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SELECTED DOCUMENTS ON SWP

TRADE UNION POLICY

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CLASS STRUGGLE POLICY IN THE UNIONS

(Trade Union Resolution adopted by the 16th National Convention of the Socialist Workers Party, 1954)
(reprinted from Discussion Bulletin A-28, March 1955)

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During the past twenty years the union movement has made a qualitative leap in both size and scope. In 1933 organized labor amounted to only a weak craft union force of about two million. Today the combined membership of the AFL, CIO and independent unions is in the neighborhood of 17 million. Although weaker numerically than the AFL, the CIO because of its position in basic industry is predominant in concentrated numbers, influence and social weight. From the start the CIO has functioned as a social movement obliged to contend with the strongest monopoly capitalists. The mass production workers of the CIO are least subject to middle class influence and have produced a decisive change in the composition of the union movement. Implicit in this over-all economic power of the workers at the union level is a decisive revolutionary power at the political level.

The series of strike struggles between 1933 and 1946, through which the union power was consolidated, demonstrated several vital political facts: The workers showed their readiness to assault the great corporations and stand up against strikebreaking attacks by the capitalist government. In the sit-down strikes the workers taught the capitalists, if not the union bureaucrats, that they have no respect for capitalist claims to private property rights in industry. The proven ability of the unions to halt production has given the workers great self-confidence. They have become socially transformed to the highest level of union consciousness.

Still another decisive political fact has been demonstrated: The capitalist reaction to nationwide strikes involving whole sections of basic industry, which arose as a necessary component of the economic struggle of the CIO workers, has made it impossible for the workers to defend their interests through economic actions alone.

Every big strike quickly becomes a national political issue with the government intervening against the workers. Every major struggle of the workers becomes elevated into a political struggle. Strikes won on the picket line are soon lost on the political arena because of the false policies of the union leadership. A glaring contradiction has therefore developed between the social power

of the workers and their lack of independent political organization.

Workers Sense Political Needs

The workers sense that strikes have today become political class battles. As a result they hesitate to walk out unless they see a clear chance for some gains or find strike action necessary to beat off a corporation attack. The workers are today searching for forms through which they may express their class political sentiments. In their own fashion they are beginning to act along class lines in national politics. They tend to vote more and more as a bloc, following as a class a false "lesser evil" course of support to the Democratic Party. The mass search for forms of political action also finds distorted expression in the capitalist party primaries.

Despite the absence of their own mass party the workers find themselves compelled to take some interest in the broad political questions of the day. In their consciousness as a class lurks the disturbing knowledge of their direct experience with capitalist crisis in a great depression and two world wars. In their travels abroad as part of the imperialist armed forces they have gotten a first-hand look at the colonial revolution, the socialist aspirations of the European workers, the utter viciousness of fascism as an anti-labor force. Hence there is today a greater potential for organized opposition to capitalist foreign policy. The workers are also becoming more aware that their unions, their democratic rights, their standard of living are the prime target of capitalist domestic policy. In both spheres, foreign and domestic, they are becoming more critical of the ruling powers above them.

The real drift of class sentiment cannot be judged by manifestations at the top of the union movement or by the failure of the workers to attend union meetings made dreary by a bankrupt policy. In the past the workers responded immediately to leadership that had some grasp of their needs and showed some skill and ability to fight. That same capacity for battle remains very much present in the working class today. What is needed to gain new response is a class struggle program and leadership.

Given that key the workers will leap onto the political arena as an independent class force with the same sweep and power they displayed in building the modern union movement.

At the head of the union movement stands a conservative bureaucracy that acts as a conscious agent of the capitalist government and is utterly devoid of any independent working class program or aims. Having long existed in the old craft union AFL, a bureaucratic formation of this type was introduced into the CIO from the start. The integration of the Social-Democrats into the CIO leadership strengthened the grip of the bureaucracy by giving it new weapons of social demagogy with which to divert sentiment for independent labor political action back into capitalist political channels.

In collective bargaining the bureaucrats are concerned not with how much the workers need, but with how little they can be forced to accept. A quest for "fringe benefits" has been substituted for a fighting wage policy. New piece-rate outrages and a stiffer speed-up are accepted in return for stingy health, welfare and pension plans. The auto workers have been saddled with a five-year contract during which period the Korean War has come and gone, automation has cut big slices in manpower requirements, a sagging economy has precipitated heavy lay-offs and yet the workers must wait until 1955 for new contract negotiations.

"Unauthorized" strikes are ruthlessly put down by the bureaucrats in open collaboration with the corporations and the government. In the steel industry the workers have witnessed the obscene spectacle of the CIO union president, David J. McDonald, making a "good will" tour of the plants with one of the labor-hating steel barons, Benjamin Fairless. But the greatest betrayal of all is the political alliance the union bureaucrats have sought to make with the capitalist ruling power.

The line of the CIO officials is to compete with the monopoly capitalists for the friendly support of the government. They have relied on government intervention in collective bargaining and on social legislation to improve wages, hours, and general conditions. In return they have supported the government's imperialist war program and helped to maintain the capitalist two-party political monopoly. Under the pressures of the developing social crisis, the AFL officials have gradually teamed up with the CIO heads in attempting to carry out this policy.

Although the government has given the bureaucrats precious few social concessions, it has become ever more demanding of them. Above all they are required to serve as political police within the labor movement, ferreting out opponents of the imperialist war program and advocates of socialism. These government demands serve to sharpen and intensify the natural inclinations of the bureaucrats to suppress democracy within the unions.

The existing bureaucracy was able to fasten its parasitic grip on the industrial unions primarily because of the Stalinist corruption in the labor movement. The Stalinists miseducated and demoralized many of the best worker-militants and destroyed the great opportunity to build a mass revolutionary party that arose during the radicalization of the Thirties.

As the CIO took form the Stalinists were shifting toward a Peoples Front line calculated to influence the foreign policy of the American government toward friendly relations with the Kremlin. Thus the Communist Party followed a political line like that of the new CIO bureaucracy, although for different basic reasons. Like the old-line union bureaucrats and the Social-Democratic lackeys of capitalism, the Stalinists therefore found it natural to join in the suppression of rank and file democracy insofar as they could do so without cutting their own throats.

Apart from the brief interlude of the Stalin-Hitler Pact, the CP lived within the CIO bureaucracy on the basis of a pro-Roosevelt line from the rise of the CIO movement through World War II. When the cold war began the imperialist-minded CIO bureaucrats turned on the Stalinists, driving them into an isolation from which they are today trying to recover through a new Peoples Front turn.

The Labor-Democratic Coalition

The attempt of the union officialdom to forge an alliance with the capitalist government has taken the political form of a coalition with the Democratic Party. For twenty years the Democrats retained control of the national administration, thanks primarily to the support of organized labor. The coalition was dealt a setback, however, when the election of Eisenhower in 1952 thrust the Democrats from power and cleared the way for the open rule of monopoly capitalism.

Mass dissatisfaction under Republican rule soon produced a trend back toward the Democrats who registered major gains in the November 1954 elections. As a consequence the union officials now hope

to restore Democratic control of the administration in 1956, promising the workers a return to the New Deal era.

Adlai Stevenson in a recent speech boasted that the Democrats had "narrowed the gap between the rich and the poor," calling attention to the anti-trust laws and social security measures. These, he predicted, represent only a preview of the bounties to come under the Democrats. Then Stevenson gave the lie to his whole speech when he said, "Instead of isolation our policy is total involvement." In that remark he assured the capitalists that the needs of their war program would be placed above all other interests.

The imperialist war program excludes any basic improvement in the workers' conditions. Any curtailment of war production, on the other hand, will increase unemployment because neither the pump-priming of the Thirties nor the war spending since has overcome a single basic cause of crashes like 1929. Unemployment already exists in the midst of large-scale arms production, demonstrating that under capitalism the alternative to catastrophic war is catastrophic depression. Therefore the monopoly capitalists feel compelled to cripple the fighting power of the unions. In fact the basic aim of the all-out campaign to elect Eisenhower was to turn the clock back to the pre-CIO days.

Election of a Democratic administration would not alter the fundamental anti-labor course of the government. As the executive of the monopoly capitalist class a Stevenson would have to carry out the same basic policies as an Eisenhower. Yet the politically bankrupt labor bureaucracy, being incapable of fashioning new methods of struggle, continues to pin all of labor's hopes on the restoration of the Democratic Party to power. In this aim they are now criminally aided and abetted by the Communist Party.

The issue, according to the Stalinists, is not socialism or capitalism but democracy or fascism. They call for a coalition under the two-party system. The Stalinists are vigorously pushing this disruptive line in the unions, seeking at the same time to curry favor with the right wing bureaucracy as specialists in fighting left-wing advocates of independent labor political action. Thus the trend is set in motion toward a united front of the right wing and the Stalinists on a political line that violates every fundamental need of the workers.

This trend can be expected to make headway for a while because of the Popular Front mood among the workers. The coalition line will also find support

among middle class elements. This mass mood is reflected in the recent Democratic election victories. Support to the Democrats flows from opposition to the Eisenhower regime, illusions that the Democrats can make good on their "welfare state" promises and lack of another vehicle for mass political expression.

Manifestations like the CIO-sponsored slate of independent candidates in the recent Newark elections are still rare. The tendency among the union officials is to demand a greater voice in the selection of Democratic candidates. This course has led to union challenges of machine candidates in Democratic primary elections and the CIO action in Newark may have been largely intended as pressure on the Democratic machine in the same general sense.

The notion of labor reforming the Democratic Party in this manner is bound to meet with response among the workers. It will take a certain amount of experience for them to learn that labor can't reform a capitalist party, that the workers will remain on a political dead-end street until they form their own independent class party.

While combating the mistaken idea that labor can make any progress by working as an organized faction inside the Democratic Party, the revolutionary socialists must at the same time give critical support to independent labor candidacies, using the independent candidacies to hammer home the labor party idea as was correctly done in the Newark elections.

Contradictory Pressures

Labor's consciousness of the shifts in political reality has lagged seriously behind the march of events. This lag has been most pronounced among the union bureaucrats whose false political policy, arising from their social function as a class-collaborationist agency within the labor movement, has served to drug the political class consciousness of the rank and file. Those who see conservatism among the workers as the cause of their political backwardness are therefore wrongfully blaming the workers for the criminal policies of their leaders.

Disoriented by the union officialdom, the workers still hope to protect and improve their standard of living through continuation of the labor-Democratic coalition. Yet it would be a great mistake to think that the workers' present standard of living has so thoroughly conservatized them that the capitalists and union bureaucrats can lead them around

by the nose. All semblance of complacency in the union ranks will give way to militancy the moment their conditions of life become seriously impaired.

During World War II and again in the Korean War the workers reacted sensitively to encroachments on their living standards. The recent years of relative prosperity have not generated mass confidence in the future. People were made crisis-conscious and fearful of the future by the 1929 crash and its aftermath. Although the masses are not yet fully aware of the fact, they are losing faith in capitalism and are sensitive to the need for action in defense of their interests.

Beneath the preliminary class-struggle manifestations now rising to the surface lie a whole series of fundamental contradictions. The workers represent the greatest social force in the nation, yet the capitalists rule to the detriment of the workers' interest. Although possessors of vast potential power the unions are rendered impotent because of a wrong political program that entangles them in the capitalist net. The union bureaucracy resorts to suppression of internal democracy in order to put down opposition to its false policies in the ranks.

The irreconcilable contradiction of interests between the workers and capitalists is leading toward political differentiation of the two classes for a showdown fight. Naked political preparation for an all-out capitalist attack against labor has taken the form of an incipient fascist crystallization around McCarthy. Political polarization of the working class has developed in the form of a tendency to choose between capitalist candidates as a class and a tendency to intervene as a labor faction inside the Democratic Party.

There will be ups and downs in this political development. But under the impact of capitalist crisis political collaboration between labor and capital will become less and less tenable. Independent labor political action has become an imperative class necessity. Delay in the realization of this political necessity has produced a whole new complex of pressures. The fundamental antagonism between capital and labor will thus have an increasingly explosive effect on class relations and the political backwardness of the workers will be overcome under the pressure of necessity.

When the mass radicalization comes the workers will use their unions as the foundation on which to build their own party, combining their organized economic power with organized political power. The fight for leadership of the radical-

ized workers will therefore begin as a fight for leadership of the unions. For that reason the trade union question is the key question of revolutionary politics in the United States. The militancy of the workers must be fused with a revolutionary leadership bringing class consciousness and a spirit of determined struggle into the union movement.

In the coming radicalization the struggle of tendencies will have the double aspect of a fight for leadership of the vanguard and of the broad mass movement. The contest will occur between three forces: the union bureaucracy, the Stalinists and the Socialists Workers Party. Of these tendencies only the SWP will constitute a vital historic force. Neither the union bureaucrats nor the Stalinists have any progressive historical mission, both are transitory obstacles to be overcome on the road to socialism.

The union bureaucracy has drawn its main strength from the relative stability of capitalism that in turn served to stabilize a labor aristocracy on which the bureaucracy rests. As the capitalist crisis sharpens the labor aristocracy will begin to lose its privileges. Differentiations will take place within the aristocracy and find their reflex in the bureaucracy itself. Demands for class struggle policies will mount at the same time among the least privileged and most dynamic union elements.

The sharpening class antagonisms will reverse the effect of the union officialdom's tie-up with the capitalist state. From its former role as a source of bureaucratic strength this tie-up will become converted into a source of weakness. Therefore our union work must be firmly based on an understanding of the transient nature of the stability presently manifested by the union bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy on which it rests.

Stalinism plays a retrogressive and disorienting role in the union movement, contaminating the class consciousness of the workers with a class-collaborationist line dressed up in radical language and seeking to restrain them from independent class action.

In the pending struggle of tendencies the SWP will have a chance to win leadership of the vanguard and the radicalized mass movement. Our surest guarantee will be the party cadres forged in the unions, class-conscious fighters armed with a powerful revolutionary-socialist program meeting the historic needs of the workers.

Transitional Program

Our perspectives must flow from the

maximum possibilities inherent in the war-depression nature of capitalism. Leftward-moving elements in the mass movement must be imbued with the correctness and inevitability of our socialist program. We must note all signs of a shift in mood among the workers, respond sensitively to mass initiative and support every demand that will tend to draw the workers into politics as an independent force.

The party must demonstrate in action -- in tune with the motion of the masses -- the correctness of its policies. Sideline commentators and critics can never become mass leaders. The workers will listen only to those who are themselves in the thick of the fight, whose words demonstrate by deeds their ability to lead.

Our strategic task is to overcome the contradiction between the fully-matured conditions for independent labor political action and the political immaturity of the working class. A transitional programmatic construction is required to bridge the gap between the present demands of the workers and the fully revolutionary-socialist program. In accord with the fundamental line of the Transitional Program of 1938, we must establish contact with the workers at their present level of consciousness and help them generalize their grievances and demands on a higher political plane.

Our key transitional demands should center around the questions of war and unemployment as they directly affect the daily lives of the workers. Special attention should be paid to demands aimed to evoke union action on the special problems of the youth, the women workers and the Negro people, stressing labor's duty to these natural allies.

The first expression of independent class political action can be expected to take form through a labor party with an essentially reformist program. In the formative period we will not necessarily make program a criterion in deciding whether to give critical support to labor candidates. The first task is to bring about a break from capitalist politics. In giving critical support we insist on independence from the capitalist political apparatus. Under no circumstances will the SWP cross class lines to support a candidate on a capitalist ticket.

As the term "critical" indicates, even in the formative stage of the labor party we reserve the right to point out errors and inadequacies in program. Once the labor party becomes a reality questions of program will become paramount. We will work to crystallize a left wing, on the revolutionary-socialist program.

Whether our party will make an entry into the labor party or not is a purely tactical question that will be decided only by future developments.

In any case our party will under all circumstances preserve its political independence. The party cadres in the mass movement are not working to build a substitute for the SWP. All our work, in all spheres and at all times, is carried on for the purpose of building our revolutionary-socialist party.

Tactical Problems in the Unions

The fight to restore union democracy is inseparably tied to the campaign for independent labor political action. Suppression of union democracy reflects the officialdom's subordination to the capitalist state and their consequent retreat before the police-state attack. Observance of union democracy, on the other hand, is a reflex of class-struggle action in defense of the workers' interests.

Advocates of a class-struggle political policy in the unions are the prime targets of the government witch hunters and their bureaucratic collaborators. That is why the political militant of the Fifties must conduct himself in the unions much like the union militant of the Thirties had to conduct himself in the open-shop plants. Good judgement by the political militants in this regard will be interpreted by the workers as a mark of leadership capacity.

The problem is to push realistically toward class-struggle objectives and yet avoid needless victimization through carelessness or excessive boldness. Our union work thus requires considerable skill, patience and endurance. The militants need to arm themselves with the long view, reinforce their confidence with a sound grasp of the party program and draw inspiration from the union rank and file.

It would be disorienting to count on vanguard action by the old militants who stormed the open-shop bastions to found the modern union movement. They are wearing out along with the limited union program of their militant days. The party must look to the new young layers of potential militants and to the women workers, the Negroes and other minority groups. They are the ones who will spearhead labor's political radicalization. Although the workers in basic industry will constitute the main force of the mass political vanguard, workers in the secondary reaches of industry and trade will also comprise an important section of the politicalized labor force. Careful

attention must therefore be paid to party work in secondary as well as basic industry.

Union tactics must be kept carefully in tune with mass sentiment, guarding against actions that would go beyond the given limits of mass support. Mass militancy without a high degree of class consciousness has a strictly limited potential. Hostile pressures cannot be withstood indefinitely by the union ranks. Our tactics must therefore be attuned to the limitations as well as the possibilities of the given situation.

A class struggle program cannot be injected into the unions simply by following a "lesser evil" course in union power politics. We take a practical attitude on internal union struggles as one aspect of a whole complex of tactics. It is sometimes profitable for us to intervene in support of a given candidate or slate when our work can thereby be advanced, but our main energy must be directed toward politicalization of the union ranks.

Tactical thinking is sometimes confused by the mistaken notion that sheer personal ability will enable a person to make himself so useful in the union that he can penetrate the official apparatus without becoming involved in unprincipled official union policies. But no-body can cheat the laws of the class struggle through talent, maneuvers or any other gimmick. Union careers of that type commonly lead either to victimization or compromise, and the longer it takes for the showdown the greater the latter danger becomes.

It is a one-sided and wrong view that our main struggle is for strategic positions in the unions. In fact this is a poor time to be pushing for union posts. Our main aim is to develop class consciousness in the ranks. We subordinate the fight for strategic positions to this aim and connect that subordinate activity with this aim.

Party Coordination with the Fractions

The party fractions tend to reflect the one-sidedness of the union movement. Large political issues become obscured by narrow union problems and the fractions are under constant pressure to make practical adaptations. That is why individuals cannot remain revolutionists without the party which rises above narrow questions of detail and generalizes from the large political issues.

Party branches must not be permitted to become mere appendages of union fractions nor must the fractions be permitted to drift without close branch attention. The fractions must have a firm political

foundation in the branch in order to maintain a proper political balance in union work. A solid branch base is equally vital to aid fraction recruitment and speed the integration of new worker members into the party.

Immersion in local work also tends to narrow the branch point of view. Close coordination is therefore necessary between the party center and the branches. Lacking such coordination the branches would tend to become influenced by expediency and practicality arising from local problems and the large national and international issues would be pushed into the background. The center in turn would tend to deal with political issues in an abstract fashion that would fail to meet the needs of the party workers in the field.

Party militants must have a clear grasp of the relation between union work and the party's general political work. Campaigns conducted by the party do not represent an attempt to by-pass the unions. General party activity on the mass arena supplements our union work. It is directed primarily, although not entirely, toward the workers in the unions, for they alone are capable of sustained action because they alone are organized on a mass scale.

Progress in the union fractions depends in large measure on adoption of the campaign principle in general party work. Drives to expand press circulation help broaden the fraction contact lists. Party tours help speed the recruitment of contacts.

Efforts like the Trumbull Park action raise the political level of union activity. Election campaigns enable party candidates to reach the union membership with the full party program, thus giving a boost to the union militants who can't fully speak their minds without danger of victimization.

Effective campaign activity requires the concentration of all available forces to achieve concrete and definite objectives. The fractions, branches and press, guided and coordinated by the party center must function as a single unit revolving around the specific axis of the campaign.

In all our activity, from the daily work of the fractions to the most highly political party campaigns, the basic aim must be to forge a left wing in the mass movement under the leadership of the SWP. We must polarize around our fractions an expanding force of union militants who are awakening to political class consciousness. These combined forces will in turn be capable of drawing larger masses into

motion during periods of upsurge.

Without our party fractions as the backbone there can be no revolutionary left wing in the mass movement. That is

why union work that does not build the party forces is not revolutionary union work. That is why the key objective in all our union activity must be to recruit worker-militants into the party.

Memorandum on Trade Union Policy

(adopted by May 1968 SWP National Committee Plenum)

1. During an extended period of political adversity since the 1944-46 labor upsurge it has been necessary for trade union comrades to follow a general policy of caution. With the union ranks more or less quiescent, attempts to challenge the ruling bureaucracy would have laid the challengers open to victimization. Efforts to play a leading role within the framework of official union policies would have led to violations of class struggle principles, thereby compromising the comrades and the party. Militants could do little more than hang on in the unions, carry out educational work among receptive listeners and prepare for a future upturn in objective conditions.

2. Today the internal union situation is changing. Inflationary pressures are generating rank and file militancy in defense of living standards. Wage demands are stiffening, as are pressures for effective escalator clauses. Ascending waves of strike action are spreading throughout the union movement. Contract settlements recommended by official union negotiators are frequently rejected by the rank and file. Workers not only do not tend to be squeamish about strike action involving war production, they also show considerable readiness to resist government strike-breaking -- characteristics that reflect the impact, especially on younger workers, of the intensifying black struggle and student upsurge. These broadening membership pressures for effective use of the union power are beginning to alter the relationship of forces between militants in the ranks and the bureaucrats at the top.

3. Faced with the declining ability of union bureaucrats to keep a tight check rein on the workers, the capitalist government is preparing tougher police controls over the labor movement. Measures are being designed for more extensive suppression of the right to strike. Plans are afoot to outlaw industry-wide and coalition bargaining, as well as to block union mergers. New forms of direct government control over internal union affairs are being cooked up. These hostile acts against dissatisfied workers can only antagonize them against the government.

4. The sharpening labor-capital conflict puts the union bureaucrats in a bind. They find it increasingly difficult to conciliate the capitalist overlords, as they seek to do, and at the same time maintain support within labor's ranks. Bureaucratic paring down of official union demands throws them increasingly out of harmony with the workers' actual needs. Weak-kneed compromising of these inadequate official demands in contract settlements aggravates the problem. Proposals for "voluntary" arbitration of contract terms, made in an effort to ward off new antilabor laws, flatly contravene growing membership pressures for use of the strike weapon. Similarly, the imposition of no-strike clauses during the life of a contract deepens frustration and anger in the union ranks over company violations of the terms. The felony is compounded when union bureaucrats help the capitalists break "unauthorized" walkouts.

5. As the crisis of union leadership worsens new internal formations are developing in opposition to the entrenched bureaucrats. Usually these oppositions tend to be relatively unstable, lacking in experience, limited in programmatic outlook and not firmly led. Yet it is significant that they are beginning to appear and that the trend is spreading throughout the unions generally. Also meaningful is the fact that younger workers, who comprise a large and growing proportion of the trade union ranks, play a big part in the opposition movements. They lend dynamism to these formations, whereas the bureaucrats must rely primarily on support from older and more conservative workers. Added impulses toward militant action derive from increasing unionization of various categories of public workers who find themselves in an especially difficult economic position. Their fight against the capitalist government, which to them is the direct employer, will help both to intensify the struggle against strikebreaking laws and to teach all workers political lessons about the antilabor role of the whole governing apparatus.

6. Bureaucratic efforts to stem the rise of organized oppositions in the unions have focused on moves toward palace overturns in top circles. Examples range from Abel's defeat of McDonald in a contest for the steel union presidency to Reuther's present challenge of Meany for central leadership of the labor movement. Starting from pretended response to rank and file criticisms, diverse ruses are used to arouse hope that necessary changes in union policy can be entrusted to self-reform measures within the bureaucracy. At the outset many workers will be susceptible to this maneuver. It will take time and experience for them to see through the trickery and come to the realization that all union bureaucrats are misleaders who can't be trusted.

7. Although experiencing a decline in leadership authority, the bureaucrats remain well entrenched in the unions. In general they can still withstand head-on attacks from internal oppositions and even take reprisals against impetuous militants who get too far out on a limb. These circumstances lend importance to the use of flanking tactics by oppositions at the present stage of developments.

8. The central objective of the opposition program should be clearly defined as defense of working class interests in the face of employer and government attacks. Key demands should be aimed straight at the class enemy, being careful to avoid any implication that the primary objective is to oust incumbent union officials. To the extent that rank and file support can then be mobilized around fighting union policies, the bureaucrats will be put on the spot. They must either respond to the will of the membership or stand exposed as unreliable. Instead of the bureaucrats being in a position to victimize militants, it will become increasingly clear to the union ranks that a change in leadership is needed.

9. Tactical advantage can be derived from rifts in the bureaucratic structure. Disputes among top officials open the way to

press for critical examination of union policy in the ranks. Using this opening militants can go beyond discussion of narrow disagreements within the officialdom and introduce a class struggle approach to the solution of labor's problems. In the process lower-echelon bureaucrats, who are most directly subject to rank and file pressures, can be pushed a certain distance toward opposition to policies laid down from on high. This weakening of the bureaucratic monolith will help, to a degree, in advancing the fight for rank and file control over union affairs.

10. A certain opening is provided by the Labor Leadership Assembly For Peace. Although run by bureaucrats who keep within the framework of the capitalist dispute over tactics in Vietnam, it at least challenges Meany's attempt to impose a monolithic pro-war line on the labor movement. This rift at the top helps open the way for debate on the war issue in the union ranks. Intervention toward that end in the LLAFP development, including circulation of Labor Voice For Peace and related material, requires careful avoidance of pitfalls for militants created by the official policies imposed by the bureaucrats who run it. The work must be done in a way that leaves no implication of support to LLAFP's negotiation line on Vietnam or to bureaucratic use of the formation as an electioneering instrument for capitalist politicians. In view of this official line the LLAFP does not in itself constitute an instrument around which efforts can be centered to build left wing groupings. It has potentialities for stimulating membership participation in the dispute over union policy on the war. An opportunity is thus afforded to advance arguments in favor of immediate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. As the debate gains momentum steps can then be taken, according to specific union situations, to press for official adoption of a firm antiwar position.

11. Measures can be taken by the antiwar movement to assist development of allied forces in the unions. Approaches to responsive union sectors through literature distributions, offers to provide speakers at union affairs, solicitation of reciprocal labor representation at general antiwar meetings and actions, etc., would give added momentum to antiwar sentiments that are becoming increasingly widespread in the ranks. In the changing union climate right wingers will find it hard to block such efforts by the antiwar movement. It is noteworthy that even among union bureaucrats at the founding session of the LLAFP a speech about harm done the unions through internal witch hunting was received rather sympathetically. Comparable sentiments are bound to become even more pronounced among rank and file unionists.

12. Rising black power trends in the Afro-American movement imply parallel developments of black caucuses in the unions. Essentially the step involves self-organization of black workers, determination of their own program and selection of their own leaders. White militants have the duty to support black workers in exercising these rights and to extend fraternal collaboration to black formations in a manner that will promote black-white unity in the unions and on the job. Specific Afro-American de-

mands for full equality should be incorporated into the general left wing program. Efforts to combat racist attitudes among white workers should be coupled with a fight to guarantee black workers full democratic rights, including meaningful representation in the official union leadership. Promotion of black-white cooperation among militants inside the unions should be accompanied by efforts to develop union support to the struggles of the black communities. Through the resulting impulses that will come from radicalizing black workers the union movement as a whole can be further impelled toward anticapitalist actions.

13. Spontaneous oppositional formations now appearing in the unions represent workers at varying levels of political understanding and class outlook. Even those becoming more advanced in their thinking tend to lag in class political consciousness. Patience and understanding will be required to help them progress step by step toward the necessary class perspectives. Our broad union program can't be forced upon them in one stroke. Its acceptance can be developed only through a series of struggles over particular issues and through lessons learned in these experiences. A transitional phase will be required before oppositions heading consciously toward a showdown with class collaborationist misleaders can be firmly knitted around the necessary anticapitalist outlook.

14. While introducing specific points of policy in stages as required by the given concrete situation, we should be clear in our minds about the overall immediate program around which we strive to build left wing forces. This includes rank and file control over union affairs; escalator clauses in all contracts, formulated to keep wages fully abreast of rising prices; reduction of the work week with no cut in pay; full compensation for jobless workers, including youth unable to find a place in the labor force; defense of the unconditional right to strike; complete union independence from government control; equal rights for all workers in the unions and on the job; full union support to the Afro-American struggle in every sphere; immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam; a complete break with capitalist politics and formation of an independent labor party based on the unions.

15. Advocacy of an independent labor party should be central to our propaganda work in the unions. Concrete experiences in economic struggles should be used to explain why union action alone, even though vitally important, is not adequate for defense of working class interests. Every hostile action by the government, every broken promise by the capitalist politicians who run it, should be used to expose its antilabor role. Examples should be cited of the many allies who would support a working class challenge of capitalist rule. Along these lines we should argue persistently for a basic turn in union policy toward formation of a labor party and a fight to take power in labor's name.

16. Although objective conditions are improving, our prospects in the trade unions at present remain modest. The key task is still one of propaganda and education aimed toward formation of

left wing forces around a class struggle program. Since the workers are not yet ready for a general showdown with the bureaucrats, it is necessary to steer clear of premature power struggles in the unions. Critical support to an oppositional ticket may be in order here and there as a step toward loosening up bureaucratic control over the ranks. Concerning our comrades participating in power caucuses and running for union posts, the question must always be put: Will it help or will it cut across building left wing forces around a class struggle program? On this point delicate matters of timing may sometimes arise. In such cases appropriate tactics should be worked out in consultation with the party. In addition, wherever comrades are involved in trade union situations, the party should be kept informed of significant developments as an aid to the assessment of general trade union trends.

BLACK CAUCUSES IN THE TRADE UNIONS

[The following memorandum was adopted by the Political Committee on April 18, 1969 and was circulated within the National Committee. It is presented here for the information of the party membership.]

1. Black Caucuses in Relation to Changing Moods in the Working Class

Rebellious moods are developing within this country that tend to undermine the stability of capitalist rule. The trend is manifested by the black power struggle, by the extensive student dissent, by the unprecedented antiwar movement and by mounting unrest among working people.

Within the trade unions objective necessity is impelling the ranks toward class struggle methods in defense of their interests. This is causing the hidebound union bureaucrats to fumble and stumble from crisis to crisis and their policies only serve to aggravate the internal union situation.

As a result new oppositional formations are appearing in the trade unions. At present these groupings tend to be relatively unstable, often tending to exist only temporarily but they also tend to be recurrent. On the whole they are limited in programmatic outlook, lacking in experience, not yet firmly led and generally unable to become consolidated.

A key fact remains, however, that such oppositional formations keep cropping up. The process is tending to deepen within individual unions and it has begun to spread throughout the unions generally. Of special significance is the big new boost the trend is receiving through the rise of black caucuses in the unions.

The record of the union bureaucrats regarding black workers is a sorry one. They follow the liberal-capitalist line of tokenism and gradualism, both on the job and within the unions. This policy has in fact been a key reason for the failure of the unions to really organize workers in the South.

With the union bureaucrats defaulting on issues touching vital needs of black workers, these victims of super-exploitation are taking matters into their own hands. A major consequence has been the present rise of black caucuses in the trade unions, which adds a new dimension to the black power trend. This is a progressive step based on the black workers' right to defend their interests through self-organization, the determination of their own program and the selection of their own leaders.

Black caucuses tend to go beyond the usual main objective of other and earlier caucus formations in the unions, i.e., the winning of union office. While this has been a subsidiary aspect of the perspectives set by black caucuses, their primary activity has tended to center on day-by-day struggles over gut issues. They are linking their fight in the unions with the basic aims of the black community. In doing so they combine economic and social issues in a manner that returns to the promise of the early CIO. That outlook, which is the polar opposite of the racist policy so crassly symbolized by Shanker in the New York teachers union, charts a true course for the union movement as a whole.

As exemplified in auto, the rise of these caucuses reflects the changing weight of black workers in basic industry. There is a proportional increase of blacks on hard production jobs, where they replace white retirees and whites promoted to skilled jobs. The black workers involved are mainly young and in most cases ready for battle. Where one is victimized and the company reaches into the ghetto for a replacement, it will often wind up hiring another fighter. As a body the young black workers are defying the rules and procedures laid down by the union bureaucrats. As part of their fight against racism, they are demanding full rights in the shaping of union policy and in making union decisions.

Conditions on production lines are becoming worse generally. White workers have many grievances of their own against both the company and the union bureaucrats. Initiatives taken by black workers also tend in many respects to serve the class interests of the white workers. This flows from a subtle living process in which the democratic demands of blacks become fused with demands they make as workers. The consequent impact within the union tends objectively to counteract race prejudice among whites. The process implies the generation of black and white class unity. That in turn foreshadows the rise of broadening patterns of united opposition to the union bureaucrats. At the same time the efforts of the black militants tend to push the whole oppositional development in the direction of class struggle concepts.

The dual role played by black workers can be expected to rise to a still higher plane. It entails more than a progressive struggle for their democratic rights as blacks. Their fight also represents a new, vital form of working class initiative, emanating from the most militant sector of the class. In their

dual role, as blacks and as workers, these militants will inject new anticapitalist dimensions into labor struggles at the trade union level. That in turn will help to impel the union ranks toward class political consciousness.

2. Black Caucuses in Relation to the Labor Party Question

Although their basic problems are political in character, the workers have yet to exhaust their efforts to find a solution through trade union methods alone. It should also be noted, however, that changing objective conditions are preparing the workers for a leap in class political consciousness. This is implicit in the growing recognition in the ranks that the unions face a grave crisis of leadership and in the fact that a search has begun for better leaders and more effective means of struggle in defense of the workers' class interests.

There is a growing rank and file demand for full use of the union power in open battle with the capitalists. Implicit in the trend is intensified government intervention on the side of the bosses. Consequent experiences will teach the workers rich lessons about the true role of the capitalist government in the class struggle and about the anti-labor character of all capitalist politicians. That in turn will impel working class sentiment in an anticapitalist direction.

The process will be helped along in two respects by the present black power trends. One aspect is the impact of black caucuses within the trade unions. Another is the impulses toward independent black political action within militant sectors of the black movement as a whole. With black militants coming to the fore inside the trade unions, even the present gestations in the direction of independent black political action are bound to have a certain impact on political thought within the union ranks generally.

Insofar as independent black political action becomes a reality the process will be helped along that much more. Significant growth of an independent black party in opposition to the capitalist parties, in turn, would tend to undermine and could eventually shatter the present broad coalition on which the Democratic Party is based. With such a development labor as a whole would be thrust in the direction of independent class political action along the labor party road.

While objective conditions are gradually ripening for a labor break with capitalist politics, subjective consciousness of the need for that step still lags

badly in the union ranks. It is still a problem of convincing workers of the urgent need to break with all capitalist politicians and form their own party based on the trade unions. That remains primarily a propaganda task.

3. Black Caucuses in Relation to Revolutionary Policy in the Unions

In the changing objective situation we can anticipate new openings for party interventions aimed toward building a class struggle left wing in the unions. Openings may sometimes develop under unusual circumstances and at unpredictable times. An example of such a wedge is Reuther's attack on the black caucuses in the UAW. There are deep implications in the UAW bureaucracy's racist reply to the demands of the black workers.

These militants want the union to combat racism; they want it to defend workers against the corporations; and they want rank and file control over union policy. Reuther's racist counter-attack not only sows divisions inside the union for the purpose of maintaining his bureaucratic rule. It also spurns demands that touch the vital needs of UAW members generally.

In addition the attack on the black caucuses adds up to a threat against all oppositional formations in the union. A problem is thus posed for white UAW members opposed to Reuther. They have a self-interest in defending the right of blacks to organize a caucus. If they don't, Reuther will be in a position to move also against other oppositional formations in the union. That makes the exercise of racial prejudice a dangerous luxury for white opponents of Reuther. It will cut across their class needs.

An objective basis thus exists for a new trend within the UAW. It implies parallel development of both black caucuses and caucuses composed mainly of white workers. Both types of formations are mutually affected by common class needs. They share a common desire to use the union power against the auto corporations. But to do so they must first wrest control from the hands of the Reuther machine.

These needs impel black and white oppositionists in the UAW toward a search for fraternal collaboration. Such a trend would imply the rise of trade union action to a higher plane. The trend will become manifested first at the industry level and in due course experiences in struggle will impel it into the political sphere.

This concrete example signifies a new opening for us in a key trade union.

At present our intervention takes place mainly through our press. In its columns we support the black militants against the Reuther machine. At the same time we seek to educate white militants about the need for unqualified class solidarity with their black brothers in that struggle.

As the situation unfolds we can an-

ticipate new opportunities to extend support to anti-Reuther militants -- both black and white -- in various ways. Out of it all should come an advance in forging a class struggle left wing, in whatever given forms, within the UAW. And implied in this specific development is the opening of comparable opportunities for our party in other trade union situations.

SWP POLITICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON NIXON'S WAGE FREEZE

August 30, 1971

1. The Political Resolution adopted by the party convention outlined the factors inherent in the world economic situation that are impelling the ruling class to seek to lower the standard of living of the workers. It pointed out that, in the context of a continuation of the Vietnam war, "only two basic options are left to the ruling class if inflation is to be a successful tool to hold down the American working class's real share of the national product: move toward a national 'incomes policy,' that is, a national wage-control scheme that would give the government authority to hold down wage gains aimed at catching up with the inflationary bite; or precipitate a recession deep enough to result in a large enough increase in the industrial reserve army to drive down these wage demands." The resolution indicated that the Nixon administration had at first leaned toward relying on the recession (which it had helped precipitate), but that this had not worked, and was not likely to work unless Nixon permitted the recession to deepen to a point where massive unemployment could trigger a sharp political reaction by the working class.

The Nixon administration decided to switch tactics. It opted for the first alternative outlined in the Political Resolution, an "incomes policy." The resolution pointed out that "an attempt to impose an 'incomes policy' could provoke a major reaction by the working class, one taking place in the framework of the general political radicalization that has been developing in the country."

Nixon's wage-freeze decree aims at lowering the real wages of the workers. In order to accomplish this objective, the capitalist class is using the centralized power of the capitalist government to attempt to cripple the fighting power of the unions and strengthen the hands of the bosses.

2. The 90-day wage freeze is only the initial move by the capitalist government. Nothing will be solved within 90 days, and the government has already indicated that some form of wage controls will extend beyond the 90-day period. The government hopes to get the union bureaucracy lined up in support of some form of wage controls, under the cover of some "equality of sacrifice" formula. Despite its protestations, the bureaucracy is incapable of waging an effective fight against the wage freeze and is already tending to capitulate under pressure from the government.

3. This combination of intensified attack on the standard of living of the working class and the incapacity of the union bureaucracy, throws the crisis of leadership of the working class into sharp focus. This will create new receptivity to class struggle concepts among the workers, which will open up greater opportunities for us to reach them with our ideas than any time since 1948.

4. To effectively take advantage of this situation, we project a propaganda campaign around a class struggle program for labor to fight the wage freeze. The central axis of this campaign is the call for a congress of labor, to mobilize the working class for struggle to counter this offensive of big business. We project that such a congress of labor would not only be representative of every section of the union movement but be broadly representative of the unorganized workers as well. It should include representatives of the oppressed nationalities, women and other allies of labor engaged in social struggle.

The program we pose for such a congress of labor concentrated on the following points: 1) Against any form of wage controls. 2) The escalator clause in all contracts to protect workers' wages from inflation. 3) The sliding scale of hours to fight unemployment. An immediate change in the hours and wages law to institute the 30-hour week with no reduction in pay. 4) Defense of the unconditional right to strike; elimination of all laws restricting the right to strike, and all laws undermining the independence of the unions. 5) Bring all the troops home from Indochina now. Take the billions now spent for war and use them to meet pressing social needs at home. 6) Launch a Labor Party based on the trade unions.

In the specific context of the wage freeze, such a program can become the basis for the formation of a class struggle left wing in the unions. In the process of development of such a left wing, it will have to take a positive attitude towards the struggles, demands and movements of the oppressed nationalities, women and other allies of labor. This initiative is necessary to lay the basis for the mobilization of the entire class including its most oppressed sectors, as well as all the allies of the working class, in joint struggle against the capitalist class.

5. In the course of our propaganda

campaign to form a class struggle left wing in the unions we will experience increased opportunities to develop political contacts among the workers. This in turn requires special attention to prospects for winning worker recruits to the party.

6. This propaganda campaign will center on three areas:

1) A major effort to reach workers with The Militant through sales at factories and other places where workers congregate. Special effort should be made to sell subscriptions to workers as part of the sub campaign.

2) Every effort should be made to get speaking engagements for the national and local candidates of the party before union meetings, outside of factories, etc.

3) Comrades in unions, in addition to the above, should raise our programmatic proposals in union meetings, on

the job, etc. The national office should be kept closely informed of the mood in the unions, the reception to our ideas, etc., and stories should be written for The Militant as part of its campaign on this topic.

7. We must utilize to the maximum our position as the best builders of the antiwar movement to help it take full advantage of the new opportunities this attack on the working class opens for winning increased labor support for the antiwar forces. War spending is the single most important cause of inflation. A key component of the fight against high prices is the fight against the war. This fact can be utilized to reach new layers of the working class and involve them in antiwar actions -- immediately the November 6 action.

The student wing of the antiwar movement should be mobilized to utilize these events and their lessons to reach out to broader layers of the working class to join the November 6 action.

LETTER TO SWP ORGANIZERS AND NC MEMBERS

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
November 10, 1971

TO SWP ORGANIZERS AND NC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

This letter concerns implementation at the branch level of the party propaganda campaign around the wage freeze and the wage controls of Nixon's "Phase II," projected by the August 30 Political Committee statement.

The Political Committee statement outlined three areas of concentration for this propaganda campaign: "1) A major effort to reach workers with The Militant through sales at factories and other places where workers congregate. Special effort should be made to sell subscriptions to workers as part of the sub campaign. 2) Every effort should be made to get speaking engagements for the national and local candidates of the party before union meetings, outside of factories, etc. 3) Comrades in unions, in addition to the above, should raise our programmatic proposals in union meetings, on the job, etc. The national office should be kept closely informed of the mood in the unions, the reception to our ideas, etc., and stories should be written for The Militant as part of its campaign on this topic."

It is important that this propaganda campaign be seen by the branches as a continuing effort. The analysis of the evolution of the capitalist economy internationally contained in the recent convention and National Committee resolutions, and in articles in our press, outlines the powerful forces at work impelling the ruling class to attempt to lower the real wages of the American workers. In order to accomplish this objective, the capitalist class is using the centralized power of the capitalist government to attempt to cripple the fighting power of the unions and strengthen the hands of the bosses.

The imposition of the 90-day wage freeze was only the opening gun by the capitalist government. Through "Phase II" and beyond, the government will be attempting to impose some form of wage controls on the workers. Working-class opposition to this assault upon their standard of living will grow. While we should expect a pattern of aggressive actions and partial retreats by the government, depending upon the shifting relations of class forces, the objective of the ruling class will remain the same: to lower the real wages of the workers

and weaken the unions. In this effort, the government will continue to seek the support of the labor bureaucracy for some form of wage controls.

The agreement by the union bureaucracy to serve on Nixon's wage board -- and its present floundering in the face of the stiffening government attack -- highlights the incapacity of the bureaucracy to wage an effective struggle against this assault by the ruling class. The crisis of leadership of the working class has been thrown into sharp focus.

Our strategic orientation to overcome this crisis of leadership is the building of a class struggle left wing in the unions based on a class struggle program. As yet, our immediate tasks in this regard are propagandistic in nature, and center on reaching workers with the key points of a class struggle program around which a future left wing can be built.

It is in this context that our propaganda campaign for a congress of labor should be seen. The program we pose for such a congress of labor, as outlined in the Political Committee statement and articles in The Militant, can become the basis for the formation of a class struggle left wing in the unions.

The government attack on the working class has resulted in greater receptivity to our class struggle program among workers, and we can expect such receptivity to increase in the period ahead as the real intentions of the ruling class become clearer to more workers. To accomplish our objective of reaching workers with this program, it is important that the propaganda campaign around a congress of labor be done in a consistent and sustained manner. Concerning the three areas of the campaign outlined in the Political Committee statement:

1) Sales of The Militant. After the announcement of the wage freeze, branches took large bundles and made special efforts to sell to workers at factories, union meetings, picket lines, shopping centers, unemployment lines, and other places where workers congregate. Certain branches have been able to sustain such sales to workers on a weekly basis, and this should become the norm in every branch.

Exactly which places are the best to sell at to reach workers varies from city

to city. In Washington, for example, the major industry is the government itself, and the comrades there have been concentrating on sales to government workers. The Houston branch has sold well at a number of plant gates. In Detroit, plant gate sales have been high, accounting for 30 percent of the branch's bundle, and sales at shopping centers account for another 20 percent of it. Atlanta has had good sales at sanitation plants. In Seattle, where there is an unusually high unemployment rate, sales on unemployment lines have been good; other branches report poor sales at unemployment lines. The Bloomington YSA local reports regular sales of 20 papers to women workers at an RCA plant. Through probes and sales experiments, branches are determining which places are the best to sell. Such probes should continue, as we continue our effort to reach as many workers with The Militant as we can. At the same time, consistent and regular sales, every week, should be conducted at places the branch discovers to be best. It is through such sales, week after week, that we can begin to build up a body of consistent readers of the paper among workers. If workers at a particular location come to expect regular sales of The Militant, this will aid in establishing such regular readers.

As our objective through sales of the paper is to build up a body of regular readers of The Militant, it follows that special attention should be paid to selling subscriptions to workers. While the major emphasis of the campaign to sell 30,000 new subscriptions to the paper is necessarily directed towards the campuses during the period of the special sub drive, attention should be paid to selling subscriptions to workers. In Seattle, for example, comrades have been selling subscriptions as part of their regular bundle sales to workers, and have picked up one or two subscriptions a week this way. Comrades active in trade unions in Berkeley, Chicago and other areas have sold subs to fellow union members; in Berkeley, one comrade has sold 45 subs in his union, to date. Such efforts

should continue as a consistent process after the end of the big sub drive.

2) Use of the SWP election campaign. In addition to The Militant the SWP national and local election campaigns are an important vehicle for this propaganda campaign. Branches should find ways to have the candidates appear before working class audiences. There are different ways to do this, in addition to attempting to get speaking engagements before union local meetings. For example, the Detroit branch arranged for Linda Jenness to speak at a street meeting outside a plant. This plant was one where the branch has had good sales of the paper. In Houston, SWP mayoralty candidate Debbie Leonard was able to speak to workers at a factory. More consistent efforts should be made by all branches in this regard.

3) Comrades in Unions. The concrete situation facing comrades in unions varies greatly, but in a number of instances comrades have been successful in raising the issue of the wage freeze in union meetings, and have been able to present our programmatic proposals, in addition to selling our press. In a few cases, this has resulted in the union local's taking a position for a congress of labor, or against the war.

The branches should discuss how best to carry out this propaganda campaign on a consistent basis. Through this campaign we will be able to make contacts among workers, win new readers to our press, and begin to disseminate the key programmatic concepts around which we can build a class struggle left wing in the unions in the future.

Comradely,

s/Barry Sheppard
Administrative
Committee

s/Frank Lovell
National Trade
Union Work Director