple. There are no big openings in any single arena at the moment. That is why we need a most flexible approach to this problem, a variegated and all-sided plan of activities. We must have no fetishes or taboos on that score. If there should develop a sudden rise of militant struggle among the Negro masses, we would not hesitate to place this first on the agenda and make this our main field of work, even though it occupies, according to Stevens-Ring, only second place in our strategic orientation.

If it should so happen that a significant radicalization develops on the campus while the labor movement remains temporarily passive and dormant, we should head straight into this current, even give it our main attention for a while, without worrying as to whether it is third, fourth or seventeenth in our order of priority. What we need above all is cadres to strengthen all phases of our work and above all to colonize into industry in order to strengthen existing fractions and build new ones.

What then do we mean when we say that we must direct our efforts primarily toward "politically conscious circles?" Obviously we do not mean simply working in Compass Clubs and the like. We mean that we must seek out the elements which can comprise the vanguard of the vanguard, those interested in ideas no matter how remote. We mean what comrade Cochran referred to in his unanimously adopted trade union report to the convention as "the most advanced workers and young intellectuals."

We must seek out these elements in the factories and in selected spots where more politically minded workers, students, intellectuals gather. Here we can sell our press as well as make contacts. Our lectures and public meetings must be designed to attract such elements, and we must publicize these functions at such left-wing gatherings, at more politicalized unions such as District 65 and others in New York, at universities, meetings of Negro organizations, etc. We must do persistent individual contact work on those whom we attract by these various means.

This was the approach that we used in our recent election campaign over considerable resistance by Stevens and Ring, who wanted to put at least equal emphasis on activities in the streets. This conscious propagandistic approach proved its validity in the course of the campaign. We attracted a considerable number of new people and created a new although small periphery, and a fund of contacts for prospective recruitment. Right in the midst of this discussion, we have received an application for membership from a young fellow who was attracted to our forum in the course of our campaign, along with a group of ALP supporters.

In short, we have proceeded with a realistic approach to our work. We set ourselves tasks that conformed to the real situation. We did not try to do the impossible - we did what we could

where we could.

What do Stevens-Ring propose that we do other than what we have been doing? How do they propose that we translate their "orientation" into life?

Our recently concluded Trade Union Conference was very revealing in this connection. This was the time and place for them to come forward with their proposals to our trade union fractions. We witnessed a rather ridiculous spectacle. Their whole pretentious "orientation," when it came down to cases, was shown to be completely empty of any content. Most of the experienced trade unionists explained to Stevens and Ring the real situation in the shops and trade unions today, that they were doing all that they could do under the circumstances and that no special "policy" or "re-orientation" or "regular and frequent fraction meetings" would enable them to accomplish any more. Comrade Ring then took the floor to explain that all he and Stevens really meant was that each fraction should decide for itself how frequently it should meet. This was their only "new proposal". So all the noise about making trade union activity our main field of work was reduced to a piddling trifle. Did we really have to have a fight over that?

In their discussion article, Stevens-Ring actually put the question directly: "How can we apply this in the trade union movement today?" You would think that finally here we would get an answer. There follows two single-spaced pages of an "answer." But after you discard all the verbiage such as "unfolding an intense political process," "broaden and deepen," etc., it boils down to two proposals for activity: contact work, and speaking to "broader strata of workers," which translated, we assume means speaking at union meetings. Both of these types of activities were included in the organizer's Report except that they were not blown up by a lot of rhetoric out of all proportion to the real possibilities.

As for the "new proposal" for regular and frequent fraction meetings: the main function of fraction meetings is to discuss and decide questions of union policy. Quite naturally, since we withdrew by and large from inner union politics and important posts, and as fewer questions of policy arose, our fractions on their own volition began to meet less frequently and irregularly. They met whenever the fraction as a whole or any member of it had some problem to discuss. Furthermore, since most of our fractions consist of one, two or three members, most of the problems that do arise are considered in informal discussion with either the Local trade union director or city organizer.

In our opinion, this is the more sensible and mature approach to this question. But anyhow, what kind of a "re-orientation" was this? How do these proposals transform us into a revolutionary party acting like the leadership of the masses? Personal contact work and educational speeches from time to time at union meetings on questions such as the labor party are the most elementary kind of propaganda activities, and are not likely to be considered a great discovery by the active trade unionists in New

York or elsewhere. Furthermore, seven of the nine trade unionists on the City Committee support my report and reject the Stevens-Ring criticism. This alone speaks volumes about the nature of their "trade union orientation."

III. NEGRO WORK

It is difficult to exercise restraint in answering Stevens-Ring on our Negro work because here they sink to the lowest level of sniping and carping criticism. First, they charge that we have not engaged in a single organized activity in Negro work in the past year. This is an outright falsehood. They know very well that the East Harlem Tenants League, which they label solely Puerto Rican work, was composed of a mixed group of Puerto Ricans, who it is true comprise the majority, and a substantial minority of Negroes. Comrade Ring's articles in The Militant on the activities in the League bear witness to this. They know further that we deliberately chose a mixed area for Negro work since we were reduced to working exclusively through white comrades who would find it easier to engage in this work in a mixed rather than in an exclusively Negro community. They know that the first chairman of the organization was a Negro woman.

Furthermore, they know that we have had comrades working consistently throughout the past year in the Brooklyn NAACP Youth Council, that the Downtown and Brooklyn branches have done consistent contact work amongst a number of Negro subscribers in three different housing projects in the city, that we conducted a campaign around the Harry Moore case. Perhaps they did not know that our comrade at NYU has been active in NAACP there and has made a special effort to contact Negro students; with a certain degree of success.

But in any case, suppose all they say were true and that we had completely ignored Negro work in the past year. Are we not justified in asking: Where were you, comrades Stevens and Ring during the entire year this was going on? You are both on the City Bureau. Comrade Ring was, in addition, a member of the branch responsible for this work. Why was the first word of criticism in the past year uttered in your "discussion article"? Is this not an irresponsible attitude by local leaders?

In the second place, they charge that I "ignored" Negro work in the Report and on this they presumably base their contention that we have minimized this "second main field of work" -- in favor of opponents work. This, if anything, is more reprehensible than the first charge. They were present at the meeting of the City Committee at which I first presented my Report, at which time I explained that it would be better to have a special report on Negro work drawn up after the comrades who are engaged in this work, and have the experience in it, evaluated the work of the past year and made proposals for the period ahead. Apparently my explanation was acceptable at that time since neither comrades Stevens or Ring objected to it, and Comrade Ring even found it possible to vote for the general line of the Report. I could easily have included some general and abstract remarks about how "important" Negro work is, how "thorny" a question it is, and how it will take Negro Trotskyists to lead Negro masses. It did not seem to me that

this would advance our Negro work by a hair since this has all been said a hundred times before. It seemed to me that the questions that needed answering were the concrete problems which we confront in this very important but very difficult sphere, and these could best be answered after a discussion by the comrades involved in the work. The 1950 Local report had no special treatment of the trade union work. All that appeared was a sentence announcing that an oral report would be made to the City Convention. There was no hue and cry about this. At that time comrades Stevens-Ring were not trying to concoct an opposition "platform" out of thin air.

The third criticism is that we relegated Negro work to a branch instead of assuming this as a responsibility of the city leadership. As with all their other criticisms, it's like grabbing at an eel? Do they propose that we dissolve the Uptown Branch? Or that we take the responsibility for Harlem work out of its hands? We do not know what they mean, and I'm sure that they don't know either. And since when does "relegating" any phase of work to a given branch mean that the city leadership washes its hands of all responsibility? Does "relegating" youth work to the Youth Branch eliminate the responsibility of the city leadership for this work? Is not all work "relegated" to some branch, committee, or department? Or do they mean that we tossed it into the lap of the Uptown Branch and washed our hands of the whole problem? But this is untrue. Indeed comrade Gold and I have occupied more of our attention and have done far more consulting on this question than on opponents work.

When we were compelled to recognize that in fact we no longer had any Harlem Branch, we proposed the establishment of the Uptown Branch which would include in it those comrades engaged in Harlem work as well as others who would carry on all the varied functions of a branch and would constantly seek ways and means of continuing some work in Harlem. We then assigned comrade Gold of the city staff and comrade Ring, another bureau member, to this branch. We assigned one of our most competent comrades to be organizer of the branch. The City Office paid the closest attention to this work and gave all the assistance it could.

We confess that we have not been very successful in our efforts. We certainly welcome any constructive proposals for improving the work. What do comrades Stevens and Ring propose? They propose that we make a "sharp turn" and that we set ourselves the task of building a revolutionary Negro cadre today. We are waiting to hear from Stevens-Ring how we can accomplish this feat. Indeed every branch in the country will be waiting eagerly to hear how we can build a Trotskyist Negro cadre today when we failed to consolidate a Trotskyist Negro cadre in the good years and have lost 90% of our Negro members nationally in the past five years. We consider the recruitment of Negro workers and intellectuals an indispensable task for the party. What we need is less agitation and bombast, and more realistic proposals and above all more hard practical work.

IV. OPPONENTS WORK

By polemical exaggeration and sleight of hand our proposal to take advantage of the receptive moods that we find in the ranks of the Stalinist peripheral organizations has been parlayed by

Stevens-Ring into organic unity or entry. Is this because they misunderstood some expression which may have seemed too extravagant to them? If that is all that is involved, I'm sure that we could have arrived at some more moderate description. Let us examine the essence of our contentions.

We said "our victory over the Stalinists in the civil rights struggle is virtually complete." Our critics once more take a side swipe at this observation without committing themselves to a direct denial. What was the issue in this struggle? The Stalinists contended that we were social outlaws: finks, counter-revolutionaries, FBI agents, Nazi collaborators, and therefore were not entitled to any civil rights nor to any support from the labor, liberal and radical movement. This was the first stage of the fight. At the Bill of Rights Conference of 1949 they rode roughshod over all their allies and voted this policy through.

By the time of the amnesty conference of 1951, they abandoned their open struggle and yielded to the pressures in their own camp with the result that we were accorded the right to participate in that conference and to be members of the organization after a long battle among the sponsors of the conference. They were also compelled to accede to a formal policy statement of the conference urging support to the struggle for a pardon and restoration of civil rights to past victims of the Smith Act. This meant support to the Trotskyist victims of the Smith Act but this support was still anonymous and decided over the protests of the Communist Party. At approximately the same time, they ceased their open opposition to support of the Kutcher case in the unions.

The third stage came with our recent partial victory in the Kutcher case. The Daily Worker took note of the court decision with a straight factual report. This alone was unprecedented. But far more important was the fact that several days later, an editorial appeared in the Daily Worker explaining the importance of the decision, referring to Kutcher as a member of the Socialist Workers Party (Trotskyist) without a single word of criticism or political differentiation.

How account for this? Is it not reasonable to conclude that this was a conscious policy decision on the part of the Stalinist leaders and a directive to their ranks that they must henceforth recognize Trotskyist defense cases as legitimate? Does this not constitute a "virtual complete victory" in the struggle over this issue? Naturally, we do not expect the Communist Party to wage an active fight for our civil liberties nor to be consistent even in their passive support. Naturally, we do not expect Stalinists to cease to be Stalinists. All we say is that we have won a victory in the fight to establish our right to civil liberties and to support from others in our fight to defend them. How is it possible to seriously question this conclusion?

Our critics further make a big fuss over our estimate that "their movement could be said to be rife with 'Trotskyist conciliationism'" and that sentiments for unity in the struggle for civil rights are widespread in the ranks of the Stalinists and the Progressive Party and even amongst some of their spokesmen.

In the first place, this conclusion could be logically drawn from the capitulation of the Stalinist leadership on the question of the defense of Trotskyists. Just because Stalinist leaders remain what they have always been, that is, mortal enemies of Trotskyism and thoroughly unprincipled scoundrels, it could be deduced that they changed their policy on this question only as a result of an irresistible pressure from their allies, sympathizers and even in their own ranks. But we have had more concrete evidence of this. These general sentiments have been expressed at public meetings, at conferences and committee meetings and/or in private discussions by the following Stalinist spokesmen and fellow travellers: Howard Fast, who three years ago wrote in The Compass that we had no right to defense because we had conspired with the Nazis; Carl Marzani, prominent Stalinist speaker, who served a term in prison for alleged perjury; Clifford McAvoy, who was legislative director of the CIO Council when it was completely controlled by the Stalinists, an international representative of the UE ever since, and ALP candidate for President of the City Council for 1951; Leo Huberman, once education director of the NMU when it was also completely controlled by the Communist Party; John T. McManus, editor of the National Guardian which hews very closely to the Stalinist line, and Corliss Lamont. These in turn reflect, we have every reason to believe, widespread sentiments among the rank and file, sentiments which we have come across very often. Members of four different branches of the A.L.P. have urged members of our party to join. I observed these sentiments in the last two election campaigns whenever I spoke before audiences which included a large percentage of Stalinist sympathizers. These vague unity sentiments and increased receptivity is evidently not confined to New York as can be seen from the following incidents reported in the Militant Army Column: Monday, Nov. 10th - Literature Agent Louise Maxwell writes that during the election campaign there were many opportunities for selling The Militant in Los Angeles, that their main problem was in making sure to get around to all the places.

Main emphasis, she writes, was on meetings of workers in opponent organizations. "We usually had encouraging experiences, sometimes almost unnoticed but surely indicating that we were not leaving without making some impression ..."

The Militant Army Column of Oct. 13th also contains a report of a literature sale conducted by the Los Angeles branch at a "rally called by Stalinists to protest the Un-American Committee." The report refers to "numerous favorable reactions." One Stalinist is reported to have remarked: "After all, they are against capitalism just as we are." Another commented that we "may be doing some good." A third "approached one of our comrades with the plea that we get together before the witch-hunt gets us all individually."

But the most obvious evidence is right before our eyes; that is, in the considerable number of Stalinist sympathizers who have attended our forums at party headquarters in recent months.

Is it really so outlandish to refer to these sentiments as conciliatory? Is there any doubt that the Stalinist leaders consider these sentiments to be "conciliationist"? Have these com -

rades forgotten what the attitude of Stalinists was toward Trotskyists five, ten or fifteen years ago when we as much as took our lives in our hands when we distributed at Stalinist meetings or attended their functions? When it was next to impossible to find a Stalinist who would take our literature free, let alone purchase it; when it was a crime punishable by expulsion for a Stalinist to exchange a friendly word with a Trotskyist? Is not the present attitude conciliatory in comparison? Is it not true that the atmosphere is more receptive and less hostile than ever before?

Then why do Stevens and Ring deny it or wave it aside? Is it because they consider it unimportant? Have they ever stopped to consider how important the Stalinist leaders considered it to erect impenetrable barriers between their ranks and ours because they feared the impact of our ideas? Here is what the political resolution of our convention had to say on that score:

"Regardless of immediate gains, the long-range aim of this tactic is to break down the hostility the Stalinist leaders have erected against Trotskyism. Once this barrier of slander and suspicion is removed and Stalinist workers can judge with some objectivity between the policies of the two parties, our political program will more than compensate for our inferior numbers in the struggle for the allegiance of the advanced workers. This tactic is a necessary supplement to our main course of struggling for influence and leadership over the principal body of trade union militants and politically unorganized workers."

We are asked why it is that we point to all the difficulties and limitations of trade union work while we present only the bright side of work in the Stalinist peripheral movement. We are trying to be realistic on both counts. In the case of trade union work, even though this is far and away our most important field of operation, whatever change has occurred has been for the worse. We cannot point to favorable developments to exploit at the present time in New York. The changing attitude towards us and our ideas in the Stalinist and semi-Stalinist movement is a favorable development, one that offers us an opportunity, even if a small one, which we are anxious to exploit to the full. We might add that a further reason is the resistance among some of our members to recognizing the extent to which the moods of conservatism and fear have taken hold amongst the workers, illusions and wishful thinking about possibilities for advances in the unions at this time, and on the other hand, a resistance and reluctance to having any truck with Stalinists and "petty-bourgeois elements."

Stevens-Ring contend that if what we say were true about unity sentiments in the Stalinist-ALP ranks, then entry or organic unity should be considered. We are glad to see that these comrades make no fetish of independence, but their conclusion about entry is all wrong. This only proves once more that they have no sense of proportion. For my part, if I thought that such an entry would be profitable, I would not hesitate to propose it, for I do not consider the C.P. or the A.L.P. any worse than the S.P. However, for a whole series of reasons that should be obvious to everyone, entry is not at all involved. The indicated tactics are united front proposals, fraction work and political discussion as proposed

in the Political Resolution of our recent national convention.

Next, Stevens-Ring demanded to know what policy our comrades should pursue in the A.L.P. and the Compass Clubs, etc. Their "policy" is all wrong or very inadequate to say the least. They propose that we push the Kutcher case, the Trucks law, etc. We should certainly do this but this is only the beginning and by itself will avail us little. In most cases our resolutions would be carried and that would be the end of it. Our policy in the Compass Clubs is to present our political program in opposition to that of the Stalinists and liberals as we have done with considerable success, especially in the Brownsville Compass Club. In addition, in the A.L.P., our aim has been to intervene in the internal conflict over perspective, which was bound to develop. Our prediction on this score has already been verified.

It has been reported to us by one of our comrades in the A.L.P. that the Stalinists have already begun to put forward their proposal to dissolve the A.L.P. and enter the Democratic Party. Marcantonio has opened a struggle against them for the preservation of the A.L.P. This controversy has now been extended to the ranks and is being debated in the A.L.P. clubs. The club to which our comrade belongs was predominantly opposed to dissolution. Most of the members recognized that the A.L.P. has become isolated from the broad labor movement but balked at entering the Democratic Party.

Everyone will agree in the abstract that we should intervene in this situation. In fact, were it not for the resistance and backbiting, we might now have been in a powerful position to exploit the A.L.P. crisis to our advantage and strike some telling blows against the Stalinists. Our one hope is that this experience will awaken our members to the dangers of the sectarian approach which prattles about the masses while preventing the party from becoming a factor in events and taking advantage of existing opportunities.

We have also found that it is possible even in the A.L.P. to present our views on big political questions. Thus, for instance, at the conclusion of the same A.L.P. club meeting, a spontaneous discussion developed over the anti-Semitic purges in Russia and the buffer states. The predominant sentiments were consternation, confusion and fear. Our comrade presented our views, including a denunciation of the trials as both frame-ups and anti-Semitic in content. He met with absolutely no hostility. The club voted to organize a special discussion within a few weeks on this question.

Incidentally, the official registration figures for 1952, recently published, reveal that 52,734 in New York City enrolled in the A.L.P., and the bulk of these are workers.

The question of our attitude or approach in these organizations is an extremely important one. It would be the height of stupidity for us to speak to the members of these organizations as though we were addressing enemies and to hurl epithets at them or their leaders. We would only succeed in strengthening their prejudices against us and making an objective consideration of our

opinions impossible. We should start with our common interest and aims in the struggle against imperialist war and reaction, offer to collaborate in the struggle over specific issues and, in the course of discussions and common activity, unfold our revolutionary program as distinct from the opportunistic policies of the Stalinists and their allies.

The importance of influencing those workers and intellectuals in the Stalinist orbit even in America (and especially in New York) was clearly set forth in Pablo's report to the Third World Congress:

"These workers, these masses everywhere, even in countries where the CP represents a minority, and even an infinitesimal minority, have a special interest for us that it would be criminal to neglect for the two following considerations: Because of the quality, the revolutionary inclinations of these masses, who as a general rule are composed of the best, the most active, the most revolutionary elements in each country. Because, on the other hand, of our perspectives on the evolution of the situation toward war which will accentuate the leftward developments of these masses and will inevitably impel them into revolutionary struggles, including struggles for power, and in any case into a revolutionary attitude in the event of war.

"Above all it is alongside these masses that we will have to carry on the struggle now against the preparation of the imperialist war, and it is on their side that we will have to struggle in case of war more directly against the power of imperialism and capitalism.

"From this estimation and from this perspective there flows a double necessity for us to find the means of being as close as possible to these masses...

"When we address ourselves to them, we must begin with the preoccupations and aims we have in common with them, and seek to find the means of establishing and extending a common front in practice around these objectives. How we write in our press, how we address ourselves to the militants and the masses influenced by Stalinism, how we present and explain to them our fundamental differences with the Kremlin and their leadership must be studied and adapted to the need of making them understand that we have the same revolutionary aims and preoccupations as they have, and to the necessity of creating a climate and a basis for a possible dialogue with these masses.

"On the other hand, our activity should demonstrate to them in practice that we are with them, that we really want to struggle at their side." (My emphasis)

The same approach is contained in the Political Resolution of the last national convention.

As for the Huberman Monthly Review tendency, which has shaken loose from Stalinism, has moved in a leftward direction, and has adopted a better attitude towards us as shown by the publi-

cation of comrade Clarke's article on the elections in their magazine, our attitude should be a friendly one. We should engage them in discussion whenever possible, urging them to adopt our programmatic views.

An example of a completely false approach was the letter of comrade Robins that appeared in The Militant of Dec.8, 1952. The last paragraph of the letter reads as follows:

"Mr. Huberman may follow his 'socialist' convictions and from now on refuse to support capitalist candidates. It should not be forgotten, however, that his 'socialist' views seem to have been consistently directed toward supporting capitalist candidates -- probably since Browder returned from Moscow in 1934 with the 'People's Front' line."

This is a typical sectarian reaction which inevitably appears everytime a Stalinist or reformist figure breaks loose and develops centrist positions. It considers our most important duty is to expose all of his past crimes and warn people against him precisely at the moment when he is breaking from his past and moving in a progressive direction. While Huberman represents a relatively small tendency, in principle, this attitude is no less sectarian than when expressed with regards to such tendencies as Bevanism, Titoism, etc. Besides, we are not in a position to be contemptuous of any tendency, no matter how small, that shows signs of a leftward evolution.

V. SECTARIANISM

This brings us to the question of sectarianism. Stevens and Ring contend that sectarianism arises in periods of upsurge and radicalization. They are dead wrong. It is true that sectarianism manifests itself most clearly when big opportunities present themselves, but it invariably arises and hardens in the prior period of isolation. The classic sectarian tendencies which arose in our movement, Oehlerism and Abernism, took shape and infected the Trotskyist movement in the dog days of the early thirties. It is in a period when a small revolutionary movement is politically isolated from the masses that it is in danger of losing touch with reality, of seeing hallucinations, of seeing an upsurge around every corner and a major trend in every incident. It is under conditions of stagnation that it becomes infected with a rigid and doctrinaire approach in the realm of ideas, tactics and organization, that it begins to engage in wishful thinking and to become more determined to act like the revolutionary leaders of the masses the more the party is isolated from the masses. The logical result of such a tendency is either to indulge in wild adventures or to hole up in a never-never world.

Under present conditions of an overpowering anti-Communist pressure, there is another danger which is closely associated with the first, and that is the danger of Stalinophobia. The resistance which we encountered amongst some comrades against declaring our support to the defense of the Rosenbergs is a danger signal which must not be ignored. Fear of being "tarred with the brush of Stalinism" is extremely unbecoming to revolutionists in the country that is the bastion and power-house of world counter-revolution and

in which the Stalinists are a hounded, persecuted, despised movement. To seek for dangers of Stalinist conciliationism or "softness" toward Stalinism under these conditions is absurd. It takes no special "hardness" or "firmness" to be tough towards Stalinism in America today. Public opinion is saturated with reactionary anti-Stalinism and we must be on guard against the penetration of Stalinophobia into our movement.

VI. SUMMARY

What is necessary above all now is to see the situation as it is and not to kid ourselves. In our favor are the concealed economic crises of American capitalism and the advance of the world revolution. The economic crisis does not put any wind in our sails precisely because it is, as yet, a prospect, not a fact, and therefore does not seriously affect the living standards of the masses. As for the sweep of the international revolution, this paradoxically enough increases our difficulties for the time being. Every new victory anywhere in the world tends to intensify the reaction and the anti-communist hysteria in America.

Both of these factors, the organic crises of American capitalism and the uninterrupted progress of the world revolution, two sides of the same process of social transformation, spell the doom of American capitalism with absolute certainty in the end. But we must repeat that the situation here in general is bound to get worse before it gets better. What we must learn above all is patience, to keep our feet on the ground and to set realistic objectives. We must set ourselves tasks which we are reasonably sure we can fulfill. Any other course can only lead to adventures, victimizations, disillusionment and demoralization.

Our prescription is to continue to penetrate the unions in order to carry out propaganda tasks and to gain footholds for future advances. This remains, as always, our fundamental orientation, for our future lies in the mass movement of the workers. Our trade unionists will naturally do whatever they can, but it must be made clear to them that for the time being, their activities are primarily of a modest propagandistic nature.

In the meantime we have the problem of keeping the wheels of the party turning; of organizing useful work for all comrades; of carrying on successful activities, of maintaining a lively political existence and of attracting new, fresh elements to our small cadre. It is also of the greatest importance that we bear in mind at all times the urgent need of carefully husbanding our finances. We hold that the New York Local has done reasonably well in the past year and we attribute this to a realistic approach and a correct tactical orientation. We propose to continue to follow this prescription until there is some change in the objective situation.

VI. WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS DISCUSSION

As this discussion approaches a conclusion, it is necessary to evaluate the discussion itself.* It has been the weirdest

* This was stated before Stevens-Ring made their proposal to extend

the discussion six weeks after it had already proceeded for two months.

branch or local discussion ever seen or heard. Two bureau members have launched an all-out attack against our "orientation" and in effect the stewardship of the Local. Naturally, they have the right to do so. But they also have a duty, and that is to present a case. It was their duty at the trade union conference, at the city membership meetings, and branch discussions to demonstrate that our course had been wrong and to make their own proposals as to what should be done. They have not only failed to do this but adamantly refused.

We have asked these comrades over and over again; you want us to "act like the revolutionary leaders of the masses"? Please tell us how.

You want us to make our trade union work and political work in the factories the center of the activities of the Local, our main field of work? Please tell us how.

You charge that we have shifted our emphasis away from trade union work? Then tell us precisely what trade union work we have shifted away from and how you propose to shift back.

You tell us that Negro work must be our "second main field of work", and that we must build a Trotskyist Negro cadre today. Please tell us how to do these wonderful things, since we are as eager to do them as you are.

We have heard nothing, absolutely nothing in reply. We therefore say to these comrades as Truman said to Eisenhower: If you really have the prescription for accomplishing these marvelous feats, then it is your patriotic duty to the party to reveal it, and if you do not, then you should stop kidding the public.

Stevens and Ring deny that they are obliged to become concrete. The result has been a mystical and confusing discussion. We have been bombarded with quotations which have already extended back to 1900. They insist on limiting themselves to an attack on our "orientation" in the abstract. But this is after all not an international conference or a national convention; it is a local pre-convention discussion whose purpose it is to survey our work of the past year and lay out the practical tasks of the coming year. It is impossible to argue this question in the abstract. Our orientation is not a mystery; it is not elusive. It has been translated into practice and can be judged by the actual experiences of the last year. We contend that on the whole we have done well, whether you consider it relative to the possibilities we had, or to the work of the previous year, or to the work of other branches in the country. This has been recorded in the organizer's Report, and they have not challenged this estimate.

We do not contend that every project was perfectly executed, that improvements cannot be made in this or that phase of work, that perhaps a little more attention should be paid this or that field of activity. On the contrary, we believe there is plenty of room for correction and improvement, and that is what this pre-convention

discussion should have occupied itself with. We might have had a very constructive discussion, had we been able to examine carefully and concretely the various aspects of our work and of our organizational machinery.

Such a discussion could have been very useful. Stevens and Ring by their irresponsible, unsubstantiated attack have deprived us of this opportunity.

They do not deny that on the whole our activities have been the correct ones and have been successful. But how account for this, since these activities were the application of our "orientation" (which was also theirs)? And how account for the fact that they, who claim to have a fundamentally different orientation, can arrive at no different conclusions as to what we must do in practice. An "orientation" that has no application is worthless. More than that, it is invalid, for practice is the test of any orientation and theirs has flunked the test.

Why have Stevens and Ring precipitated such an abortive struggle in the Local without a shadow of a case, without a pretense of a platform? We must conclude that for reasons best known to themselves (and no doubt to others), they first decided to launch a fight and then proceeded to cook up an "orientation". How else explain the complete emptiness of their charges and of their entire case? How else explain the less-than-honest criticism of our Negro work which they apparently first discovered when writing their document? How else explain that Comrade Ring found it possible to vote for the general line of the organizer's report when it was presented to the City Committee while Comrade Stevens abstained in order to "take council with himself"?

We have some hint of the answer to these questions from statements in the discussion by supporters of Stevens-Ring, admitting that they really have no quarrel with the work or stewardship of the N.Y. Local but that what is involved is a national controversy in the party. It is no secret that differences exist in the N.C. and that a full-scale discussion will probably develop in the near future. Now the answer to the riddle should be fairly clear. Comrades Stevens and Ring undertook an attack against the local leadership in anticipation of this national controversy. But since these national questions cannot be resolved by a local convention, they were compelled to throw together a "platform", and the inevitable result is a mass of confusion and nonsense, factionally motivated from beginning to end.

It was a great disservice to our local and to the party to have anticipated and prematurely launched such a struggle in our local. They should have waited until the N.C. itself was prepared to open such a discussion on the basis of clearly formulated positions. The result of their ill-considered action has been an abortive discussion, an attempt to line people up without any political basis, miseducation and confusion, undue friction and impairment of our activities and morale. They started the wrong fight, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.