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WRITING FOR *THE MILITANT*

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WORKSHOP ON WRITING FOR *THE MILITANT*

The following is a transcript of the workshop on writing for *The Militant* held at the Socialist Activists and Educational Conference, August, 1974.

Caroline Lund, Militant staff, New York

The talks by Jack Barnes and Carol Lipman have taken note of the new stage of the radicalization in this country with the spread of radical ideas to broader layers of the working class, a greater number of struggles by working people and in the Black communities, and the new developments in some unions, like the formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women and the struggle of the United Farm Workers Union and the developments in the United Mine Workers Union.

With this new stage in the radicalization the audience of *The Militant* is slowly changing, just as our areas of activity are changing. And the readership of *The Militant* is not just the radical students that we were selling to at the height of the antiwar movement. More working people of all ages are reading *The Militant*. And it looks like this will be more and more the case in the future.

The women we work with in CLUW are reading *The Militant*, farmworkers are reading *The Militant*, Black people are reading *The Militant*. Miners are reading *The Militant*.

Many comrades were probably surprised one evening a couple of months ago to see the miners down in Harlan County, Kentucky, on the seven o'clock CBS news, with *The Militant* spread out in front of them reading our paper. Independent truckers began reading *The Militant* as a result of our support and coverage of the truckers shutdown last winter. You might have noticed that we received a number of letters from truckers, as well as from a miner in Kentucky. More and more workers in the unions where comrades are working are also reading *The Militant*.

To utilize *The Militant* most effectively in taking advantage of these new opportunities, we have to adapt the way that we write and what we write. The expanding audience of *The Militant* in the working class, although still on a modest scale, means that it is more and more important for us to develop our skill at clear, simple, popular writing. Of course, this is always the best way to write, and it is also the hardest way to write. But as *The Militant's* readership widens there is more of a premium on it.

On the one hand, we need to develop our skill at presenting basic socialist propaganda and Marxist ideas in a popular way. We face this problem, for example, now in writing articles on the causes and effects of inflation. Our candidates face this problem all the time in explaining socialist concepts on the radio, at press conferences, at rallies, and public meetings. Often such basic socialist propaganda appears in *The Militant* in the form of campaign coverage.

The second type of popular writing we need is news reporting that is clear, lively, and reflects the real pulse of the particular struggle. We want news articles that a participant in that struggle would read and say to themselves, "Yes, this is just how it is; this is a paper that is speaking for us."

The Militant is one of our most important forms of intervention in the new openings we have today in the class struggle. Often it has been the only way we have had to make contact and develop a relationship with workers in struggle.

We've had some good experiences over the past year in using *The Militant* to win a hearing among worker militants through the paper projecting itself as the voice and champion of their struggles. One example of this was during the truckers action. There I think comrades were able to see the difference that it makes to have on-the-spot coverage rather than simply reports written from *The Militant* office in New York based on clippings from the capitalist newspapers.

Comrades immediately went out onto the highways and into the truck stop restaurants and got into the mass meetings that the truckers were having. And the articles in *The Militant* really breathed with the real language and anger of those truckers. I think the coverage we had of the truckers strike was especially inspiring and compelling because of that fact, because they were a reflection of a real struggle.

In some areas *The Militant* was key to our establishing contacts with the truckers. In one case comrades asked to get into a meeting of the truckers to cover it for *The Militant* but the truckers were very suspicious of reporters generally. So we showed them a copy of the last issue of *The Militant* that had our articles on the truckers strike. They were astounded at our coverage and realized that *The Militant* was really the only newspaper that was giving full and complete coverage and support to their struggle. And they decided to let us into their meeting.

Another example of a case where we had no contacts to begin with was the miners union. And through our coverage in *The Militant* of the Harlan County strike we were able to develop our first contact, and then this contact was further developed by sending reporters to cover the UMW convention.

Other good examples of lively reporting that we want to emulate, I think, are some of the articles by Harry Ring on the UFW and the Raza Unida Party and on the work of the Crusade for Justice in Denver.

There is an article in the book by Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*, that everyone who writes for *The Militant* should read. It goes into just these questions. There are several articles on the role of the revolutionary press in this book that are valuable to read. But the one I am referring to especially is called "The Cultural Role of the Worker Correspondent."

It was a speech that Trotsky gave to a gathering of worker correspondents for the Soviet press. It discusses the central role of the press as an intermediary between the revolutionary party, the Soviet government, and the masses, and as a lever through which the party can inspire and mobilize and raise the class consciousness of the masses.

Trotsky, in this article, was talking about the role of the revolutionary press after the revolution in building socialism and raising the cultural level of the masses, but the same concepts he raises apply just as well to the role of the revolutionary press prior to the revolution.

Part of this article consists of suggestions by Trotsky to the correspondents on basic aspects of how to write. He points out that good writing is basically just clear thinking. He goes into the necessary balance between fact and opinion, and the importance of internal logic in an article, and how different levels of style and methods of presentation depend on the nature of the subject you're trying to discuss.

There are a lot of suggestions in this article that we can apply today. For example, Trotsky says, "When you write, picture to yourself as clearly as you can how your article would sound being read aloud in your own shop at the factory, or in the next one to yours, or in some plant nearby. Imagine a dozen or so workers, or citizens in general, listening to your article. Think calmly and conscientiously about how this article is going to reach them and enter their consciousness."

He talks about how the worker correspondent in a sense should be a kind of spy on their coworkers, listening to their discussions, paying close attention to their concerns, and trying through their articles to assist in the development of their consciousness and educate about the connection between their more narrow concerns in their everyday life and the broader questions of the world class struggle.

He also talks about the danger of what he calls "newspaper bureaucratism" which he says can happen when too many articles are written from the newspaper's office rather than from the field. He says, "The editorial staff has its own separate departments, its own red-tape, its own approach and special habits and instructions enforced from the top down. But life is always changing, new layers develop among the masses, new questions and interests arise. If the newspaper sees things from one angle and the reader from another, it is death for the newspaper. The worker correspondent must not allow this to happen. Worker correspondents do not just write for their newspapers about the life of the masses, they watch how the newspaper is received by the masses, not just their own news stories, but all the newspaper's departments and all the articles."

For example, comrades in Atlanta who are active in the struggle against police brutality there will be watching for the response to our coverage in *The Militant* on the struggle against the police there, listening for the reaction to our articles and to our political points about the role of the cops, and looking for various misunderstandings and things that were not clear enough in the last article, that should be clarified further or explained better in the next article.

What kinds of things can we do concretely to help us use *The Militant* in this way? Andy Rose later is going to go into the importance of receiving articles from the branches. In addition, one thing we can do is encourage worker militants or CLUW women or Black activists that we are working with to write letters to the editor. The letters page is one place where the readers of *The Militant* can speak for themselves. And we want to have the perspective of enlarging the letters section

as much as we can as we begin to receive more letters.

Another thing we should do is encourage comrades working in unions or building CLUW or the Black struggle or the Chicano movement to write short features for the paper that speak to the everyday concerns of working people or that expose various aspects of the degradation of life under capitalism and the ways this is felt by working people.

For example, the biggest issue now is inflation. And we could use many more feature articles on the impact of inflation on the lives of the masses of working people. Or a comrade could write up an experience on the job that illustrates some point about the rottenness or irrationality of the capitalist system.

Often comrades will report such interesting experiences at branch meetings; such reports should find their way into *The Militant*. If we are unable to use it as an article or an "American Way of Life" column, we can always use it as a letter to the editor.

We want to continue in the direction of making *The Militant* more readable and more understandable to the greater numbers of working people that are reading it, and to continue making the paper more reflective of the new struggles that are arising. And this use of the paper is one of the keys to our intervention in this new stage of the radicalization.

Andy Rose, Militant staff, New York

As Caroline pointed out, writing for *The Militant* is not a task only for the comrades in *The Militant* editorial office and a few especially gifted and especially trained comrades in the branches. Rather, our concept is that *The Militant* is the paper of the entire party and that all comrades are involved both in distributing the paper and in contributing to it. We want to broaden, increase, and improve the correspondence from the branches and locals into the paper, including articles, reports that can be worked into articles, and letters for the letters column.

It's true that journalism is a skill that can be acquired and improved, and we hope that increasing numbers of comrades will consciously work on and develop their ability as writers. And to the extent that we can, we want to try to help this process along and work with comrades who write for the paper.

One example of this is that in some cases we've tried to send back edited copies of articles with notations so that comrades can see the changes that were made in what they sent in and have some explanation of why the changes were made. We want to try to do more things like that.

But the main thing right now is that we don't want to miss reporting on some event because there isn't someone who can write, someone who has that mysterious and arcane ability to do the article. We want to encourage more writing from the branches.

Of course, this is not an individual question but one of the branch leaderships discussing and thinking out what are the important events in the class struggle in their area that should be covered in *The Militant*, what party activities should be reported on, and what material they want to get into *The Militant* that can then be used by the branch in its political activity.

And so, if a comrade has to write a story and feels,

"I just don't know how to write," they shouldn't be worried about it that much. The main thing is to simply tell the story of what happened, get the facts in there and send it in. We can take the material that's there, work on it and polish it up, and perhaps improve it—although the writer doesn't always see it that way.

Farrell Dobbs once remarked to a new comrade joining *The Militant* staff that he would soon learn that the function of a *Militant* editor is to go carefully through all of your articles, pick out the most important political points and the best written sentences—and delete them.

As the talks and workshops this week have explained, the character of the work of the party today involves a lot of stress on local struggles and local activities. And this underlines the importance of these articles from the branches.

One example is our coverage of union struggles. There are other examples that could be gone into as well, struggles against police brutality, student struggles, and other things, but many of the points about covering strikes would apply to these other types of articles as well.

First of all, how are we going to decide what we should cover? When there are five or six hundred strikes going on in one week, as there have been in some recent weeks, *The Militant* obviously can't have an article on each one. But we should certainly try to cover any large strike that is significant in the national or local labor movement, such as the clothing workers strike or the copper strike. And we should cover many not-so-large strikes as well, if there is some special aspect about them that we are interested in and want to highlight, such as an organizing drive, or a strike that raises demands about the needs of women workers or Black workers, or if an escalator clause or some other key demand becomes a central focus of the struggle.

What we can do on any particular strike may range from just a short report in "In Brief" to lengthy, consistent coverage that includes both reporting and analytical, programmatic articles. A good example of the latter has been our coverage of the construction workers strikes in California, written by comrades directly involved. These articles were sold to building trades workers, even if on a limited scale, and we were able to get across both the idea of *The Militant* and the party as a supporter of these strikes and also our program for advancing the struggle.

But even when it is just a short news item, the story is still valuable for the scope of *The Militant's* coverage as well as directly to the branch. By going out and covering these strikes we will learn more about the union movement locally and will be able, by going out as *Militant* reporters, to talk to these workers at a time when they are liable to be the most interested in talking to us and glad to have our support.

I think the point that Carol Lipman made the other day, about the appropriateness of the name of our paper, is completely true. Far from turning people off, we increasingly find that if we go out to a picket line and say, "I'm a reporter for *The Militant*, a socialist weekly that supports your strike; we're here and we want to be able to tell the workers side of the story," that the response is usually good.

And then it is especially valuable to be able to go back with a copy of *The Militant* with a story on their strike, sell that to workers as an opening that may very well lead them further into the paper.

Not every article about a particular strike has to have a whole political analysis and raise our entire program. Readers, after all, don't like to feel that they're being beaten over the head with our program in a heavy-handed way in every single article. In fact, they should never be beaten over the head in a heavy-handed way.

Just simply reporting the facts from the workers' point of view is in itself an important political statement. We want *The Militant* to become known as the paper that's always there finding out what the workers have to say, telling their story, and standing up for their side.

What sort of things should these stories include? Above all, above everything else, the basic facts. This might seem very elementary, but sometimes it can be a problem. For example, in a strike you have to report the name of the union, number of workers, their demands, what their wages are now, pertinent information about the percentage of Black or Chicano workers or women workers if that is an important aspect of it, the age composition of the work force, when the strike started, when the strike ended, what the terms of the settlement are, and so on.

When reporting on a demonstration, we need the size, where it was, the composition, what sort of signs were carried, who the speakers were, what the chants were, and things like that—all the basic facts.

And as a basic rule, the most important facts should be put up towards the beginning part of the article. We have to remember that most people who buy the paper do not read it like we read it, going through and reading every article or nearly every article from beginning to end because we know that this is where you find out what is going on and what the line of the party is. Most readers just pick it up and look through to see if there is anything they are interested in. And so their attention has to be captured by the beginning of a story and they have to be led into the rest of it.

And reporting must be accurate. This cannot be stressed too much. It is the most important point for every comrade who writes for *The Militant*. What we report must be accurate. Let me give you one frequent and important example. If there were 500 people on a demonstration, we report that there were 500 people there, not that there were a thousand to make it sound a little better. Or we don't report that it was a thousand because other people who were involved in organizing it are saying a thousand and that's what they want to hear. We say what actually was.

This is for a very good, simple, practical reason. Once someone realizes, based on comparing what they know to be true with what they read in the paper, that it exaggerates or distorts, even if it's just on one little thing, very quickly they come to doubt everything else they read in the paper. The best example of such practices can be seen in the *Daily World*. Anyone who has read the *Daily World* for any length of time knows that you just can't trust what it prints. If the *Daily World* writes that France is in Europe you would want to go check on the map to make sure. But that's not what

we want. *The Militant* is, among other things, the paper that tells the truth.

Let me give one other example of what can be tempting to do. Say, for example, you are reporting about the settlement of a strike, and you go out and talk to workers and get their reaction to the settlement. If we find that most people say, "Yeah, this settlement is pretty good," and there are a few people who say, "Well, no, I don't think it's so good," then we should report it that way. Even if we think it is not a very good settlement, we should not pick out one or two people who didn't like it and try to portray them as being representative of all the workers.

And here I think the example of what not to do is *The Bulletin*. According to them, every strike while it is in progress is on the verge of civil war, and then every settlement is a sell-out which all the workers invariably oppose. In fact, you wonder how any contract ever comes to be ratified since they are all sell-outs and the workers always oppose them.

In the article Caroline mentioned, Trotsky has something to say about accuracy as well. "Conscientiousness on the part of a worker correspondent is the most important quality; without it all other qualities are of no benefit. If your reports turn out to be erroneous, exaggerated, or simply false, once, twice, or a third time, that will not only undermine confidence in you, worker correspondent Petrov, but it can undermine confidence in the printed word in general among backward readers. Keep your own reputation as a newspaper reporter in mind, worker correspondent, and beyond that your responsibility as a guardian of the honor and achievements of the Soviet press!"

And just to give you a little further idea of our insistence on accuracy, let me tell you about one of the things that *The Militant* copy editors do with every single story they get. In addition to checking for punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and things like that, they attempt to go through and verify every single fact that they possibly can—finding a reference source to check the spelling of every name, check every date, every historical fact that's cited, check every quotation against the original, and so on. In fact, this is one of the most time-consuming tasks involved in the copy editing of articles.

So when you send in an article it is important to keep that in mind and to send in any sources, any reference material that you refer to, any sources that aren't just from your own personal experience—any newspaper clippings, leaflets, union literature, and so on, so that we can look at it and double-check it.

In addition to getting in the basic facts, what makes articles most interesting is the extent to which they can paint a picture of the living struggle, based as much as possible on what our own reporter has seen and people that he or she has directly talked to. If we don't have a comrade involved in a particular strike or perhaps even if we do, we should go down to the picket line, talk to people as *Militant* reporters, try to get their story in their own words, ask them questions about what are the conditions on the job, how much are they paid, how can they get by in the face of inflation with the amount they are paid.

A good recent example of this kind of reporting was the article on the Baltimore municipal employees strike this summer—even though we didn't have comrades there and the reporting was done by comrades who went there from D.C. and New York. Sometimes a branch is unable to send someone to the scene of a strike or some other struggle in their region. But at least we can get a telephone interview to find out directly what the workers are saying or what the union is saying about the struggle, and not simply base an article on what is in the capitalist press.

And when we interview people, one small point is that it is a good idea to ask their names, because many people will be willing to be quoted by name in the paper and this adds to the tone of authenticity. And, of course, we should try to get photographs.

One final point on strike coverage is that we should be consistent on following up on a story once we start to report it. We shouldn't simply report one week that there is a strike going on and then just drop it and not say any more. *Militant* readers will want to know about further developments and how the struggle was finally settled. If we don't follow up in this way we will look unserious. And for a major struggle that we have been following over a period of time we may very well want to write a balance sheet at the end of it, drawing the lessons of that strike. We were able to do that, for example, with the articles about the California construction strikes.

One thing I wanted to mention about reporting on campus struggles. We don't at all have the notion that all student coverage automatically goes into the *YS* instead of *The Militant*. Frequently there are different types of articles involved and we can have week-to-week news coverage of student struggles in *The Militant*; it is not possible for the *YS* as a monthly to do this.

One good example this spring was our coverage of the struggle against budget cutbacks at Federal City College in Washington, D.C., which we reported regularly while it was going on. But on the whole this has been a weak area in the paper that we want to improve.

Now, on campaign coverage. *The Militant*, of course, is one of our most important tools for getting out the positions of our election campaign. We should keep in mind, for example, that if we issue a statement answering something that a capitalist politician has said or giving our support to a particular struggle, even if it is not picked up anywhere else, if there is a story about that in *The Militant* it is going to reach hundreds of the people who are most interested in what we have to say, who are our best contacts.

Broadly speaking, there are two different types of coverage of our campaigns. First is the regular news reporting of campaign activities, tours, speeches, banquets, what our ballot status is, and how we respond to issues as they come up. One thing to keep in mind about writing these articles—although there isn't any formula for how to write them to make them interesting—is that what might be included in an internal campaign report to the branch is not necessarily what would make the most interesting *Militant* article. That is, an article that just goes over everything that the candidates have done in the last week, lists the meetings they have spoken at

and what the attendance was, can be pretty deadly in *The Militant*.

It's important to think out a focus for each article. Perhaps there would be one particular event with an angle of special interest, like a candidate speaking at a union meeting or speaking to a group of veterans or something else. Instead of simply reporting that the candidate spoke, we want to focus on what the candidate said and what the response of the audience was, perhaps what questions were asked and how the candidate responded, and so on.

Another possibility is to pick out one political issue that we have been doing activities around for a whole period and do an article just on that. There was an article like that this spring from the New York campaign about their activities around the Con Ed rate increases.

In addition to news stories, we can do many types of feature articles about our campaigns. There were a number of examples in the target issue for the special sales mobilization, dated May 17. One type is a position paper on a particular issue. For example, there was an article from the Colorado campaign about ecology and oil shale plants and development. In the August 9 issue there was an article from Washington, D.C., on the housing crisis, what our solution is, and how it is different from that of the capitalist candidates.

Another feature may be an especially good speech by a candidate, perhaps a debate with a capitalist party opponent, or an expose of one or more of our capitalist party opponents. Or another type of feature—there was one like this from Philadelphia in the May 17 issue—is on issues facing the Black community in an election, bringing together local issues, the positions taken by different Black groups, and our program.

Another aspect of our campaign coverage is to report on the Communist Party campaigns where they are running. Of course, we are not just reporting as disinterested observers, but we will want to polemicize against them. In the current *Militant* there is an article of this type. It is not the only thing the article is about, but it is one of the subjects, about the New York Communist Party campaign. We want to go after them on Portugal and Africa, for example, and on how their campaign is in reality a cover-up for support to the capitalist parties. In some instances we may be giving critical support to Communist Party candidates, and if so we will want clear articles explaining exactly what that means and why we are doing it.

Once an article is assigned to be written, it is not only the responsibility of the comrade who is assigned to do the actual writing. Other comrades, notably the campaign director in the case of campaign articles, and often the branch organizer, should go over it before it is sent in so that any questions of fact, formulation, or of our political attitude are collectively decided and are all agreed upon before the article is sent in. This can save a lot of unnecessary effort later, such as *The Militant* having to call back to the branch to check on something then. In fact, that goes for all articles, not just campaign articles.

Finally, I want to go over a couple of technical points about how *The Militant* is put out.

First, on deadlines. *The Militant* is printed on Thursday evening. That does not mean, as comrades may know from bitter experience, that material can be called in at any point up till then and still get into the paper. Our closing news date is Wednesday. What that means is that Wednesday is the last possible moment for getting in very important, fast-breaking news.

We have to turn in copy throughout the week in order to meet our final deadline, because all the copy that is turned in must be worked on by a staff writer, edited, copy edited, typeset, proofread (not once, but three times), laid out, and finally the page must be pasted up. And in order to get this done for all 28 or 32 pages, we have to start turning in copy almost the moment that the previous issue has finished coming off the presses and keep turning in copy steadily throughout the week.

So special parts of the paper are designated to be turned in especially early, before the weekend, such as the review page, the letters, and columns. We also try to get in most of the campaign coverage early. The deadline for us to receive campaign articles in the office is Saturday morning. That is, in most cases something that is happening over the weekend should be written up and sent in for the following issue rather than being called in at the last minute.

Another consideration in trying to get stories in early is the limited amount of space we have. Nearly every week we have more articles than we can possibly print. The paper gets filled up quickly, and the earlier an article comes in the more likely it is that we will be able to fit it into that particular issue. If we know in advance to expect a particular article, that also makes it easier to plan the issue and get that article in.

A small point on phoning in articles. Whenever an article is telephoned in to *The Militant* office, it has to be taped and then a comrade has to take the time to transcribe the tape. And even for a fast typist this is a very slow and laborious process. It also runs up the branch's phone bill. And so, unless it is absolutely necessary, we prefer if at all possible for stories to be mailed in.

The last point I want to mention is that the comrades might want to have some feeling for how long an article looks when it is printed, as a guide for the length they should aim for when they are writing. All material sent to us should of course be typewritten, triple-spaced, and on 39-character lines. When that's done, each line that you type on the average corresponds to one line of type in the standard columns of *The Militant*. And the maximum amount of type we put on a page is 250 lines in order to have room for the average amount of headlines, photographs, and so on. In fact, if we are going to do any sort of special layout for a feature we have to put even less than 250 lines on the page. A half-page article would be about 125. A shorter news article might be a third of a page or a little bit less, say 75 lines.

The shortest news article that would run as a separate article would be about 50 lines. Then we try to keep items for "In Brief" or for the "Campaigning for Socialism" column to a maximum of 35 lines. And if you ever have an occasion to be writing a guest column, like for "The National Picket Line" or the other columns, the length of those is 90 to 100 lines.

Excerpts from Discussion

Greg Cornell, *Twin Cities*

I was asked several days ago to say a few things about writing for *The Militant*. It occurred to me that talking a little bit about our Wounded Knee trial coverage, which I have been handling, might add something to the discussion.

It was decided in consultation with *The Militant* at the beginning of the year that covering the Wounded Knee trials should be my major assignment. As many of you know, it is often hard to find time to write articles for *The Militant*, so it was a decision that that would be the main thing that I would do. Any time we are covering something for any period of time almost on a weekly basis, that should certainly be a consideration.

Our general strategy was to provide weekly news coverage, a weekly summary of the most important developments, highlighting wherever possible those things that the defense did right, their best defensive formulations.

All the key people on the defense were given subscriptions.

I would get to the trial on the average of once a week, which was about all I could manage. But I would follow the press coverage on a daily basis and clip the paper so that I could keep up with the major developments in the trial.

One thing you will find is that each reporter who covers anything will come up with different information. With this trial, some of the reports in the capitalist press were inaccurate and sometimes the most important things that occurred at the trial never found their way into print. So I would always make a point of talking over the entire week's events with attorneys and Dennis Banks and Russell Means, checking the facts with them, going over the most obvious things, and often going through the court transcripts, which the defense made available to us.

Usually we want details in these stories, not just generalizations. And we want quotes on some of the key developments. One thing a reporter who wants good quotes has to do is to ask extremely basic questions. For example, when Mark Lane was jailed during the course of the trial by the judge, I asked him what his reaction was to being jailed by the judge. I got a good quote—I don't remember what it was. Some comrades, or most comrades, would be too embarrassed to ask that kind of basic question, and as a result the story is not going to be nearly so complete or interesting or illuminating.

Also, in asking basic kinds of questions you learn other things and are able to keep up with the trial developments. Most people, you'll find, have some very important information, and the only way you are going to get it out of them is by asking very basic questions.

Because we are a weekly and people are going to be reading material that is sometimes dated, it is necessary to combine your news coverage with a sort of evaluative approach, having comments and quotes in there that attempt to sum things up. You're not writing hard news stories much of the time. I would recommend studying *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines for that—not for the politics, but for the way they write it.

Some other points. One is to never believe what you

read in the newspapers. What you should do if it is at all possible, is check every fact, everything. My experience has been that in any news story of any length the chances are that there is going to be some inaccuracy in it, an inaccurately spelled name, fact, something. And so, if you then record that fact in your story, *The Militant's* credibility will be hurt. So check names, spellings—those are things you get wrong the easiest—ages, dates. Doublecheck the picket line slogan.

When you are writing a story always try to get a few quotes, not long speeches that go half the length of the story, but something that will make things a little more interesting.

Get details. If the wages of some striking workers are low, don't say "the wages are low" if you can at all help it, but find out how low exactly. Then find out how it has affected a worker's family. For example, ask somebody if you are on the picket line, "How the devil can you make out earning two-and-a-half dollars an hour?" or whatever. Ask a picketer what his or her attitude is toward the company. And you'll often get some very striking comments. (That wasn't meant to be a pun.)

When you are writing, work over particularly the lead paragraph. If the first paragraph of a story is not interesting and well written, then you are going to have a lot of trouble getting the reader to read the rest of the story. And the basic facts about a story should be there. If it's about a strike and you've gone through a second paragraph and haven't mentioned the fact that there is a strike that you are writing about—then you're going to have problems keeping the reader onto the story.

Discuss the story out in the appropriate fraction or with the party or YSA leaders. Make sure you agree on what is important to emphasize ahead of time.

Stories should, of course, flow logically. Sentences should be simply constructed. Don't use a long word when you can use a shorter word that means the same thing. Sometimes a carefully chosen word can replace an entire sentence. Sometimes a carefully written sentence can replace an entire paragraph or several paragraphs.

It pays to sometimes read your stories to someone else or pass it around before you mail or call it in. And really demand to have it honestly criticized. If there is a real hole in the sentence or story, or if an idea doesn't come across, you can often fix it a lot more easily in Denver or Minneapolis than editors can in New York, a thousand miles away.

In general, though, the way to learn how to write is to do a lot of writing. But it also pays to do a little studying. You can pick up some books on journalism in the library. It is a good idea, I think, to read AP and UPI stories for the purpose of seeing how stories are written. They are usually the trimmest, most concise, most well-written articles journalistically in the average newspaper.

The purpose of the Wounded Knee articles was to provide, to the extent we could, the best possible defense of the Wounded Knee defendants. The YSA and SWP were also the key to every Wounded Knee demonstration in the Twin Cities since the trial began. We sold a large number of papers at Wounded Knee events throughout the spring. Our paper and our movement

have won considerable respect in the Twin Cities area for our Wounded Knee work.

Joel Aber, Atlanta

I was supposed to be the campaign publicity director and deal primarily with the bourgeois media. But when events continued week after week in the Black struggle against police terror in Atlanta, *Militant* coverage was a time-consuming and important enough task that this often became my assignment for the week.

We should really treat *Militant* coverage that way. When we have a major story to write, it should be the main assignment of the comrade that's involved in it.

One thing that is very important that happened in Atlanta, and that is going to happen more and more during the course of struggles is that our *Militant* articles are more and more having an effect on the course of struggles, on making the struggles what they are. In the absence of any specific organ like a strike organizer more people turn to our analysis and our reporting in order to learn how to best conduct their struggle.

The coverage of the struggle against racist cop terror in Atlanta gained *The Militant* the respect of participants. They learned from what we had to say and there was nowhere else they could get an analysis of what was going on.

And many, many people in the Black community who were not activists in the fight against the police read the truth about what was happening in *The Militant* when they couldn't read it anywhere else. We sold 900 copies of *The Militant* with the headline on the Atlanta police riot, which was about two-and-a-half times our normal bundle size. About 80% of these were sold in the Black community.

I'd like to make a couple of points about interviews and how to use interviews in *The Militant*. For one thing, in an article that is basically a factual article, that is not primarily an interview, it still helps to have a paragraph or two that is an interview with participants in the struggle, even if that's not the content of the whole article. It makes it seem, and it is, more of a first-hand account if you do that. Often, all we have to do is show people a copy of *The Militant* and people who might be reluctant to being interviewed become very willing.

For example, I covered the killing of 17-year-old Brandon Gibson by the cops. And I went to Brandon Gibson's home. There were mobs of reporters and camera crews around and people from the mayor's office and governor's office, and I felt very uncomfortable walking into the house of the bereaved family and asking them for an interview.

But as soon as they saw *The Militant* they sat me down and treated me like a special guest while people from the governor's office were wandering about aimlessly. And they ran and got children from the community who had been witnesses to the shooting. These people had seen *The Militant* before and could see that we were telling the truth about what was going on in the community when nobody else was.

And incidentally, they asked us to send copies of *The Militant* to them once the interview was published. We should do this as a matter of policy.

There are a couple of technical points I would like to make. One is that we in Atlanta try never to send in a *Militant* article without it being checked both for accuracy and for formulations by a couple of members from the executive committee. And to estimate the size of a demonstration we usually try to get a consensus of four or five people. Because even without exaggerating consciously, it is very hard to get an accurate estimate of a crowd size, no matter how many demonstrations you've covered.

In addition, it is often useful for even a very experienced reporter to have someone else check the *Militant* article for style, someone who knows just a little about how to write. Because often your little pet way of writing a sentence isn't the clearest, and often it can be shortened and made into a better sentence even if it doesn't seem as creative.

It is also important for people who are concerned with an area of work to discuss what kind of articles are needed. It's important to discuss out what formulations we want in an article. And of course that becomes much more important if it is an analytical article. It becomes more important to discuss it out at length so that we have the kind of analysis we want, not just the analysis of the writer, but of the branch leadership.

Jo Hendrickson, Militant staff, New York

On photos: we have a darkroom and would prefer to have you just mail in the film immediately, the same day you shoot it if you can. You should use black and white, 35mm, any ASA between ASA 120 and ASA 1600.

If you want to develop the film there and send us the negatives or prints, that must be done right away, because if these pictures are to go with an article in the week's issue we have to have them right away. So it is preferable for you to send in the film.

We would like you to send in a note along with the film, explaining what is on the roll and identifying the events and individuals, in order. Also say who took the pictures, the date, and any pertinent information as to the ASA. We always assume the film was shot at ASA 400 unless you tell us otherwise.

Bruce Kimball, Cleveland

I was involved with the coverage of the *Painesville Telegraph* strike that went on from July 2 last year until February of this year, and I want to relate several problems I had in covering it.

The strike itself was very significant in the sense that it was conducted by the International Typographical Union in an organizing drive on an industrial basis. And most of the people they were organizing and the leadership of the strike consisted of newspaper reporters. This underlined the importance of having accurate, well written articles.

One problem I encountered was that I think it is extremely important to be careful about using *The Militant* as a reinforcement for a strike. This was a very long, drawn-out strike, and the strikers became increasingly pessimistic about the outcome of their strike. We started out writing articles about how successful the strike was going to be, how they were going to win, and increasingly the strikers became disenchanted with this type of extremely optimistic coverage.

They were saying things like, "Tell how the president of the union sold us down the river; tell how this strike should have never been organized." It became extremely difficult to operate under these circumstances. Part of the problem, I think, was that some of these things were not thought through from the beginning in covering it.

Robert West, San Francisco

I want to comment on some of the problems that comrades in the San Francisco branch faced in reporting on the California construction strikes that Andy mentioned.

We had comrades in one of the unions involved in the strike, the carpenters union. It was assumed that in that situation you would have a source of real facts, of news on what's happening, but we found that that wasn't necessarily true. We found that because of the situation in the building trades unions, which are divided up into the various crafts, we didn't have that ready source of news, even for what was happening in the carpenters union that we had comrades in. We couldn't get information from the union itself, from the business agent, or any of the officials in the union who in that situation had a policy of keeping the union membership and everyone else completely in the dark about what was happening. So we had to look for other sources of news.

Well, of course, the bourgeois press did not overlook developments like the California construction strike and there were a number of articles in San Francisco papers. But as mentioned before, the bourgeois press is not a very good source of facts; we realized that from what little we knew of the situation from comrades involved. The press would simply print news releases from the employers' associations.

The union officials did not release any statements to the press, so even the bourgeois press could not write an article about the position of the union.

We finally found that the best source of information on the strikes was the *Daily Pacific Builder*, a publication of the McGraw-Hill book company, which puts out the paper every day of the workweek for a very specialized audience in the construction industry. Although we don't want to be in the position of reporting employer association press releases or quoting the statements of the bosses, we found that we could gather quite a bit of information about the real issues of the strike and positions of the unions involved, the extent of the strike, and what strikes were happening. A number of them were just not reported at all in the bourgeois press. This newspaper's readership depended on accuracy and information in terms of what was happening. The bosses and their agents wanted to know, and because the industry is so dispersed they need to look to a source like the *Daily Pacific Builder*.

Once we were able to obtain the facts it was very important, in that there were a number of strikes, for us to sit down and discuss what these facts meant. This is true sometimes just to report a news story, not to mention the whole feature-length article in *The Militant*, which took hours of discussion in order to be able to interpret the events.

But we found that coverage in *The Militant* of the

strike is very important for the work we have been able to do. In fact, it is the most work that we have been able to do in the construction industry in California. We've been able to make contacts with militants through, first, having comrades in the unions. But in order to step beyond a certain familiarity to establish some political collaboration, the coverage in *The Militant* has been essential.

George Bouse, Lower Manhattan

I think it is generally felt that we should continue to have the kind of review page we now have in *The Militant*, and I've heard from some people that that page should be expanded so that we can give a critical response to the many history books, fiction pieces, novels, short stories, articles, films, plays, gallery shows, and things like this that many of the readers of *The Militant* will be attending and talking about.

When I was doing my master's essay during July, one thing that particularly impressed me as I looked over a lot of reviews of a particular Black author that I was developing my essay on was the way the different ruling class reviewers had given a hideous critical response to Black authors in the past.

There is no national Black newspaper other than *Muhammad Speaks*, and a small magazine like a newspaper, *Jet*, that is able to really review on a national scale. We are pretty much the only newspaper nationally that can give a supportive critical response to the Black arts.

I think that's something we should keep in mind. That is, when films like the *Education of Sonny Carson* come out we should review it. If a prominent Black artist puts on a show at the Whitney and this show will be traveling to other cities around the country, we should review that. If there is an exhibition at the National Gallery as one that appeared last spring on "Blacks and the Revolutionary War Period," it would be good to try to review it.

George Kontanis, Portland

I would like to talk a little bit more about the features in *The Militant*. I think *The Militant* got off to a good start on the expose of the transit mess in Los Angeles and later on, in the May 17 issue, the article on the environmental issues in Colorado, etc. I think we could make that a weekly or even a monthly series of features on different problems of capitalist rule around the country. And I think the branches could help *The Militant* out by thinking of various muckraking articles that we might want to draw together, whether it be over safety conditions in the nuclear plants, the geothermal energy scandal, hospital crisis scandal — all kinds of things which expose capitalist misrule.

Such articles can help expose capitalist misrule in the local areas. They can also be a powerful source for our campaign committees in exposing capitalist institutions and gaining respect for our campaigns. And they can provide the local candidates with valuable research and information about those examples of capitalist misrule and articulating the socialist solution to them.

Susan LaMont, Boston

I want to make a point about what I have found to be

a little bit difficult in following some of the articles in *The Militant*; this relates to the point that Caroline made.

It is true that *The Militant* is being read more and more by working people and by people in the Black community, different people than we sold the paper to primarily before. It is also true that a lot of readers are people who aren't in union situations. And a lot of terminology that surrounds unions is not familiar to a lot of people. What is a "business agent," for example? Not everybody knows what this is, or what a shop steward does. I remember that I was in the YSA for quite a long time before I finally figured out that a coal operator — I just figured it must be someone who operates on the coal somehow — but that a coal operator is the owner of the mining company. But it was very confusing to me in following the articles.

Some of the articles about strike situations have been quite complicated to follow. And I think that just as it is important for us to learn to report on activities and explain our program and events in a way that everybody, all working people, can understand them, it is also important for us to be able to explain union struggles and strikes in a way that everybody can understand them.

Harry Ring, Militant Southwest Bureau, Los Angeles

I'd like to add a point to the one Susan just made.

In covering labor struggles I think we should avoid writing what can often sound like a fraction report to a branch. Sometimes in even the reports to the branch there is more detail than necessary. Those details should be eliminated. We are not a trade union newspaper that has to report every detail of the issues in the strike. We have to report the central meaningful ones and not the lesser ones.

We have to explain things which may be known to the people involved in the strike but which are not known to other readers. And that means not assuming that people understand the significance of a particular strike struggle. For example, it was good in writing about the San Francisco municipal workers strike to explain who was involved in that strike; what forces had been brought into struggle that had not been previously involved in traditional trade union struggle; the fact that it involved many Black workers, many women workers, many older people, and many young student radicals coming into the labor movement. By explaining that it brought the meaning and significance of that strike home to the readers of *The Militant*, particularly as a pattern of such strikes among municipal workers began to occur around the country.

And it is those generalized features of struggles that we should try to get across to our readers. That means thinking consciously not only of what we want to say, but of who we are saying it to, what they do know and

what they don't know, what they would like to learn, and what we think they should learn from a particular thing.

One suggestion. I think that each branch or at least one comrade in each branch should own, in addition to a reasonable quality camera, a cassette recorder. It is an extremely useful instrument in reporting. In covering a strike struggle you want to interview some of the pickets, some of the strikers, and get their views. It is a lot easier and a lot more accurately done with a cassette recorder. Covering a rally or a press conference, it ensures greater accuracy and a lot less effort. In conducting interviews you can do it with far greater facility; you can concentrate on the question; the person being interviewed does not feel quite so self-conscious as when someone is furiously trying to write down what they're saying.

Along with a tape recorder you can buy for \$1.50 or so a telephone tap, a simple rubber suction tap that fits on the earpiece of a phone. And that makes it very easy to get telephone statements where you don't have the time or opportunity to see someone in person.

Cindy Jaquith, Militant staff, New York

This is just a small point about getting press passes. When attending union conventions or other events where we have to get our press credentials from some kind of official body, *Militant* reporters should expect the same kind of credentials that every other paper, including bourgeois papers, receive.

For example, at the NEA convention the *Militant* reporter, just like all other reporters, received a little packet with all the statements that would be released that day and copies of speeches. There was a press room that we used along with all the other reporters, which included coffee, donuts in the morning, a telephone that would call all over the country, typewriters, paper, etc.

Sometimes in presenting ourselves to union officials we think that they're not going to pay any attention to *The Militant* and we won't get to be treated the same way other reporters are. If we go in with that kind of attitude it is very likely that is the way we will be treated. But if we go in as one of the legitimate newspapers covering this event — which we are, and we're seen by more and more working people in that way — we can get equal treatment.

That also includes the aggressiveness to ask officials for an interview or to discuss with us. We found that a lot of the staff on such bodies as union public relations bureaus are young people like ourselves. Some of them subscribe to *The Militant*. There are many young people in the unions who are at least sympathetic and think that we should be treated in the same way as everyone else. That is the kind of approach we should always take.

THE MILITANT—WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO USE IT

by Larry Seigle

In reading over the responses to the questionnaires on what people like best about *The Militant* and what they like least about *The Militant*, it became clear that there are basically two ways of approaching that question.

Some of the answers were written from the standpoint of readers of the paper, indicating what comrades like best to read and least to read. But a good percentage of the answers were written from the standpoint of viewing *The Militant* as a weapon in carrying out the tasks of the party and the YSA. These answers were aimed at making it easier to sell on the street, more effective in communicating our ideas to new readers, and a better tool to be used in the many specific tasks of building the revolutionary movement.

This is the way we should look at *The Militant* in this discussion tonight, not only as readers, which we all are, but as those who are responsible for the paper overall, as reporters, as photographers, as circulation builders, and as *The Militant's* most demanding critics.

The Militant is a unique kind of newspaper. Of course, it is unique in its political approach, but it's unique in another way also. *The Militant* is not produced, like the capitalist dailies and weeklies are, by an office staff based on news compiled by professional and paid reporters. We do have a full-time and professional team of writers and technical staff and editors in New York and in the Southwest Bureau.

But the real staff of the paper includes everyone in this room and hundreds of other comrades and supporters around the country, people who are not normally writers or reporters, but are political activists who become *Militant* reporters when there is an important political event, an issue unfolding in their city, or a demonstration or strike or political meeting. People who make it their business to let the readers of *The Militant* know what's happening.

And everyone here is part of the staff in another way also. You won't find the reporters for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* or the *Chicago Tribune* out on the street corners hawking the paper with their article in it. You won't find the labor reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* taking a bundle of papers down to the pickets, showing them what the paper has to say about their struggle, getting their reactions to the paper and drawing on their responses for the next article, or selling a subscription to somebody who is particularly interested in what we have to say. That's what *Militant* correspondents do.

We approach *The Militant* differently than other papers. When you pick up a capitalist daily you do it from the vantage point of the reader. You say, "Well, their job is to write it, and my job is to read it (for whatever it's worth)." Our relationship to *The Militant* is different because our job is not only to read it, but to write for it, to sell it, and to work to improve it.

So this session can be viewed as a big *Militant* staff meeting. It's a chance to review what we're trying to do with *The Militant*, what stage we're at in accomplishing our objectives, and to outline the projections for the big circulation drive going into the fall.

The Militant is our most effective weekly tool in the task of constructing the revolutionary party. The banner in the back of this hall sums up our tasks as "educate, agitate, and organize." *The Militant* is our weekly educator, agitator, and organizer. It's designed to educate large numbers of people in the basic ideas of socialism and of the Trotskyist movement. It's designed to agitate, to hammer away week after week at the most timely slogans, whether it's for an escalator clause, against cop terror, or urging solidarity with the African colonies against Portuguese colonialism. And it's an organizer, a recruiter to the SWP and YSA as the organizer, not only of the campaigns of our movement, but of the periphery, the supporters, the sympathizers of our movement and our election campaigns, who look to *The Militant* each week to find out what's happening.

The Militant is really a combination tool, because it has to be used on many different jobs each week. Each issue has a variety of audiences to speak to. These can be roughly broken down into three categories.

First are the new readers, those who pick up a copy for the first time or who have seen a copy once or twice before. Second are those readers who are beginning to think of themselves as socialists, but are not yet thinking about joining our movement. And third are the members and supporters of the party and the YSA, those who are becoming educated Trotskyists. *The Militant* has to speak to each of these audiences each week.

By far the largest section of the audience is the new readers, the new subscribers, the people who buy the paper on the street corner once or repeatedly. These are people who are beginning to radicalize under the impact of events. And it is to reach them and to hold them as readers of *The Militant* that we need to continue to learn how to popularize our ideas. And it is primarily for these new readers that it is so important for us to have a lively, bright, attractively designed newspaper with lots of short features, articles, and columns.

There's a lot of room for improvement in this area, but to judge how we're doing, just contrast *The Militant* to other newspapers like some of the Maoist rags—the RU paper *Revolution*, or *The Call*. Everything about these papers, from the depressing layout to the extreme Mao-Tsetung jargon to the absurd length of almost every single article, is like holding up a big sign that says: "Warning! Don't read this paper unless you are initiated into the intricacies of Maoist factional politics."

Those papers reflect the orientation of the groups that put them out, and right now they are oriented toward some kind of regroupment of Maoist forces. And their papers more or less meet that purpose.

But that's not where our movement is directing its energy. We need a paper that has plenty in it for new readers and that will be understandable and interesting to them.

But *The Militant* is not just for these new readers. Not every article can be written for them without abandoning the other tasks that *The Militant* has to accomplish, in-

cluding the task of continuing to educate these new readers after they have ceased to be new readers and have become familiar with the basic ideas of socialism.

In his book *Letters from Prison*, which has a lot to say about the kind of newspaper that we need, Jim Cannon recalls his own experience with the *Appeal to Reason*, which was the mass circulation socialist weekly of the pre-World-War-I socialist movement. He explains that a paper written only for new readers, solely popularizing basic ideas, soon loses its value to those who quickly absorb the elementary ideas and want to move on to something more meaty. I just want to read a paragraph from this book, describing the *Appeal to Reason* and his experiences in Kansas.

"Precisely here was the Achilles' Heel of the old *Appeal to Reason*. Its unrivaled agitation on a few simple points, and its sensational exposures, made the *Appeal* very attractive to thousands of new readers who were making the first break in their allegiance to the bourgeois parties. But the *Appeal* left them, so to speak, on the first step of the ladder, never raised them higher. The readers, after a spell of enthusiasm, got tired of the singsong which they already knew by heart and fell away. At a certain stage of its development, the *Appeal* was confronted with the life-and-death problem of getting new thousands of readers to take the place of the other thousands who were falling away."

We don't expect our readers, especially the new readers, to sit down and read *The Militant* from cover to cover, because many of these readers are won to the paper on the basis of just one subject. And for a while they will read *The Militant* every week just to see what it has to say about their particular interest. For example, some new readers may read only La Raza en Acción column and other coverage of the Chicano movement for a while. Or some CLUW activists will buy subs to the paper just to see what's going on with CLUW.

But over time many of these readers will find other articles that will attract them and will be drawn into other parts of the paper. Or some big event will occur, like the Chile coup or the upsurge in Portugal, and everyone will want to read and follow the news stories.

One way to understand what *The Militant* is, is to look at what it isn't. *The Militant* isn't really a newspaper in this sense: you can't read it instead of the capitalist daily papers to find out what's going on. No weekly national paper could do that in this country. A mass revolutionary workers party would need not a weekly, but dozens of daily papers to totally cover the news. At the current stage of our movement *The Militant* can't try to play that kind of role.

Even within the limitations of a single national weekly publication, *The Militant* doesn't really correspond to the weekly newsmagazines like *Time* or *Newsweek*, because these publications cover almost all the major developments within a given week. *The Militant* has to carefully pick and choose what it will cover, and we don't claim to cover everything each week.

This isn't to say that there isn't plenty of news in *The Militant*. There is a wealth of factual information in every issue.. Some of it is compiled from other publications that aren't readily available to most readers. Some of it is available to any newspaper, but only *The Militant* sees the importance of reporting it.

Within the limitations of the space we have to work with, we want *The Militant* to become recognized as the best and most reliable source of news of general interest to everyone who is involved in or thinking about social struggles. And we've come a long way toward establishing *The Militant* as an indispensable source of facts and information, including for those who don't agree with everything we stand for but recognize the value of the paper for the facts it provides.

Another thing *The Militant* is not is a "movement" newspaper. We don't claim to cover all radical activities from an impartial or neutral vantage point. Of course, no paper can do that, but some papers claim that's what they do. Some underground papers, for example, claim that they are just a service to the movement. The *Guardian*, for several years, claimed that they were giving impartial news coverage to all radical activities.

The Militant doesn't claim that. *The Militant* is a weapon in the radical movement, fighting for a particular perspective, building those activities that we support and explaining what's wrong with those we oppose.

It doesn't follow that *The Militant* isn't also an objective source of information about the major developments in the radical movement, about the activities and the evolutions of the different political tendencies, and the discussions and debates going on in the left. And as we continue to make progress toward our goal of putting out a paper that dominates the field of radical politics in this country, *The Militant* will be more and more looked to as the place to find accurate reports on the development and evolution of all the tendencies on the left.

There's been a lot of discussion this week on the current nature of party activities and the evolution of the radicalization and how it affects our work. The axis of a lot of our work has shifted from nationally organized campaigns like the campaign against the Vietnam war or the abortion rights campaign to taking advantage of the wide variety of openings we face, many of which are on a local level. We are involved in dozens of different local struggles of oppressed nationalities; we are finding new openings for fruitful work in local union situations; and we are finding a growing receptivity to the ideas of socialism among broader layers of the working class.

These changes are reflected in *The Militant*, too. *The Militant* is different now than it was three, four, or five years ago at the height of the student struggles and the peak of the antiwar movement. At that time the issue of the war and the antiwar movement and student struggles around the country naturally made up a good chunk of each issue of *The Militant*. *The Militant* was never merely an antiwar paper or student paper, however, any more than it was ever merely a union newspaper during a period of labor upsurge. It always maintains a balance between the different areas of party activity, between the national and international coverage, between agitation around the war or other immediate questions and education about Trotskyism.

But the balance has shifted somewhat, reflecting the new openings and the character of these openings for the party. There is now a very wide range of subjects and struggles that we campaign around on a week-to-week basis. Some of these are the big international events, like Chile or Portugal or the Mideast war, or our campaign to answer the Stalinists on detente. With the

expansion of the paper and the addition of the regular "World Outlook" section in 1972, we've been able to devote more space on a regular basis to reporting and analyzing the major developments in world politics and following more closely the activities and development of the sections of the Fourth International around the globe.

The evolution of the class struggle in this country, the eruption of the sudden breakdowns that illuminate the underlying anarchy of capitalist production, the outbreak of militant struggles that quickly move beyond the control of the trade union bureaucrats or the capitalist politicians—these all mean that *The Militant* has to be able to respond quickly with extensive coverage of totally unanticipated events—events that pose new questions of working out formulations and explanations and lines of interventions.

Just in the last year and a half, *The Militant* has waged consistent campaigns around such major developments in the United States as Watergate, the energy crisis, the meat boycott, the truckers shutdown, and others.

This shift away from nationally organized campaigns like the antiwar movement or the abortion rights campaign to more local struggles has a lot of implications for *The Militant*. It puts a new premium on articles sent into the paper from around the country. Perhaps the biggest single change in *The Militant* over the past few years has been the increase in articles from the branches and locals. A bigger percentage of *The Militant* now is made up of articles from the field, and the greater percentage of the staff time is spent in working with the branches and YSA locals, preparing these articles, and editing them when they come in.

This has highlighted the value of having a national newspaper that is not produced solely by an office staff but draws on the political strength of comrades involved in action in cities from coast to coast.

In his book *Labor's Giant Step*, Art Preis explains that in writing his history of the CIO he had an invaluable advantage over other historians: he reported on many of the events that are covered in the book for *The Militant*. He wrote in the introduction to his book, "I can say not only that I wrote dozens of contemporary articles about the events described in this book, I can add in the case of many historic labor events, I was there."

That's what we can say about each week's *Militant*. Its reports come from people who are there on the scene and actively involved in the struggles they are writing about.

Another part of our recent expansion of local coverage has been a direct result of the expansion of the Socialist Workers Party branches into new areas. Since last summer's convention we've begun to get regular reports on developments in Pittsburgh and St. Louis, and we can look forward in the coming year to reading about what's happening in Milwaukee.

The expansion of our coverage of events occurring in local areas puts greater importance than ever on the role of political leadership in branches and locals in thinking through and writing articles for the paper. The question of *Militant* coverage, just like the question of *Militant* sales and subscription work, should be on the agenda of every fraction meeting.

That doesn't mean that we expect an article on every

single meeting or event, or a story from each area each week. We can't print all the articles that come in now. But it does mean that if a branch or YSA local is involved in a consistent, sustained local campaign—whether it is around a local defense case or a union struggle or an election campaign—and it isn't reflected in *The Militant*, then we are missing a big opportunity. It means we are missing an opportunity to win new readers to the paper by covering the struggles that they are involved in.

People are interested in reading about the things that affect them directly, especially when they are involved in some kind of action. You know that from your own experience with *The Militant*. When the bundle comes in one of the first things that comrades look for is to see what's in the paper that week from their city, reporting on their activities. And it is a safe bet that one of the best ways to sell a *Militant* to a worker on a picket line is to show them an article, even if it is just a short news article, on their strike. They want to find out what this paper has to say about their struggle and about their interests.

The Militant is also our best tool to reach the activists we are working with, with our proposals for further action, our analysis of the problems they are grappling with, and to give them a picture of what kind of organization we are and what we stand for.

But these articles on local struggles have a broader value than just their usefulness in the local area. They convey to readers throughout the country the lessons of local actions, and taken together with similar reports coming from other areas, they provide a truly national picture of the moods and the emerging issues in the class struggle.

Construction workers on the East Coast can learn and absorb the lessons of the carpenters' strike in California. Blacks in Milwaukee and Pittsburgh and St. Louis can see what the SWP is doing and what is going on with the fight against cop terror in Atlanta. Chicanos in Texas and California can find out what is going on with government victimizations in Denver.

Continuing to improve in the area of *Militant* coverage from the branches and locals requires better and closer collaboration between the *Militant* editorial staff and the branches and locals. As comrades who have been writing for the paper in the last period know, there are a lot of problems that have to be dealt with—everything from the technical problems of deadlines and the lengths of articles to the difficulty of editing material in the office when we can't sit down and discuss articles with the writers and others who are involved in the situation we are reporting on.

And no matter how carefully planned out things are, we are never going to be able to totally avoid the situation where articles don't come in on time or when some articles that do come in time don't get in the paper or have to be cut way down.

Political reporting for *The Militant* from the branches is an important leadership responsibility, and it should be viewed as an integral part of the political life and activity of the comrades in all areas of work. In the past some branches have experimented with *Militant* correspondents as special assignments. Sometimes this has worked out and been helpful. But in other cases it has actually gotten in the way of increasing *Militant* coverage.

It is always a good idea to have comrades who have a special knack or interest in writing cover things for the paper. But it is impossible for one or two formally assigned *Militant* correspondents to cover all the political developments in a city or region. When the leadership in the branches and locals take responsibility for looking at the articles whenever possible and for the political and factual accuracy of the articles sent in, we make a lot fewer mistakes and we get a lot better articles.

But this leadership responsibility doesn't reduce the responsibility of each and every supporter of the paper to suggest ideas and to send in materials for articles, as many comrades have begun to do, to constantly offer criticisms and point out ways the paper can be improved, and to take the initiative and with the collaboration of the local leadership to write up stories and other articles.

The questionnaires that were distributed here and before the conference in the branches about *The Militant*, and the suggestions that many comrades raised in the *Militant* correspondents workshop and informally here this week, show that comrades have a lot of ideas about the paper, things we would like to see more of and things that we would like to see less of. Everyone who sells the paper on the street gets a lot of ideas about what kind of front and back pages are good and what are not so good for sales. It would be helpful if comrades would send in letters about the kinds of reactions they get when selling different issues of the paper.

And it would be helpful to the editorial staff if salespeople would send in responses to articles from the people we are working with. Let us know how people react to the paper, to the paper as a whole and to particular articles on particular subjects.

One of the obstacles that we want to overcome is the mistaken notion that you have to be a trained journalist to send in articles for the paper. Of course, journalism is a skill and has to be learned like any other skill. And comrades who are interested in writing regularly for the paper should take the time and learn some of the fundamentals of writing and reporting.

But we don't require that every article that comes in be a polished, finished product. We have comrades on the staff who are familiar with all the rules of grammar and punctuation. They know how to fix up articles that are a little rough, and they can usually improve the articles that are sent in — not always.

The letters column can also be an especially valuable department of the paper for reflecting what *Militant* readers are thinking. And this column is for all readers of *The Militant*, comrades as well as non-comrades. We could use more letters from comrades on incidents that highlight some aspect of the oppression or degeneration of capitalist society, or that tell readers about the response of people to the last issue, about a discussion that got started on the job or street corner where you are selling.

Lenin wrote a lot about the need to develop worker correspondents for the revolutionary paper. He viewed it as the fundamental requirement of a real workers paper, and he repeatedly stressed the need for all members of the party, especially the workers, to send in articles, material for articles, and letters to the editor. The same goes for *The Militant*.

I want to turn now to the question of the circulation drive for the fall and to review the lessons and the accomplishments of our circulation-building activities in the recent period.

The goal that we are working toward with our sales and sub drives is building *The Militant* into a big socialist weekly. We choose to do this rather than trying to put out a more frequent *Militant*, a daily paper or twice-a-week paper, because that would only become an albatross around our necks from the standpoint of distribution.

A mass party needs daily papers because it is in a position to respond to and directly affect events on a day-to-day basis. For us that remains in the future. Today a daily newspaper or even a twice weekly would be nothing but a headache to distribute. And you can see that from the experience of the Communist Party with the *Daily World*; they don't even pretend to distribute the paper by sales. Their standard procedure is to give it away, when they can.

Our goal is to expand the size of the weekly *Militant*, to make it more able to fulfill a variety of functions. In 1968 *The Militant* was only an eight-pager. It grew in that year to 12 pages, to 16 pages the next year, to 20 pages in 1970, and 24 pages in 1971. When we added the "World Outlook" section it reached 28 pages. Since then we have maintained the 28 pages and published many 32-pagers.

Practically every week we have plenty of material on hand for a 32-pager. But that step to a 32-page paper every single week requires a bigger financial outlay than we can now afford, given the current circulation base.

There are basically two ways open to us to continue boosting the circulation, the subscription drives and the single-copy sales campaigns. Over the past two years we have experimented with both these ways, and both of them have advantages. This fall we want to continue to utilize both the sub and the sales drives.

An introductory subscription has a greater value than a single-copy sale because it means a new reader can see the paper over a period of time, a number of issues rather than one. They can follow how we cover the unfolding events and how we respond to them. The introductory subscription drives are also essential to expanding the geographic reach of our movement and to making the distribution of *The Militant* truly national. As a result of the sub drives, and especially of the traveling *Young Socialist* teams, *The Militant* each week gets to hundreds of places where we have no organized activities and where no bundles are sold. It qualitatively increases the national impact of our movement. So we want to continue with our subscription drives.

In the spring of 1973 we began an experiment with an organized campaign of street sales. Based on the success of that initial effort, we've continued those drives in both the spring and fall periods. The big advantage that we found with the sales campaign was that it helped in the process of integrating *Militant* sales with the other political campaigns and activities on a week-to-week basis. When big national or international events occur or a local struggle erupts, the sales drive fits right into the rhythm of party and YSA activity.

Our sales campaigns are aimed at raising our consistent and regular weekly sales, putting higher sales and

higher participation in sales on a permanent basis. Actually, these campaigns aren't "campaigns" in the way we normally use that word, that is, short-term, intensive efforts to meet a particular goal when we subordinate other activities to a special project. Our sales drives are aimed at institutionalizing higher sales overall and doing it in coordination with all our other activities.

The fall sales quotas aren't set at the highest level they could be if we were going to subordinate all our other activities to selling *The Militant*. They are designed instead to fit sales into a rounded, balanced plan of party-building activities. And if we can succeed in further institutionalizing street sales, bringing them up to a level

of sustained, high sales each week, then we can move forward from there with further campaigns to expand the circulation of the paper.

This week at the conference all the lectures, workshops, classes, and reports have made it clear that we are going to be doing a lot of educating, agitating, and organizing this year. *The Militant* is an essential tool for us in all the things that we have to do. And in using that tool more effectively we are going to be making it a better and more effective tool. And with a successful and enthusiastic fall circulation campaign we are all going to be involved in taking the next big step in turning our paper into *the socialist weekly* in the United States.

REPORT ON *MILITANT* PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION CARDS

by Joel Britton

The *Appeal to Reason* was a mass-circulation socialist weekly in the early part of the twentieth century. We think one of the subscription-getting methods of the *Appeal to Reason* could help us in getting subscriptions also.

Here's how Comrade Jim Cannon described this method in a recent discussion with Harry Ring. Harry had asked Jim what the Socialist Party was like in Rose-dale, Kansas, Jim's home town. Jim said, "Well, I guess there were about a dozen of them all together, mainly old-time socialists, my father and several others, a man and his wife named Kately who ran a sort of ice cream lunch parlor. Kately was an old-time railroad man, a Debs man from way back in 1894. They just kept the faith. 'Talking socialism' was an expression commonly used then; I don't know whether it's done nowadays. Whenever they'd get a chance they'd try to get a few words in for socialism to anyone who would listen. They also subscribed to the *Appeal to Reason*. My father was a member in good standing of the Appeal Army, that's what they called it. They had a column in the paper called 'The Appeal Army,' and that consisted of people who sold subscriptions and sent them in. And they'd mention those who had made the best record that week. My father used to be in there quite often. He would send in five subs or ten subs. He was very proud of that.

"They used to carry the *Appeal to Reason* sub card in their pocket, a prepaid postal card with a receipt attached to it. The idea was that you sent in an order for five or ten prepaid subscription cards, 25c each. I think they were five for a dollar. My father always had a package of them in his pocket, and so did several of the others. And they'd be talking to somebody and would say, 'How would you like to read the *Appeal to Reason* for only 25c a year?' If they would agree they'd write in their name and address and drop the card in the mailbox. That's all, no records, no signing anything else, just drop it in the mailbox. And the receipt attached to the end, pull it off and that's the proof that they had paid for it. There was no sending in to the local office or anything else. That's it. We could do the same thing."

Even though we don't have a dozen members in Rose-

dale, Kansas, we are a much different kind of organization than the pre-World-War-I Socialist Party. Our locals and branches are much better organized. We don't propose switching over to the prepaid subscription card as our sole means of getting subscriptions. But we think there is a place in our scheme of things for the prepaid subscription cards.

We have printed some up especially for this conference. They are on heavier paper than the ordinary sub blanks, paper like a post card. They are addressed to *The Militant*, and they have the proper postage on them. I don't know how much postage was in the pre-World-War-I period, but when this was discussed in the 1940s in *Letters from Prison* by Cannon, the postage was a penny and they were talking about penny prepaid postcards. Now we have 8c on them.

They sell for \$1 and are good for two months of *The Militant*, a regular introductory offer. Just as the *Appeal to Reason's* 25c cards were five for a dollar, eleven of these cards can be had for \$10.

For members of the SWP or YSA or other supporters of *The Militant* whose work or school schedule makes it difficult to get to the headquarters every day or two, the prepaid subscription cards will make it easier to sell subs. You buy the cards in advance.

And when you are talking socialism with a fellow worker or student and you convince someone to get an introductory sub, you fill in the person's name and address, tear off the receipt on the end, and drop the card in the nearest mailbox. Soon an agent of the federal government will arrive to pick up the card and deliver it with all deliberate speed to *The Militant* business office. It saves the hassle of holding on to the sub blank and the dollar until it can be turned in to your local or branch sub drive director.

Now, if you bought eleven cards for ten dollars, the special packet you can get here, you might do what Jim Cannon's father did when you get to the eleventh sale, have a well deserved snack or beer or two, or sell the eleventh sub for less than a dollar, or give it to an interested but financially embarrassed individual.

During our big sub mobilizations which are highly organized blitz efforts to get thousands of subs in a very

short time, most comrades will use the regular sub blanks that we have been using for the last few years. When comrades come in after blitzing the campuses or the Black community they will turn these in to the local sub director and the local sub director will collect all the dollars and send a check in to the business office. And branches will continue to have regular sub blanks for comrades who can't lay out money in advance for the prepaid cards.

We don't see the prepaid cards as a step toward re-quiring advance payment for all sub blanks or for all papers, individual copies of *The Militant* or bundles of the paper a la Tim Wohlforth's *Bulletin* or *Muhammad*

Speaks. And if a person got stuck with more cards than he or she could sell, of course we would refund the money for any cards returned.

The prepaid cards are simply a special device for a special contingent of what we used to call "The Militant Army," that is, all the comrades and friends who are always trying to reach out to win new people to our cause.

In addition to reporting in *The Militant* and singling out for praise the top areas and individuals in the sales and sub drives, we will periodically single out for special praise the top sellers of the prepaid subs.