

INTERNAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Contents

	Page
Steelworkers , edited transcript of the Steelworkers workshop held at Socialist Workers Party convention, August 1976	2
Appendix I: "Our Aims and Tactics in the Trade Unions," by James P. Cannon, a speech delivered at the Party Conference of Coal Miners at St. Louis, Mo., July 27, 1924	10
Appendix II: "It Is Time for a Bolder Policy in the Unions," by James P. Cannon, excerpts of remarks on trade-union policy, taken from main political report and summary at SWP's October 1941 Plenum-Conference	13

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Steelworkers

[The following is the edited transcript of the Steelworkers workshop held at the Socialist Workers Party Convention, August 1976.]

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Workshop Leader

This workshop will be geared to giving some information on what's going on in the Steelworkers union, particularly to comrades and friends who aren't directly involved, because the potential for the party's work in this situation is very great. We feel there are some real openings we should begin to get involved in on a greater scale everywhere in the party.

What's happening in the Steelworkers union will affect every area of the trade-union movement. It's going to affect every area of this country.

We're going to start with reports from some of the areas that have been involved in the steel union. I just want to give a little bit of background on the general situation.

As most of you know, a referendum election for the international officers of the Steelworkers union is scheduled for February 1977. And the chances are very good that Ed Sadlowski, who was elected a few years back as the district director of District 31, will announce his candidacy for president of the union soon. He'll be running on a program similar to the one he had when he ran in Chicago—a program of union militancy and union democracy. It's a situation we want to get involved in.

Next week in Las Vegas, the constitutional convention of the Steelworkers union takes place, and the fight will already be shaping up there. The pro-Abel forces have yet to come to agreement on what slate they're going to put up in the union.

The Sadlowski campaign organized by Steelworkers Fight Back is beginning to shape up. They're beginning to reach out into other areas, and I think the best way to begin to discuss it is to hear what's going on in some of the places. We'll start with Pittsburgh.

From Pittsburgh

I want to give you very quickly some of the background of our situation in Pittsburgh and then mainly talk about Steelworkers Fight Back and how we're relating to it there.

We have several comrades in the Steelworkers union in Pittsburgh. There are three union districts, spreading out from the center of the city, all of them in western Pennsylvania, with a total membership between, I'd say, 100,000 and 200,000. We have comrades in basic steel, one of whom unfortunately is laid off right now. We also have comrades in fabricating plants. We have been in the union from one to five years.

The economic situation in steel in Pittsburgh is somewhat spotty right now. They've been calling back workers for at least six months, but a number of the plants still have layoffs. On the other hand, there are a number of plants that are hiring. It's just something you have to pay close attention to.

For example, the plant where I work has been hiring pretty steadily now for three or four months. And I know one of our political opponents has just managed to get two

women workers hired during the last three or four months. So it is possible with a little diligence to get jobs. (Just coincidentally I have some applications in my suitcase.)

Our most serious opponents in the area are the Stalinists. So far as I can tell, there are about a half dozen CPers in the mills in the Pittsburgh area, most of them really deep into the woodwork and really not active even in their local unions. There is one exception. He has been somewhat active in Fight Back.

We first tried to get in touch with Fight Back from Pittsburgh last December, around the end of the year, and three of the comrades wrote letters to Fight Back, asking for information, asking what we could do to help. For more than four months we heard absolutely nothing.

Then, much to our delight, about two months ago one of us got a phone call from Fight Back from Chicago, saying they were coming to Pittsburgh. Next day we got another call—they were in Pittsburgh with a carload of Fight Back people. This is pretty much the way Fight Back has been going around the country: They'll fill up a car with activists, and union officials from Chicago who support Fight Back, and they'll just head off toward any of the steel centers in the country, leafleting along the way.

Once they got to Pittsburgh they explained to us they wanted to do an initial leafleting of the steel mills as rapidly as possible, and we became involved in that. The response was very good, I think, given that in almost all the cases we went to the mills completely cold.

The Fight Back people managed to get a large number of new contacts in one large mill. They got to meet and gained the support of the president and most of the executive board of that local. Generally speaking, it was a very encouraging experience for them. I think it helped to build their optimism.

Our comrades soon came to be seen as dependable, serious activists in Fight Back—people who could be counted on to bring more contacts and more steelworkers to Fight Back. This was very greatly appreciated, of course, by the Fight Back people.

Just one incident to make it a little plainer: At my mill we had scheduled leafleting one morning and I went out there about 5:30 and met the guys from Fight Back. The Stalinist at the mill was also supposed to be leafleting. He, however, never showed up to help them leaflet.

Later on that night I was talking to some of the Fight Back people over a couple of beers and they asked me about this guy. I said, well, he's usually a pretty good union man, pretty active. And they said, we can't understand it. He came to Chicago and said he supported Fight Back. But he never returns our phone calls. That seems to be the Stalinists' level of reliability, at least in the Pittsburgh area.

The most recent development happened about two weeks ago. Late one Friday night, we got a call from Fight Back that Sadlowski was going to be in Pittsburgh the next evening. On less than twenty-four-hours notice they arranged a meeting with about seventy to eighty people. Most of them were rank-and-filers. Some were local union officials, grievors, and some local presidents. There were some staff people there. Our comrades attended, also two people from IS [International Socialists], and about a half

dozen people from RAFT [Rank and File Team, a longtime opposition group] out of the Youngstown area in Ohio, who came specially to the meeting.

Sadlowski gave about a twenty-minute talk to the meeting and then started to take questions from the floor. The response overall, I think, was good. However, Sadlowski seemed to take an almost legalistic approach to some of the questions. One fellow from the floor, for example, asked him about the no-strike agreement. He started off with a ten-minute answer that I don't think anyone there understood except maybe himself. Finally someone else got up and said, well, what do you think about it? Yes or no. Just give us a yes or no answer and then explain what you mean by it. He finally did that.

Most of his answers, though, were pretty well received by the people there. Some expressed some hesitations. But just about everyone, I got the impression, was going to become Fight Back supporters with some level of activity. A number of people took piles of the latest Fight Back leaflet.

We're working with one woman who is close to RAFT. Our comrades are seen along with her as the activists at this point in Pittsburgh. Which brings me to one of the key points. Serious union members are looking for activists. They're looking for people who want to work and want to build Fight Back. And the opportunities to do that—to make contacts, and to recruit people to the party eventually, are just enormous.

Fight Back has made a good start in Pittsburgh, and we're going to continue to help it as much as we can. We should have good results.

Workshop Leader

Before the next report, I want to make a couple of points about the CP's attitude toward Sadlowski and Fight Back. As you know, the Communist Party has seen their work in the steel industry as their "proletarian credential." It's been the biggest national project for the last several years. As far as we can see, they've been putting people in there since 1970. In the Chicago area we estimate that they have twenty to thirty young Stalinists in the mills. And they have their best people in the mills.

They only have one problem. They have a very poor program and they don't do so well. They involved themselves very much in the Steelworkers Fight Back movement in the beginning of Sadlowski's campaign, but they did more talking than actions. They didn't take responsibility. They didn't do the things they promised they were going to do. And they're discredited among the activists, because all they did was move around with their mouth.

They participate in what they call the National Steelworkers Rank-and-File Caucus, and they vacillate with this caucus from the most extreme sectarian approach of pushing this as *the* representative of insurgent steelworkers to a real slavish approach of licking the shoes of Sadlowski.

Next we're going to hear a report from Houston.

From Houston

Work in the Houston Steelworkers union has been going a lot slower than it has in parts of the Upper Midwest and Pennsylvania. First of all, there was no organized Steelworkers Fight Back in the area until a few weeks ago.

Our comrades had been in contact with Steelworkers

Fight Back for a number of months through letters, and also comrades on vacation traveling through Chicago would stop in and have discussions with them. But again, it was like the Pittsburgh experience; we got very little response back from them. They took our names. But they weren't doing the regional outreach into the other districts in the Steelworkers union that they probably should have been doing earlier.

A few weeks ago a team of Steelworkers Fight Back people (comrades are probably fairly familiar with that team—it was on the back page of the *Militant*) did come to Houston. But we didn't know they were coming. They called us and said, we're here.

They were all either union officials or past union officers who have a real knowledge and a good feel for what to do. They were all older fellows—those who traveled in the South anyway—and they meet people they used to know. The local union elections had just taken place. They wanted to know who agreed with their program to democratize the union and would support their campaign.

We have participated in union activities and know some of the union activists. Some read the *Militant* and are interested in Steelworkers Fight Back. So there were some people in one or two shops who had some knowledge of Fight Back. The visit of the Fight Back team helped broaden the work out.

Our comrades, of course, were involved, as was the case in Pittsburgh, in the day-to-day work. We helped leaflet in some of the shops. After two days, we made a big push to some of the larger plants, and that's when the attacks on Steelworkers Fight Back started in the Houston area.

We went to two large steel plants—the only two basic steel plants, I think, in the Houston area—to leaflet. And in both places the Steelworkers Fight Back people were met by goon squads organized out of the union halls. At one point, staff representatives, staffmen, came out to explain how they didn't want any of the "Chicago communism" shaking up the nice little boat we have down in District 37.

Our own comrades, along with most of those who were willing to do Steelworkers Fight Back work, were involved in a local union election to get delegates elected to the international convention so the membership could find out what was going on. We thought that if people who were working with us could get a slate together, they would come back from the convention with some authority and would be interested in Steelworkers Fight Back. We ran on a very minimum program, basically that we weren't going on any vacation. Our local, as most locals, makes sure that you have plenty of cash. So we ran on a thing that we'd have total financial accountability and turn back all we didn't need, and that we'd support any moves to democratize the union. That was our whole program.

I was on the slate. The ultralefts, particularly the October League, hoped to ace the SWP out of any role, so they went on a campaign in support of the slate but against me. So I wasn't elected as a delegate. But one person who's been involved in Steelworkers Fight Back in the plant and in the area was elected as a delegate to the international convention.

The very next day we leafleted the plant. We held off leafleting the plant that we have been working in, because with the local union election activity, we felt it would just be too confusing. The day after the election we did leaflet the plant, and that's when the shooting took place. If

you've read the *Militant* you will have a good idea of exactly what we know about the shooting and what actually happened. It's a real good report on it.

That shooting has galvanized some activity. Most of the people outside the small group we had around us in one shop were unwilling before the shooting to take a stand in favor of Steelworkers Fight Back because they wanted to wait until after the international convention. They were willing to say informally they supported Steelworkers Fight Back, supported Ed Sadlowski if he decides to run, but they refused to take a stand beforehand. The shooting has galvanized a certain amount of activity, by some union officials in some of the other plants, around defense work. They hope to head off any further acts of terrorism, especially at the convention, against any oppositionist delegates who might be there from our district. There will be a few.

We have had a long experience. The majority of us have been in the plant a number of years and are in positions of low-level grievors, shop stewards, and a number of other posts. We have some comrades who are not known in the plant as members or supporters of the SWP and other comrades who are.

One of the reasons I wasn't elected was that I'm a known supporter of the SWP in the plant. We have a division of labor and are able to steer other people to comrades who regularly sell subscriptions to the *Militant*. Some comrades can participate in the union locals and pull some of the union goals together. Other comrades would just be red-baited, both by the right wing and by the ultralefts, for their Trotskyist views. So it's worked out very well for us because we have been in a position to explain who we are and what we stand for, at the same time working with union builders to strengthen the union.

Just one other thing you should remember: The *Militant* can be a big help in our campaign. A Fight Back supporter told a comrade who isn't publicly known that the best newspaper for coverage of the Sadlowski campaign is the *Militant*. He recommended the *Militant* to our comrade.

The week after the shooting, based on the back page of the *Militant*, the local decided to go on a sales campaign. Our branch mobilized at 5:00 o'clock in the morning to sell. We were able to sell over eighty papers in a matter of maybe three hours at three different plants. The *Militant* is going to be very important for the branches to back up comrades who are in the plants and also where we as yet have no members.

From San Francisco

We have comrades in an amalgamated local in the Bay Area. It's a local that has had a history and tradition as a kind of vanguard local. It played a role years ago in the general strike in Oakland, and it has something of a tradition. It's in favor of a labor party, for example. We sponsored a resolution two years back at the district conference on trying to build a labor party. We helped to stimulate new interest in that whole concept there.

The comrades have been in the local for three or four years. We have an ex-comrade who is also in the local who's been in there for years and years and he's been a tremendous amount of help to us. We also have a number of close friends who come to forums, and we work with them on the job and in the union.

We've played a role in the local affairs of the union, in the day-to-day activities. We are now represented on the

executive board of the union. We ran on a slate in the elections last April, which was an extremely valuable experience, a learning experience. I don't want to take time to talk about that right now, except to say that we lost. But we only lost by a few votes, and we learned a lot from doing it. We're in very good shape now because of some events that happened after the election. I went to the district conference of the Steelworkers and played a minor role there. I spoke on various issues.

The major discussion at the conference was on the issue of nuclear safety versus nuclear jobs, and I spoke on that and on health and safety and civil rights and the civil rights committee and the functioning of it. I think I helped to get the first woman delegate elected to the wage policy subcommittee, along with another Sadlowski supporter in the key basic steel local in Northern California.

At that district conference we were able to meet with a lot of the militants in the western region. District 38 is the largest district geographically. It covers fourteen states. So this was an opportunity to meet many militant members of the union.

Since then I went to Chicago and met with Sadlowski and talked with him there. I was very impressed with what he knows about our district. He has connections there. But the publicity on Sadlowski has not gotten down to the ranks yet. We're going to get together with the big basic steel local in Pittsburg, California, and help to get that material out.

I wanted to say a couple of other things about the district conference. When I got there, one of the scheduled speakers was Russell Means of Rapid City, South Dakota. So I followed up on that to find out, because I couldn't believe it.

I called up AIM and they said they didn't know about it and that Russell Means was out of town at the Treaty Conference and they had no one there to pinch hit for him. So they said, why don't you call Wounded Knee Legal Defense Committee. They had the same problem.

But luckily, at the last minute, someone did come in town—the aunt of Russell Means, a woman named Faith Traversie, who agreed to show up on two-hours notice and came over, to the very great surprise and embarrassment of the steel union officials. They didn't really intend to go out of their way to make sure Russell Means showed up, even though they had invited him.

His aunt gave a forty-minute talk that blasted the racism of Rapid City, South Dakota, and all the Dakotas. She talked about the Russell Means case and the Dennis Banks case. It went over very well, and there were a lot of people who came up to her afterward and shook her hand and talked with her for a good while. So the conference was very useful in that sense.

From Cleveland

We have several comrades in basic steel and we're urging more to get jobs—even in these little shops, because when you're doing Steelworkers Fight Back work and in the Steelworkers union, that means that you can get to talk and work with other people.

Sadlowski has made a real point of organizing some of these places where they haven't seen the international representative for years. That's a source of dissatisfaction in the union.

We want to get comrades in industry. We want to make sure before we start them doing work that they're on the

job, people know them as people who are good workers, who are interested in what the union's doing, and are human beings, not something set aside. We want to be involved in the life of our local. We want to be involved in big issues. We don't want to be involved in petty stuff. We want to be involved with the workers in our plants who are interested in where the discussions are.

Since Sadlowski first ran we formed a very small fraction, held discussions. We were trying to find a way we could begin campaigning for Sadlowski. There was no way, because there's no team to work with. Sadlowski hadn't declared himself. There was no way other than having private discussions with members of local executive boards in our unions and saying we heard this guy, what do you think?

So you can't do a lot of work on much broader questions until the openings come. I want to explain the opening I found in my local in particular and how we related it to much broader questions in the union.

I'm in a basic steel local in Cleveland that is predominantly Black. The leadership for the past couple of years has been a predominantly Black leadership with a lot of younger whites who have been consciously collaborating and running on a slate to get racism out of our union. They have been collaborating on building the union, against a racist slate that keeps appearing each election—keeps losing, by the way, at this point.

Joseph Kender, who's the district director in our district, three years ago had a big fight with Frank Valenta, who ran against him but lost. To eliminate any further competition or any opposition they might have in the district director's race this year, the I. W. Abel machine is circulating anonymous letters, election appeals, and doing all sorts of things. One local was put into receivership.

The receivership had no basis to it. For four months there have been accusations, and there's been an investigation of finances. No charge was ever made. There was no consulting with the leadership of the local. It was just total fabrications.

We had discussions in the branch right off. We said, well, is it possible to run a union or any organization this way? And some of the things that we came up with were these: Innocent or guilty, the way the Abel gang has approached this is a violation of the union constitution. It's undemocratic. We decided to help expose this.

The attitude of the local leadership, who got elected by a landslide—the whole slate won every position they fielded for—was to mobilize the ranks. No one knew how to do this. No one's ever done this. None of the leaders of the local was even a steward at the time of the 1959 strike. So, one of the things the local officers did was release their story to the daily papers.

The local president came up and said plain and simply: I can't explain all the technicalities, but this is a racial and political frame-up. It had a big impact.

At the hearing of international officers we brought more people than three-fourths of the union meetings I had been to. We brought something like 176 brothers and sisters to the international office, which is twenty miles away from the steel mills.

It was really surprising. About 95 percent of the gathering was Black. They didn't even have a room big enough to hold the hearing. So what it amounts to is there's a struggle, a struggle to fight for the union. Some of the activists in this fight are known as socialists. We stood

100 percent for the democratically elected leadership, and against this frame-up.

In discussions I had with top officials and members of the local executive board, I suggested one person who could help is Ed Sadlowski. He might be a person to talk to. I went to a banquet in Chicago and talked to Sadlowski and subsequently talked with the local people in Cleveland.

The real clincher came when a team of Fight Back supporters toured the Cleveland area and contacted us. We were the only people they knew. We went out and helped them leaflet. We also set up private discussions for the members of the local union executive board.

In fact, two days later we brought the team to the bar adjacent to our local meeting, and I passed out Sadlowski leaflets in front of my hall. Not one person had a bad thing to say about Ed Sadlowski.

This was the opposite to the reaction in another plant. There they were seen as something outside of the plant. This team from Chicago, no one knew them, no one knew who Ed Sadlowski was. They thought they were all "communists" and they avoided them. But when my local executive board went to the gates with the team, passing out Sadlowski literature, people saw this as a real force. They gave names and money; they wanted to be part of the new movement.

Through all the discussions, the president in one of the locals agreed to be the organizer for the Sadlowski campaign. It's not like the other places around the country where it's our comrades who are doing most of the work and shouldering most of the responsibility. In Cleveland the prominent leaders of the Sadlowski campaign are seen to have a lot of authority in the district, and that's what is needed. That's what we want them to have.

One other thing I want to raise is how we acted in this struggle for union democracy. We have tried to make it clear what the issue is. We tried to mobilize the local to build the union. We were still moving forward. We wanted to get a union hall. We were trying for four years to get a union hall. We're for getting a union paper. We're for fighting the bosses. We're trying to make this point all along.

One indication of the strength that came out of this is all the meetings we've held, all the discussions on the job, the number of people who are coming in unprecedented numbers to local union meetings.

A hearing was recently held in Pittsburgh on the charges against one of the Cleveland locals. We organized a Greyhound bus in five days and paid it off in advance to go to Pittsburgh with about forty people. These are people who took their days off and took their time off to go. We raised so much money from people who couldn't come that we bought breakfast for everyone at Howard Johnson's on the way down and dinner on the way back. This is real good for morale, and the fact that we won the hearing was better. But the strong delegation made the victory possible.

I've been asked to bring up one other thing. When I started working a few years ago I was one of three whites in a department of 350 Blacks. Now I'm the first white shop steward in my department that anybody remembers. And the union leadership, including the person who is on the local executive board and the chief steward for the department, have asked me to take more responsibility.

This poses some problems because this company is one of the nastier ones and they'll fight over everything, every

penny. It has nothing to do with making iron. It could be eating, or sleeping. They want to send you home, fire you. And so workers all the time come up to me and say, "Listen. I've got a problem. You've got to do something. You're a steward." They won't go to the other stewards. They won't go to the people who are supposed to really take the brunt of this. It puts me in a position where I feel obligated to go out on a limb, when contractually I have nothing to say about it.

There's one other thing I want to raise and comrades should be really clear about this. These groups that call themselves the rank and file—I don't care whether they're IS, or CP, or whatever—are dangerous. I'll tell you why. Unionists do not call themselves the rank and file. They usually call themselves the local: The local's going to do this. Or the union's going to do this. They don't see this distinction between themselves and the union.

I have one opponent in my local—an ISer. He's so infamous that a Fight Back team that was touring around the country spoke about how bad this guy is. And they've never met him. This Steelworkers Fight Back team had four local presidents on it, young local presidents. They said this is an example of how not to work in the union.

So these so-called rank-and-file groups have little in common with the union membership. There are a lot of fights they get in that are not legitimate fights. They try to pin things on local leaderships that are not their fault.

I just want to cite one typical example and I'll leave it at this. We had a Black woman who was on probation and was fired. They fired a certain number of new workers just to scare everybody, put fear in everybody's hearts. The feeling was that she was fired unjustly, and she was. One of the reasons that probably motivated firing her was that she was a woman. But in the contract we cannot represent probationary employees. We have nothing to say about it. My local leadership went to bat for this woman. They did everything possible. They had all sorts of meetings with the company.

Nevertheless, one of these "rank-and-file" groups put out something saying that the union fired this worker. The union can't get her back. The union has nothing to say about it. If I hadn't checked into it, I could have been caught up in the trap of blaming the local union leadership.

I'm going to leave it at that. There are a lot of other people who have other reports.

Workshop Leader

I just want to say one thing before we hear a report from Milwaukee—about this probation and the wonderful leadership of I.W. Abel. Before the last contract the probationary period in basic steel was 260 hours. The companies complained that this wasn't enough time to filter people out, to screen them out. And they wanted a longer probationary period to get what the union officials agreed was a good thing: a stable work force. The union officials don't particularly care for a so-called unstable work force either, because sometimes they have to hustle around defending some of these people.

So they agreed to raise their probationary period to 520 hours. That's thirteen weeks. That's one-quarter of a year. You might say, well, that would reduce union membership, perhaps even reduce union dues. No, they made a deal on that one—that after thirty days you pay your initiation fee and you pay dues. And it's in the contract that the union

can represent you, you can file grievances, you can squawk like hell. There's just one problem: They can't do anything about termination. They still collect your dues in your probation.

There's a number of suits around the country. In fact, even the union officials from the civil rights department are warning the local officials to do everything in their power in such cases because there's court cases that are coming up. A number of people have filed suits around the fact that the union's taken their money and signed an agreement not to represent them.

Let's hear from Milwaukee.

From Milwaukee

I'm from District 32 in Milwaukee. I work in a foundry. It has about 450 employees. It's about half Black and Latino. It's the second biggest foundry in Milwaukee, which contains no basic steel. It's all steel fabrication and foundries.

I started working in basic steel in 1968 in southern Illinois and I worked with Rank and File Team and other oppositional forces in the union before I joined the SWP.

Right now there's not a lot going on in my district; that is, until last week, when the second Fight Back team came to Milwaukee. So they went to the most reliable contact in the city, which was me. They contacted me and it just so happens that I had a two-week plant shutdown, so I was available for full-time work.

I joined a team, along with three local presidents and other activists in the union from the Chicago-Gary area, all of whom were elected on Fight Back slates by margins of up to 11.5 to 1 in their locals last April in the local elections.

We went to every plant in the metropolitan Milwaukee area except for a couple of small shops. About thirty-five in all. We leafleted, walked picket lines, contacted local officials, did everything we could to get the Sadlowski campaign started.

They knew from the very start, from the very first moment they started talking to me, that I was a member of the SWP. They had only good things to say about the comrades in Pittsburgh.

I was out in the Milwaukee area for about three or four days and then they asked me to go down to Indiana Harbor to help leaflet the plant gates. As an indication of the radicalization and turmoil in the union, they told me that six months ago in previous elections in this particular local, Steelworkers Fight Back had to bring in people from other locals to help. It's a big deal if they get two or three people from Chicago out to leaflet this plant.

I went to the North Gate, which is one of the nine gates, and we were going to pass out a few leaflets. I got there and found that my presence was superfluous because there were 500 steelworkers at that gate. About 400 of them were working on the Fight Back slate for the convention delegates. The convention's going to be in a couple of weeks. It was very impressive. It was just like a demonstration. That was one plant gate.

On local struggles I've been engaged in lately. We had a contract fight this spring and as a result of that I got pinpointed as the ringleader, leading the pack, they said, of the young white militants and the Blacks. They were mainly the people who wanted better contracts. So I suffered a punitive layoff for about eight weeks when they reclassified me from a semiskilled to an unskilled job.

They called me back twenty-four hours after the contract was signed. They just wanted me out of the shop while the negotiations were going on.

Well, we lost the fight for a better contract. We rejected the contract the first time and finally after some scare tactics and attempts to divide the Spanish-speaking people from the rest of the workers, we had elections in April and we threw out the old leadership. We elected a militant Black shop steward to president.

As a result of my activity in the contract fight and support to the militant slate, I was elected by a split vote in the executive board to the Milwaukee County AFL-CIO Labor Council to represent the union, and I am supposed to take a steward position in the furnace department after I get back.

Workshop Leader

I'm going to tell a little bit about Chicago but first I want to review some general things. We wanted to get these reports in because we want to show people the opportunities and the openings. They're very real. What's the problem? What's the limitation of our work in this union right now? In every area where we had people active in the union, we're getting this kind of results. But the problem is, in the last year, not one area where we didn't have people in before tried very hard to get anybody in the union. I don't think it's too late by any means.

We're in a unique situation in an industrial union. In most of the industrial unions, it's difficult to do union work for quite some time. Sometimes it's very difficult no matter what you try to do.

But we have an opportunity here. Because of the appeal that the Sadlowski people are going to make to the rank and file, and because of the concurrent district director campaigns that'll be going on before February, we can expect a duplication of what happened in Chicago and Gary and what's happening in Houston, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and a number of other areas, in every single district of the Steelworkers union. That is, our comrades will have a chance to work with hundreds of the best militants, the ones who want to improve their lives by improving their union. And it's an opportunity that we don't want to miss.

Actually our number of comrades in the union has increased somewhat in the past year particularly in areas where we've already done some work. The fact that we have some comrades who have been in the situation for three, four, years—some since 1968 and before—makes it possible to do better work.

This is a unique opportunity. As was explained in the discussion on the political resolution, it's going to affect every union in the United States. It's a big breakthrough. There's no objective reason that we can tell, that anybody's come up with, why the revolt first took place in the Chicago-Gary region. It began in the middle of 1972. The big difference was a man named Ed Sadlowski.

Beyond his own particular politics—which have some strengths and of course some weaknesses—what he's brought into the union is the radical tradition. He prides himself as a labor historian and he tries to educate the people who work with him on labor history. First and foremost, he's a good trade unionist. He believes in things like solidarity, don't cross picket lines, strike if you have to, you try to be militant, and you rely on the rank and file.

In the two campaigns in 1973 and 1974 he assembled a

movement in Chicago-Gary which we think will be duplicated all over the country, involving many hundreds of rank-and-file steelworkers, young ones, old ones, Black, Chicano steelworkers.

First and foremost in Sadlowski's organization are people who have been in the industry for a number of years—ten, fifteen, twenty, years. And they've been fighting a good fight for that long. They see that the only chance to improve their lives is to improve their union. Take a look at the back picture of the *Militant*—the pictures of Jack Russell and Jonn Askins. That's the kind of people who are the backbone of Sadlowski's movement. And that's the kind of people basically going around the country.

He built a core of forty or fifty supporters who did nothing for two years but leaflet plant gates for him. That is, if they had an 8:00 o'clock shift, they were at another plant gate at 7:00 o'clock. If they got off work at 3:00 o'clock, they went to another plant gate for 4:00 o'clock. And they did that for years, because they see in this campaign a chance for rank-and-file participation in the union.

Sadlowski's basic theme, and why we support him, is that the union should be turned over to the membership—union democracy and union militancy. It's hard to judge the militancy of the steelworkers, how they feel about the contract, how they feel about the ENA [Experimental Negotiating Agreement], when they don't feel that the union backs them up. The first thing you have to do is turn the union over to the members. We can go along with that. That sounds pretty good. In the context of American trade unionism, that's damn good. But he's still kind of vague on a number of programmatic points.

In his campaign he will have the same tone, we believe, as a vocal opponent of racism. And this is unique, particularly in basic steel. He's quite vocal about this. He never speaks without making the point—that racism does not belong in the union movement. And while he has made no special programmatic appeal to Black and Chicano workers, he's attracted them. They support him.

He happens to be a remarkable individual and I would say myself that that's one reason why things developed the way they did in Chicago-Gary.

You can't win a campaign for international president without mobilizing the rank and file around the country, without hoping for an explosion of rank-and-file resentment against the bureaucracy in the union. This is the only hope he has. He also has some technical problems. To run for president of the union, you have to be nominated by 150 locals around the country. That's no small task because all these district directors and local presidents that support Abel will do anything to prevent a nomination in their local. It's hard enough to find out where all the locals are and when they meet because the international isn't very helpful.

As a matter of fact, when they ran in the Chicago-Gary district they couldn't get a list of the locals. There wasn't any list, a very deliberate policy. But they finally made it.

They're going to be sending people out around the country to build local Steelworkers Fight Back groups, Sadlowski campaign groups. In many cases, they will be working with candidates for district director. We hope that they will be because that will add a certain dimension to the campaign that's very important.

In these campaigns in Chicago-Gary, many nonsteel-

workers participated. Hundreds of them participated—students, teachers, professional people, liberals, do-gooders, radicals of all kinds. But he made clear and we want to make clear, too, that first and foremost it's a steelworkers' campaign. We want that label on it. And that's what we'll try to do in each area—to involve as many steelworkers as possible.

Every case where the Sadlowski team has approached the membership, has approached local officials, has dug up the old oppositionists, as in Houston, they've gotten a good response. People see it as a new hope.

They want to send steelworkers out because it's steelworkers who are going to talk to other steelworkers. They're going to be taken seriously. But they've got a problem. They can't quit their job to go to work for Steelworkers Fight Back. So they're doing what they're doing now. That is, people are taking their vacations, or local union officials are getting lost time or relief from their local posts to go out around the country. Or they get people like John Askins who've been laid off, and they go out.

That's the kind of movement that this can inspire everywhere. The other thing that was reported on is the momentum we can expect out of this movement as it's developed in Chicago and Gary. That is, in the local elections this April the Sadlowski forces won. And they won big in locals, particularly the basic steel locals, where they weren't too strong before. They won big. Every attempt at red-baiting, every attempt at liberal-baiting, every reactionary attempt against them, was defeated, with a couple of exceptions. In all the big locals they swept office.

It wasn't hard in some cases. Many local officers were under investigation for stealing money and under indictment or whatnot. This tends to discredit them, generally, and that's what the international is trying to do in Cleveland against the local officials. But they fought the good fight and they're growing. And that's going to happen elsewhere.

What are some of the issues that are going to come up in Las Vegas and are going to be issues during the campaign? In Las Vegas the Sadlowski forces started a little late trying to organize delegates around the country. I'm not sure just why. They're going on the theme of "membership ratification of contracts." Sounds pretty simple. It's a very attractive demand. Most workers believe that they have a right to vote on their contract. In basic steel, they don't have that right. That is, the local presidents involved in the contract meet and vote on the contract.

The other big issue is the dues increase. Dues were increased substantially not too long ago so they could jack up the officials' salaries. And they upped Abel's salary thousands of dollars and they upped district directors' salaries another ten thousand.

I want to go over a couple of things that we ought to do in every area regardless of whether we have people in the steel union or not. First is the sales of the *Militant* and the sales of this pamphlet, *The Fight for Union Democracy in Steel*, by Andy Rose. They sell. We know the *Militant* sells at plant gates. The experience in Houston, selling the *Militant* with the shooting story, is not unique. The *Militant* sells in the steel mills. It's read in the steel mills.

What's it take to get people into the steel industry? Is it that difficult to do? It's not. It just takes a little

perseverance. Our experience has shown that wherever people have really tried to get into the Steelworkers union, they've been able to do it.

What about our tactical approach? A couple of things on this. We're going to be in the Steelworkers union for a long time, way beyond February 1977, and way beyond August when the next contract comes up. So we shouldn't take the approach that everything we do is predicated on what results we can get between now and February 1977. The role we can play in different areas is going to be very uneven. But everywhere we possibly can, it's an opportunity we have to throw ourselves into.

The other side of it is this: It's proven valuable, and will continue to prove valuable in this kind of union work, to have the comrades in there in large enough numbers where we can work out a division of labor. In some of these plants (with seven, ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty-two thousand people in them) it's good to be known as a socialist. There are many workers who would like to talk to a socialist. Some of these plants, by the way, are half Black, half Chicano, young people, ex-students, people with a couple years of college—same kind of people we meet everywhere else.

Let's field some questions.

Question

In terms of plants that are hiring around the country—some places are having shutdowns, some places they're not hiring—in a lot of basic industry they're not hiring. Could you go into which areas in the country are hiring in this period right now and if there are any priorities, any particular areas where we want to get more comrades in.

Workshop Leader

I'm not sure of the situation everywhere. I know in some of the steel mills, they are hiring. They're not hiring with the frenzy that they were in 1973. In most of the big mills that I know of in the Midwest, everyone who's laid off has been called back and they've been hiring new people.

Because of the consent decree, they're hiring a much higher percentage of women than men. You can get hired more easily if you're a woman. Thousands of women have entered basic steel in the last few years. Not all of them have stayed. The turnover is very high. But we can expect that women will become established in the industry, and they've already in some plants become a very significant numerical force. They're not yet established enough where they have the self-confidence to organize against their special oppression. But we know that they will. And so far the unions have been relatively responsive to some of the needs of women. That's another reason why we want women in there.

So I would say this. In any area of the country there are shops under the Steelworkers contract that are hiring. It may not be basic steel. It may be a little fabricating shop. It may be a machine shop. It may be a can factory. It may be a foundry. It may be a die-cast shop. It may be electrical equipment. But there's no place where we shouldn't be able to get in somewhere—no place.

From Houston

I think comrades to get into steel should look at it in an organized fashion. Every branch should know in every city where the steel plants are and what plants are organized by the Steelworkers. There are a lot of plants

that will surprise us. We had a comrade for a short time in Houston who got a job at a paper-box factory. He was just looking for work and took the first job he found, and he signed up to be a steelworker.

Each branch will have to think it out to organize the search for jobs. But that's going to be important for getting comrades in steel. We have to know where the jobs are and the best way to do it. It will have to be organized on a branch and local level to be able to stay on top of that kind of work.

Workshop Leader

Just one thing on that, on the people who try to get into steel. In addition to newer members, we also want some experienced people, people who are experienced in party work.

From Houston

I just have two things to mention—first of all the question of women getting jobs in the mills. Not only is it easier for women to get hired right now, but a lot of different kinds of jobs are open. You're not always going to be working on an open hearth place or anything like that. It's not like a journey into the inferno. So you shouldn't get the idea that if you've been a waitress, or you've been working at a discount house punching a cash register, you are not qualified to work in a steel mill. And it pays a lot better than \$2.75 an hour.

But another thing is we need comrades in the unions, the Steelworkers or whatever, regardless of the Sadlowski campaign. You can see that people need the kind of leadership that we can give by the response that comrades get. We're interested in the union. We build the union. People respond to this. They're looking for people to lead the way, to show them that they can be effective and they can do things. And it's not just for personal satisfaction, going in there and becoming a grievance person. It's because people look at you, they respect your ideas, because we have the ideas that they've been looking for for twenty years. And we ought to make a big push.

From Los Angeles

There are two things I'd like to hear a little bit more about. One is, once you get hired, make sure you stay in. Just what is this probationary period and how should the comrades function during this period, especially in regard to the Sadlowski campaign? We don't want people being bounced out of there as soon as they go in.

The other question is this: There's been a lot of resistance on the part of comrades to attempt to get this kind of job because it's so disruptive, they consider, of the branches with these new branches being so small. You need people to have assignments and you can't have people working all kinds of crazy shifts, and I want you to say something about that and how branches can get around that problem.

Workshop Leader

Well, on the crazy shifts stuff first. You can have a branch with all kinds of people working crazy shifts. I know that for a fact. You can do it. It is disruptive of the normal pattern. Most of these jobs in basic steel work turns, twenty-one turns, fifteen turns. That means your shift changes every week. And your days off are very rarely Saturday and Sunday, and you don't spend

Christmas with your family. A lot of people volunteer, and have Christmas the next day—double and a half time. We've had comrades working in industry for years. Many comrades who've worked in industries, in all kinds of jobs, are the best activists in the branches.

There's no reason why we can't build branches made up of industrial workers, because if there is, then we've got some problems. We've got some real problems. If we're supposed to be cutting down to small branches to be more flexible and then we discover that we're not more flexible, then we'll have to rethink some things if that's a problem.

But this is a priority. It's got to be done.

On probation, there's different theories on what to do. but just work like hell. Show up for work every day. Never be late. And just like holding any other job, be friendly to everybody, in the sense of get along with everybody. That's how most people lose their job, you know. They don't get along with people.

I wouldn't talk much about politics. There's no guarantee that anybody can get through 520 hours or any probationary period without getting fired. There's no magic formula.

Question

I know this is a tactical question for each branch to decide, but generally what would you say to comrades who have other industrial jobs but are living in an area where it's possible to get a job in a steel plant. Suppose there's not much activity in the union in the other industrial job even though it's in an important industrial union.

Workshop Leader

Well, it's a tactical question. We don't want to take light decisions with our members. We don't want to just bop people around here and there. We have comrades in other unions who are going to be working with us, I hope, and will have opportunities to do it. It will be a good way if it's the case, to work with people in your union.

Same Questioner

What I wanted to ask is this. Are you saying that if you can get into the steel union, get into it?

Workshop Leader

I'm just saying it would be a good thing to give it a try. But I'm not going to say, rip people out of this, and rip people out of that. I don't know.

Further Contribution From Group

I just wanted to make a little comment. One of the things that this campaign for union democracy does, just as we see in other social movements, is that it has the effect of stimulating the other activity that we're involved in. That's going to be very important for us. People will begin discussing things in the union local as a result of the Sadlowski campaign. It could spill over into other unions and provide us new opportunities in our antiracist work and other areas.

Workshop Leader

Don't forget to buy these pamphlets. They're only 50 cents. We also have this SWP Internal Information Bulletin No. 5 in 1976 that has many of the reports and reprints of articles on the Sadlowski movement.

Our Aims and Tactics in the Trade Unions

(A speech delivered at the Party Conference of Coal Miners at St. Louis, Mo., July 27, 1924. First published in the Daily Worker, August 2, 1924.)

By **JAMES P. CANNON**

This speech by Comrade Cannon was delivered seventeen years ago when the trade union work of the Communist Party was first being developed on a practical basis and its guiding principles laid down. Most of what is said there is pertinent to the present stage of the development of our party trade union work.

—THE EDITORS.

* * *

Comrades:

These conferences of Party members in the important trade unions in which representatives of the Central Executive Committee take part are becoming frequent occurrences. We must regard this as a healthy sign. It indicates that we are maturing as a Party of theoretical and practical revolutionists, and getting a firm grip on our basic tasks. The close collaboration between the active comrades in the field and the leading organ of the Party has a beneficial result all the way around.

The close and intimate contact with the practical problems of the daily struggle and with the comrades who directly face them, serves as an unerring corrective to any tendency there might be in the Party to deal with these problems in an abstract or purely doctrinaire fashion. On the other hand, the participation of the Party representatives insures that the fundamental political aspect of the trade union struggle will be brought to the front in these trade union conferences. The importance of this cannot be over-estimated. Otherwise there is constant danger of the work of our trade union comrades being influenced too much by expediency and so-called practicality. One-sided conceptions, purely trade union points of view, take the upper hand and the general class issues of the struggle are pushed into the background. Such a state of affairs must be guarded against. We know too well that it leads to reformism and futility.

We are meeting here today to consider the problems of the particular trade union you belong to, from the standpoint of the Party, which is the standpoint of all Communists. And I think I will be proceeding in the proper order if I put forward as a premise the revolutionary aims of our Party and propose that we weigh and judge every trade union question that comes before us, no matter how small or practical it may appear to be, in the light of our final aims.

A Revolutionary Party

Our Party is a party of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletarian revolution is the only solution of the labor problem and all our work must lead to this goal. This is our starting point in the trade unions, as in every field of activity in the class struggle. It is this fundamental conception that distinguishes us from all other parties and groups in the labor movement. It is the band of steel that binds us together into one Party.

Our revolutionary goal shapes our policy in the daily struggle. The revolutionary aspirations of our Party comrades generate the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice that give the Party its driving power. Woe to us if we become so "practical" as to forget this for one moment. All our work must

lead toward the proletarian revolution. If we keep this always in mind and measure all our daily work by this standard we will keep on the right road. The revolutionary principles to which we are committed put upon us responsibilities and duties which cannot be shifted or evaded if we are to live up to our conception of the Party as the vanguard of the workers. We have to stand up and fight for the true interests of the working class as a whole, at every turn of the road.

With the Masses, But Leading Them

We want to be with the masses, but we must also be ahead of the masses, and not be afraid to take an unpopular stand, when it is necessary in order to combat their prejudices. Take for example the Ku Klux Klan. Here is an organization that is anti-labor in its very character,—yet large numbers of coal miners are misled into supporting it. To fight the Ku Klux Klan, to expose its reactionary nature and win the workers away from it is a difficult and somewhat hazardous task in certain sections of the country, but it is our duty to the working class to make such a fight. We would not be worthy of the proud name our Party bears if we evaded such a fight on any pretext.

Our work in the trade unions is developing. Evidence of this can be seen on every side. Such conferences as this are proof of the rapid strides we are making. We have already accumulated rich experience, and this experience is bringing to light both positive and negative sides in our work. One of our main duties is to review the whole activity from time to time, to strengthen and improve what is good, and discover what is bad in order to reject it.

It goes without saying that we Communists esteem each other very highly, but when we meet together in conferences such as this, it is not for the purpose of extending bouquets and empty compliments, but to speak out openly and frankly; to subject all our work to thorough-going examination and criticism in order that errors may be discovered and overcome. You have the right to expect plain speaking from the Central Executive Committee. I feel quite confident that if some errors in your work are mentioned here in this discussion, if some of the mistakes that individual comrades made, are pointed out in a friendly and brotherly, but nevertheless frank manner, as is the custom among Communists, that none of you will feel offended. The discussion is only for the purpose of improving our effectiveness and strengthening the Party for the fight.

Our Valuable Experiences

The power of a disciplined Party, founded on revolutionary principles, and concerning itself in a business-like fashion with all aspects of the trade union struggle, has already begun to manifest itself. At the last convention of the Illinois miners, for example, everybody could see that the Party is beginning to grow up, to stretch its shoulders, and take its

place on the stage of events. Our Party appeared there as the leader of the fight for the interests of the men in the mines. It was in the forefront, dealing the heaviest blows against the agents of the bourgeoisie, who have usurped the official positions in the Miners' Union. The work of our comrades in this convention added greatly toward making the Miners' Union a better union for the class struggle, thereby increasing the prestige of our Party. That must be acknowledged at the very beginning.

In a whole series of trade union conventions held in recent months the same phenomena were to be observed. Our small Party, which only yesterday emerged from underground and began to collect the scattered forces of the revolutionary workers, was the storm center of the fight against reaction in the labor movement. We have not yet become the leader of the masses in the trade unions, but we have become the leader in the fight for their interests. The rest will follow in good time. Of this we can be confident.

It is no accident that our Party is pushing forward everywhere and putting itself at the head of the struggle. The reason for this is that ours is the only Party willing to fight for the immediate interests of the workers, and the only Party standing for the solution of the labor problem by means of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. All of the interests of the working class, immediately and ultimately, are indissolubly bound up with the revolution. And if we make mistakes here and there, if we fail to take the fullest advantage of opportunities which arise in the course of the struggle, it is because our comrades in the unions, due mainly to inexperience, have not fully mastered the art of taking a practical stand on every question that arises, and relating it skillfully to the final aims of the movement.

Correcting Our Mistakes

To do practical work, and at the same time to deepen and extend the class-consciousness of the workers, and lead them toward the struggle for power—this is the heart of our task in the trade unions. From this point of view an examination of events that transpired at the last convention of the Illinois miners will bring forth fruitful results. Our power will be multiplied at the next convention, if we frankly recognize the negative as well as the positive sides of our activity at the last one.

One of the main errors made by our comrades there, was the failure to realize fully that the brazen scheme of class collaboration presented to the convention in the report of Frank Farrington, revealed the political and ideological basis of all the corruption and betrayal of the whole bureaucracy of the United Mine Workers of America, from Lewis to Farrington. Our comrades should have attacked this report in the most militant fashion. They should have shot it to shreds on the ground that it represented the theory of the mutual interests of the coal diggers and the parasites who exploit them and fatten on their toil and misery. Against it they should have set up the principle of the class struggle, the theory of the salvation of the workers through uncompromising struggle against their exploiters.

Such a fight would have been a dagger aimed at the very heart of the corrupt and treacherous trade union bureaucracy, because it would have been aimed at the false system of ideas with which they poison the labor movement. Such a fight should have been seized upon as the best means of opening the eyes of the miners, and making them see their real pro-

blem. All the other fights in the convention, the fight over the appointive power, the fight for better legislation in union affairs, for the reinstatement of Howat, etc., should have been regarded by our comrades and explained to the delegates, as related to the basic fight for the principle of the class struggle, and subordinate to it. This would have been the best means of awakening the honest rank and file delegates, and of binding them more closely to us.

Another error at the convention occurred in the handling of the resolution on the recognition of Soviet Russia. Here again the principle of the class struggle was involved. The Farrington machine played a clever game with the delegates on the resolution, by calling for the recognition of Soviet Russia in one paragraph, and then nullifying the whole effect of the resolution by adding the qualification that Soviet Russia should recognize certain obligations—the very obligations which the capitalist governments of the world have been vainly trying for six years to impose upon her. Our comrades made the mistake of thinking that the question of formal recognition of Soviet Russia was the real issue, and of considering such a resolution a victory for us.

This was entirely too "statesman-like." We are for the recognition of Soviet Russia, because it is a working class state, and because we recognize that the interests of the working class all over the world are bound up with it. The recognition of Soviet Russia is for us an issue of the class struggle, and we should have made the fight purely on that basis, and hammered home again to the delegates the idea that the solidarity of labor, the world-wide union of the working class in the fight for the overthrow of capitalism, must be accepted as the guiding principle of the labor movement. We might have failed to get a majority of the convention if we had put the fight on this basis, just as we might have failed to get a majority in a clear-cut class struggle fight against Farrington's scheme of class collaboration, but that is a secondary matter. We would have brought the principle to the minds of many of the delegates, and tied them more closely to us. It is not the formal victory but the fight that is important.

Inadequate Organization

From the same point of view the inadequate development of the left-wing caucus at the convention should be pointed out. Some comrades objected to these caucuses on the ground that Farrington's spies might be present and learn something in advance about the fight we intended to make in the convention. This attitude is erroneous. It is the result of over-caution and too much concern for immediate legislative and technical victories. Moreover, it represents, to a certain extent, an unconscious yielding to the position of the reactionary officials who naturally resent any attempt to organize the rank and file against them. This question goes much deeper than appears at first glance. The failure to organize the left-wing delegates at the convention into a fighting body, if carried to its logical conclusion, would lead to the failure to organize the left-wing forces throughout the union. It means giving up, under pressure of the officialdom, the right to organize the Trade Union Educational League. "Don't make a mole hill into a mountain," is a good maxim; but it is just as good if we turn it around and say to the comrades who are willing to concede this small point: "Don't make a mountain into a mole hill." If we are making a serious fight to break the control of the trade union bureaucracy we must not neglect to organize our troops.

Our fight for the conquest of the union is at bottom a

fight to organize the rank and file workers together with us on the basis of the class struggle. Therefore, they must be enlightened as to our aims and plans.

Conventions should be regarded as the best occasions to advance this process. The conventions afford us the opportunity of coming into close contact with rank and file delegates, of combatting by discussion and argument their prejudices and misconceptions, and of uniting them with us into an organized body to fight for the regeneration of the labor movement. The left-wing caucus is necessary for this work.

It is far more important to us if we get acquainted with ten new workers and make them a part of the organized fight, than if we pass a dozen resolutions in the convention by an accidental majority.

The conscious support of the workers is what we want. We are fighting for their minds and hearts. Do not forget that, comrades. The officialdom can turn our best resolutions into scraps of paper. They can retain office by stealing elections, but they can not turn away from us the workers we have won over to our way of thinking and fighting. The officials can maintain themselves in power, for a time, by a thousand tricks and fraudulent practices. But once we have won the masses over to our side, we can snap our fingers at them. The control of the unions means for us the control of the masses. This, and this alone, will insure our final victory.

Communists and Union Offices

I want to pass over now to another question which will become more and more important as our strength develops in the trade unions. It has confronted us already a number of times. That is the question of comrades holding office in the unions and becoming candidates for office. This may become one of our greatest dangers, and one of the greatest sources of corruption of party members, if we do not properly estimate this question and take a resolute stand on it at the very beginning.

In the discussions which took place here today, we heard the remark made by one of the comrades that our struggle in the unions is a struggle for strategic positions. This is a one-sided view and if we allow it to stand alone, we will fall into a serious error. We must adopt the point of view that our struggle is a struggle to develop the class consciousness of the rank and file workers and to win them over to the principle of the revolutionary struggle against Capitalism under the leadership of our Party. If we will connect the fight for strategic positions with this broad political aim and subordinate it to this aim, we will be on safe ground. Otherwise, we will be confronted with the spectacle of Party members regarding the fight for office as an end in itself; of evading or putting aside questions of principle with which the masses are not familiar; of scheming and calculating too closely in order to get into office. Of course the comrades will justify all this on the ground that once they get into office they will be able to do big things for the Party. But quite often we will be apt to find the very comrades who adopt this method of getting into office falling into the habit of continuing it in order to hold the office. They will thereby degenerate into mere office-holders and office-hunters. They will lose the confidence and respect of the militant rank and file workers, and our Party, which stands responsible for them, will have its prestige greatly injured.

Strategic positions, however, are very important and we

must not take a doctrinaire view in regard to them. The opinion expressed here by one comrade that men become petty bourgeois in their interests and outlook as soon as they are elected to office and that, therefore, we should have nothing to do with office, is not correct. It is true that official position, especially in the American trade union movement, has led many men in the past to corruption and betrayal of the workers, but that does not say the Communists must be corrupted. We have to hold the conception that a true Communist can go anywhere the Party sends him and do anything, and still remain a Communist—still remain true to the working class. Comrade Lenin was an official. He had more power than Frank Farrington, but he did not become like Frank Farrington. The guarantee against corruption of Party members who become officials is that they remain close to the Party and that they base their fight for office on the support of the rank and file for the policy of the class struggle, and do not become too expedient and too “clever”—do not try to “sneak” into office by soft-pedaling and pussy-footing on questions of principle which may be unpopular, but which Communists, nevertheless, are duty-bound to stand for.

A Party of Struggle

Our Party is a party of rank and file revolutionary workers, a party of revolutionary struggle against capitalism and all its works, and we expect comrades who are put into official positions to retain that fundamental conception and carry it out in all their official work. They must not allow themselves to be influenced by their positions into an attitude of overcaution. Above all, they must not acquire an “official” psychology, and fail to do their duty by the Party for fear of jeopardizing their positions. We do not put Communists into office in order that they may do less for the Party, but more.

The atmosphere of American trade union officialdom is a fetid one. It is permeated thru and thru with customs and traditions of a nonproletarian character. Take care, you comrades who become officials, that you do not sink into this swamp. Remember always that you are Communists and hold on to your rebel Communist spirit. Do not succumb to the customs and traditions of office developed by the agents of the bourgeoisie, who have fastened themselves upon the labor movement in official positions, but take your own revolutionary ethics and customs with you.

Party Discipline

The question of Party discipline becomes especially important in connection with comrades in official positions. Comrades so situated must tie themselves closely to the Party, make themselves one with it, and regard the Party always as their best friend. The close union of a Communist official with the Party will be the best guarantee that he will be able to retain his revolutionary point of view and do his duty by the working class. The Party expects even more discipline to be shown by comrades who become officials and leaders than by other members of the Party. It does not fear even the biggest officials who go against the decisions of the Party and follow a policy in conflict with it. Comrades who hold offices, no matter how important they may be, cannot act as independent individuals without being called to order by the Party.

The Test of Our Work

We can sum up the whole question in a few words. We are not Progressives, but Revolutionists. Our role in the union movement is to organize the masses for the proletarian revolution and to lead them in the struggle for it. All of our daily work must be related to this, and subordinated to it. The test of our work can never be made by formal victories on paper, but by the development of class consciousness in the ranks of the workers, the degree of their organization on that basis and the increasing influence and leadership of our Party. Strategic positions in the labor movement are of importance chiefly from the standpoint of enabling the Party to advance and develop its work of revolutionizing the masses.

Let us be shrewd and practical by all means. Let us learn how to meet every question that arises in the union, in a realistic and businesslike manner. Let us become experts in the daily work of the unions, and in maneuvering for strategic positions, but let us also remember always the danger of degenerating into mere professional office seekers.

APPENDIX II

It Is Time for a Bolder Policy in the Unions

By James P. Cannon

[The following are excerpts of remarks on trade-union policy, taken from James P. Cannon's main political report and summary at the SWP's October 1941 Plenum-Conference. The full text of Cannon's report and summary are available in *The Socialist Workers Party in World War II* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), pp. 165-98.]

Report

Now I come to a very important point, the question of party work in the unions in the next period. You know that the unions are gradually undergoing a great transformation. Day by day the class-collaborationist leaders of the unions, cooperating with the government heads who have a deliberate design, are working to harness the unions to the war machine and to encroach upon their independence, to tie them up with no-strike contracts and agreements, to shift the center of their activity from strikes and class-struggle activities to negotiations by the government mediation boards, and so on. The program of harnessing the unions to the state is going ahead with full speed. Because of that our work in the unions becomes more important and, at the same time, more difficult than ever and requires more attention to the established Bolshevik principles of trade union work.

For years now we have been bending the stick in one direction: that is, we have been trying to take the party that was predominately petty bourgeois in its composition, in some parts of the country at least, and transform that party into a proletarian organization with its members rooted in industry and belonging to unions. We have waged a long and hard fight; the faction fight with the petty-bourgeois opposition was one of the episodes in that long struggle to proletarianize the party. We have succeeded so well that you can say offhand now that the average member of our party is a trade unionist. In many places the great majority of members of the party now are trade unionists. While we were carrying on that campaign to get into the unions, we naturally emphasized one side of the task. Comrades were cautioned not to go into the unions and begin making speeches about Lenin and Trotsky right away. They should be careful, integrate themselves, get some training in their

Active unionists, especially those who hold office, are beset by a thousand temptations to turn aside from the road of the class struggle. Only their close union with the Party will enable them to overcome these temptations. With the assistance of the Party they will learn how to serve the workers in the daily struggle and to connect all their activity with the task of leading the masses toward the final revolution. They will learn how to measure their progress at every step, not by formal victories on paper, but by the development of the class consciousness of the workers and the influence of the Party, by the extent to which their activity inspires the workers with that spirit of determined struggle, which is the spirit of Communism.

Many difficulties will confront us in the task we have undertaken, but, with the assistance of the Party and the International, we will solve them all. We will win over the masses to the side of Communism; we will wrest the labor movement from the hands of the agents of the bourgeoisie and convert them into mighty instruments for the proletarian revolution.

trade, some standing as mechanics, workmen, etc. Instead of pushing them into exposure, we tended to restrain them at all times. We told them many times, there is only one way of carrying on trade union work effectively—that is inside the unions. And if you conduct yourself in such a way that you get bounced out before you really get in, you cannot carry on any fruitful trade union work.

This work of integration has been pretty well carried on. We have come to a new stage where the comrades should begin to develop systematic party political work. Trade unionism by itself does not amount to much in this epoch of wars and revolutions. Only insofar as trade union work is inspired and fructified by Bolshevik political activity does it afford some permanent benefits to the working class and lead them toward the path of revolution.

There is only one way to carry on political work in the unions, only one way to do any kind of serious work in the unions, and that is by means of fraction organization. It is by means of the fractions that the influence of the party is asserted, that policies are determined, that individual party members are controlled and subordinated to the party, and the full force of the party is brought to bear. You have in your conference folders, I think, a copy of a speech I made on the trade union question seventeen years ago, reprinted from the *Daily Worker* of that time. That was a speech to a party conference of coal miners in St. Louis in 1924.

A project has been approved by the Political Committee to publish a book of my writings and speeches. This speech I refer to is part of the material dug up out of the old files. The one thing that struck me right in the eye, and other comrades when they read it, was that the speech, just changing a few names, would be 100 percent applicable to the present trade union problem of the party. Those were the days when we were just laying down the principles of communism and establishing the procedure by which the communists work in the trade unions. Without the fraction organization you cannot recruit for the party, and without recruiting for the party you never really influence the unions, you only have contact with them. An individual comrade

who organizes a union, or gets a strategic position in a union, can lose that position for one of a dozen or more reasons. Then, if he has failed to recruit and build a party group in the rank and file, nothing remains to show for his work but a union for some business agent or bureaucrat to take over.

One cannot accomplish much in the present trade union movement without the help and direction of the party. The best comrades, the best Bolsheviks, become burdened by the weight and the detail of the trade union movement, which is a veritable breeding ground for opportunism. They have a tendency not to push party fraction work, but to postpone it, to pull away from it, to imagine that they can work out some shortcut to attain their ends which can only be attained by the means laid down by the party. This principle of party fraction organization is confirmed by all the experience of revolutionary Marxists in the trade union movement since Lenin first elucidated it. But time and time again you can find an individual comrade in the unions who becomes an official, who thinks Lenin's method is unnecessary in his case. Some of them take this attitude in the best of faith, thinking they know better than the party, they will do it differently.

You have other cases of comrades who get appointed or elected to some petty business agent's job and immediately begin to think they are bigger than the party and don't want to be controlled by the party. They don't want any fraction organization because they don't want the rank-and-file comrades to be able to call them to order. Of course, these are exceptional cases and the party always finds a way to deal with them.

It is no accident that the record of Trotskyism in the trade union movement is clear as crystal and clean as a hound's tooth. Our party never entertains for a moment the idea that a trade union official, or a trade union group, overshadows and dominates the party. The party leads the work of party members in the unions, as elsewhere, and that is the only way we want it. We don't want anything to do with fictitious influence in the unions. We want the real thing or nothing.

You had this morning a report of the magnificent fight that the comrades put up in Minneapolis. The whole country knows about it. The name of Trotskyism has been glorified by the magnificent stand of the leaders in Minnesota who would not knuckle down to the warmongers, who took the blows and fought back and defended their principles regardless of consequences. It is no accident that only the Trotskyists do that. Look at what happened to the others. Look at the Socialists. They had a big Socialist group in the auto union led by Reuther and Co. Dubinsky was once a member of the Socialist Party. Reuther, Dubinsky, Green, and VanGelder in the Shipbuilders union, all kinds of "socialists" in all kinds of unions—they have all gone over to the war machine. And the Socialist Party yet doesn't dare to criticize them because, you see, they are trade union leaders, and the Socialist Party has an inferiority complex in front of anyone who has influence in the trade union movement.

And look what happened to the Lovestoneites. They led Local 22 in New York, a very big union. They used to make fun of us as a splinter group with no "mass" basis, whereas they were—so they said—great trade union mechanics. The only trouble with them was that the business agents in Local 22 were willing to belong to the Lovestone faction as long as the faction shielded them from criticism and asked nothing from them. When the business agents decided to go 100 percent for the war, they dragged the Lovestone group with them. That is one of the reasons the Lovestone group had to dissolve in such disgrace. A political party which subordinates itself to trade union officials is doomed to die and deserves only to die.

If here and there you develop a trade union business agent who gets elected to office by strength of the party in the first place, and then begins to think he is bigger than the party, you have a way of reaching him. If you have organized a fraction in the

union, you surround him with the fraction. Experience will convince you that in such conflicts the rank and file support the party every time. Without the rank-and-file fraction you have no means of controlling this fellow. He can compromise the party. But, you may ask, what shall we do if he will not submit to the decision of the rank-and-file fraction? The answer is simple, comrades: Kick him out of the party. Don't make big problems out of trifles. If our influence in a trade union rests on a disloyal man it is a fiction, and we don't believe in fictions.

In the next period this side of our trade union work has an extraordinary importance for another reason. Our task in the unions is not simply to play high politics. The main task of a party member in the union is to get acquainted with another worker beside him in the shop, and convert him to our ideas, and get him into the party. Unless we do that, unless we recruit continually into the party, we can never influence the trade unions, and without decisively influencing great masses of workers in the unions we can never lead the revolution.

Summary

The second point, now again, is the trade union question. Comrade Adler made an excellent point that the possibility of political agitation on the part of our trade union comrades is enormously enhanced by the new developments in the labor movement, in society in general. In the period of capitalist peace and stability, a comrade could work for years and years in a trade union and never be confronted in his daily work with anything more than the humdrum daily work of negotiating contracts, settling little grievances, routine, etc. Today politics has completely engulfed the trade union movement. In the old days the slogan of Gompers and Co.: "Keep politics out of the trade union movement," had a wide support. There was a tremendous impression among the workers that they had no reason to bring politics into the unions. But today with the development of the decay of capitalism, with its engulfment into the war and its permanent military program, Comrade Adler rightly pointed out that every question in the trade union movement leads today directly to Washington, to questions of the war, of priorities, of the mediation boards, and so on. And this opens up for us a political atmosphere which we can utilize if we know how to do so cleverly and successfully.

I think one of the funniest and at the same time most tragic [. . . examples] of how politics has caught up with some of the old-fashioned labor fakers is John L. Lewis. In the twenties Lewis was able to carry on a great crusade against the Communists and drive them out of the miners because they were bringing politics into the miners' union. Today he himself is facing annihilation because of the developments of the war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and the war program of Roosevelt and one thing and another of that sort.

Generally, we can say that unions do not operate and can never operate again as they did in the old days of peaceful, stabilized, democratic capitalism. The traditional "business agent unionism" is dead forever. The new lineups in the labor movement, it must have struck you, which are repeated at every trade union convention, are the lineups on the questions of support of Roosevelt's war policy, for the defense of the Soviet Union, against any support of the Soviet Union, for isolationism—all questions which are in their very essence political, and the trade unions are compelled to make their lineups accordingly. And that makes an atmosphere for political interest of the workers who have been somnolent before, who never knew any political life before. They are compelled by the situation to think of political questions, and, to a certain extent, in political terms, and that is why I think we should try to develop our own political work in the unions with some hope of a better reception than we used to receive in the past. And, of course, by that we mustn't think that,

as has been pointed out with a few words of caution, we will just run hog-wild; we will forget the relationship of forces; we will forget how weak we are . . . with the result that we will soon isolate ourselves and have ourselves thrown out. Now I don't mean that, whether some others meant it or not.

I do not believe in doing anything stupidly. I am convinced that any good proposition can become ridiculous if you apply it stupidly, and after my years of experience in this vale of tears, and my dealings with all kinds and types of humanity, I have evolved for myself a firm conviction on one point: there is absolutely no substitute for intelligence. If you go about developing our political work stupidly, naturally you will have bad results. I mean political work not in the sense of splurges, but in the sense of talking to the worker immediately next to you in the union or in the factory, taking advantage of problems arising over priorities unemployment, intervention of Mediation Boards, intervention of the Maritime Commission—as our comrades did on the Eastern Seaboard a few weeks ago, and utilized this occasion to do a little intelligent, careful, systematic political education, with the object of bringing people to the party, and, similarly, even open intervention in the union when the occasion is propitious. This can be done and should be done.

And I think that our comrades in the past year have carried out to the letter, and literally leaning over backwards, the injunctions we gave them to be careful and to get integrated in the shops and in the unions before they begin popping off too loud. But after they have been there for a year or two, after they have got their bearings and acquired a little prestige, to remain there year after year so careful, so cautious, so silent, and so invisible that nobody ever finds out that they have any political ideas, that, I must say, is carrying out the program of integration a little bit stupidly.

Now we must begin to bend the stick the other way and prod our comrades forward. And if somebody in some branch takes this as a signal that everybody who has not a strategic position in the union has got to run about with a bundle of *Militants* under his arm, you can just tell him what we said here, that you are supposed to do this, but do it cleverly and not stupidly. No mechanical politicalizing, no unnecessary and foolish exposure of comrades in the unions, who have to proceed cautiously in order to maintain their position; but to do the work, devise ways and means of strengthening the political work that we are doing in the unions. Meet in the fractions and discuss not only the high politics of the union but the simple question of how could we possibly recruit this man who is a good trade union militant and friendly to us, and bring him into the party. Assign a person to talk to him, two people to talk to him, work out a campaign for the approach and education of a single person in the union, to get him to join the party. That is political work which is ten times more important than any foolish splurging over a high question. What we want is new people in the party.

And the same rule of intelligence applies to the question of fraction organization too. I know that you can become so formal and so mechanical and get so wound up with the machinery of the fraction that all the energy of the comrades is involved with the fraction, and they never get around to putting the fraction to work. We don't want to do it that way. It is quite true, as Comrade Jones [V.R. Dunne] said, that fractions are no panacea; they are simply the Leninist mechanism of working in a mass movement. That is the whole thing. And the more formalized it is, the more the comrades get in the habit, whenever they have anything serious and important under consideration, of meeting together and talking it over and working out a policy and making decisions—in preference to the informal, lackadaisical method which is so easy to fall into in the trade union movement—the more success they will have.

Of course, neither a good policy, neither an acceleration of

politicalization, nor fraction work, nor prayers will shield any organization from an occasional traitor. That can't be done. Every organization in all the historic experience in the labor movement, every great cause, has suffered from a certain percentage of renegades and traitors who under pressure turn over to the enemy. But we can keep it down to a minimum if our organization is tight and is disciplined and is prepared to defend itself. That is the whole score on the question of renegades, and by and large we haven't a great deal to fear from that. Every organization has had an occasional rat turn up. We have had a few turn up in Minneapolis—some careerists there, even though they are rank and filers, joined the party, stayed in a few months, then became disillusioned and go and peddle all they know, and a lot of things they don't know, to Tobin and the FBI. But serious defections anything like the parade of renegades who have risen up to confound the Stalinists everytime they get in trouble, I think we will be immune from because by and large we have accepted people of a different type and have not encouraged people to join the party with the object of self-advancement.

We have had some tests of the efficacy of fraction work just recently in the East Coast maritime situation. Problems of a complex political nature arose almost overnight over the question of bonuses for sailors going into the war zones, certainly a political [issue]. Then the Maritime Commission intervened and undertook to man some ships in the face of a strike. . . . Then the workers struck against the Maritime Commission and took a vote for a general strike and the question was taken out of the hands of the Maritime Commission and turned over to the hands of the Defense Mediation Board.

Our comrades could not possibly have found their way in that maze of developments if they had not met together. They came together in fraction meetings, they had the advice of the Political Committee, and I think everybody will agree that by virtue of that procedure—the fraction organization of the comrades in the union, and the political assistance of the Political Committee of the party—that our group came out of that tremendously difficult and complicated struggle with added prestige and strengthened position, while others didn't do so well, particularly those who didn't know how to work together. Why, it is really ridiculous when you stop to think, that the IWW tradition got wound up in this problem too, but we, working together, succeeded in breaking the IWW into different groups and fractions, because they don't believe in discipline, in giving up their individual liberties. We believe in discipline. We worked together and coordinated all our activities and practically scattered and demoralized them in favor of a more rational policy in the strike.

Fraction work is important for recruiting. I mentioned before, I have never heard that discussed much in the party, but it seems to me an excellent idea that if, for example, we decide here on a recruiting campaign, that the fractions in the various unions put on the agenda of the fraction meetings the question of recruiting, not in general but concretely, and really push the question of trying to draw into the party by the collective work of the fraction a few valuable individuals. That will be a great gain for us.

I had the very pleasant experience last Saturday night of spending an evening with one of our best trade union organizers, a young comrade who came out of Chicago, out of Indiana Harbor, and was appointed to an organizer's position with a big union. He first inquired of the Political Committee whether he should accept the post. It is one of those jobs which come up so frequently, of an appointment being made by a reactionary officialdom with a double purpose: one purpose being to try to win over to the machine a young militant who has been making a little trouble, put him on the payroll, soften him up a little bit, and integrate him into the machine; the other is, get him out of the field of activity, get him removed from his base in the rank and file, and if he doesn't go along a little later, throw him out. That is the way the wise labor fakers figure, and that is the way

they ruined and demoralized many and many young militants who didn't have the advantage of a party education and party support. But in that case, as we almost always do with a comrade we trust, we said, go ahead and take the strategic position. Let them play their game with you, but you play your game with them. Use your position, however restricted the opportunities are, to acquire experience and to serve the party.

This comrade has now been promoted to a higher post and he again came to New York to consult us whether he should accept the higher position to which he was promoted. In the course of the conversation, he expressed great satisfaction. . . . One thing he was sure he had done which he counted more important than the organization of 10,000 workers was that he had gotten two of the organizers to join the party and he had a plan to collect some money out of his wages and the wages of the members he had recruited, to pay the expenses of a party organizer to go into that field and devote full time to the chasing down of contacts that he had secured for them. He, himself, naturally, because of his position, couldn't work in the open. But when one is really loyal to the party and when he understands that every time he does a job in the mass movement there has to accrue a benefit to the party in order for the work itself to be permanent; when you have that kind of attitude, you find a way to do the political work, to do the fraction work, and so on.

Trade union comrades operating in the trade unions in this day with the tremendous flux in the world, with the ups and downs, can suffer annihilation overnight as a result of some unexpected developments. One who is merely operating as a trade unionist today is operating with blinders on. That is not the case with the party. The party is not a local organization, not a trade union organization. It is an organization that is nationwide, that grows and thrives on the activity of comrades, even though that activity doesn't bring immediate success. Even a struggle that ends in defeat can only mean for party members an improved experience and a transfer to new fields of activity in the party and later back again to the trade unions.

I use the illustration, for example, in discussing this question of Bert [Cochran] who went into the trade union movement, acquired a position and certain influence, and then, in the future course of developments was ganged up on and defeated in his job as business agent for one of the Ohio Auto Workers' locals. Well, if he had been merely a trade unionist, disconnected from the party, his trade union leadership was at an end. Being there not as a trade unionist, but as an agent of the party, when that field became temporarily unproductive, it was no problem either for him or for the party. We simply transferred him to New York, to put in some time as party organizer. Then when the auto industry opened up again, we sent him back to Detroit.

In general, that is the way you develop real leaders, broadening their experience, moving them from place to place, letting them become more universal in their experience, and consequently in their understanding and their knowledge; and not to take it as a devastation or a catastrophe if we encounter here and there an inevitable setback in the trade union movement, not to think a whole world hangs on whether we win or lose this particular battle in this particular trade union.

I called your attention in my remarks this afternoon to the speech I gave in 1924 to the miners' conference in St. Louis. At that time the Communist Party had a tremendous influence in the Illinois miners' organization. At that time they were in virtual control of the needle trades unions in New York. In the further course of developments the party was completely wiped out of the mine fields due to their own stupidity and by the objective circumstances. . . . They eventually lost their base to a large extent in the needle trades, but the experience accumulated by the party in the trade union work in the needle trades, the prestige of these struggles that had brought some people into the party, opened up new trade union bases, and in the course of the

next few years the CP, in spite of all its betrayals, mistakes, stupidities, and venalities committed by the bureaucrats, in spite of all of that, employing this technique of fraction organization, riding on the prestige of the pioneer Communist movement as a class-struggle organization, and exploiting the name of the Soviet Union, built up a tremendous power in the trade union movement of this country. So much so that just a few months ago the great John L. Lewis, who thinks it's possible yet to lead a labor movement without a political party, found that the Communist Party people whom he had been so cleverly using with fancy politics from the top, had been organizing fractions in the spots where he turned them loose and they came up with the power and not John L. Lewis. And if they can do it in the name of a false policy, in the name of all kinds of . . . betrayals and mistakes, what grandiose vistas open up for a genuine honest party of Trotskyism which has the wind in its sails in the union movement and organizes its forces and consolidates them at each and every step of advance.

I am in favor of the idea expressed here of colonizing, if we can find out where we can get the colonizers. The fact is that we have practically got the whole party now in industry. Why, only in the last few months we took twenty-five more comrades and shoved them into the maritime industry in New York. And we took them from the most unusual places and just hurled them in there and threw them into the bay, and they had to jump a ship in order to keep from drowning. And, by God, most of them turned out to be sailors and some of them did pretty good at it, and they became sources of support for us in that tremendously strategic industry and union. We are a small party and we can't go colonizing all over the lot. We must colonize in those places which offer the best opportunity at the time, and when this opportunity which we seize at one occasion proves later on to be not so fruitful, we have got to shift our people.

Right now we are colonizing more or less in one particular union in the maritime industry, because it is wide open for us. It is a new union with no entrenched bureaucracy and there are possibilities of our people exerting a tremendous influence there in due time. So we are trying to take some of our maritime comrades who were originally colonized in another union, and move them across 3,000 miles of country or around through the Panama Canal and transplant them to New York and ship them out through the other union. I am only sorry that we have encountered a little difficulty in doing this because some of the comrades have apparently settled down in San Francisco. I don't know of anything more disgraceful for a young revolutionist than to get settled down and get so encumbered in a place that he cannot move. . . . It would be a damn good thing for him if he had a fire. . . . to blow away some property encumbrance and make him footloose and revolutionary again. I hope that the comrades out there will get over this passing resistance and move around more to colonize this new position, and I cite that only as an example.

Our colonization must be strategic. We must take the occasion when it is opened up to us. We didn't, for example, acquire the great influence and prestige of Trotskyism in the Minneapolis trade union movement because we sat down and made a survey, and decided that was the most important center, and the most important union. The reason was that the door was open there and we had comrades in the situation who were able to get through the door and we took advantage of the situation. The same number of comrades of their caliber colonized strategically in auto or in steel would have made an even bigger splash in the American trade union movement. But they weren't in such a position; the road was not open; conditions were not propitious, so naturally they moved where they had the opportunity. And we must do that also.