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TOM KERRY'S WITCH-HUNT

by Milton Alvin, Central East Branch,
Los Angeles,

July 12, 1975

When I received the discussion bulletin containing the article, "The Man on the Flying Trapeze," by Tom Kerry (Vol. 33, No. 8) I thought it was a forgery produced by an enemy of the party and sent to me for the purpose of sharpening a dispute. However, that evening at the branch meeting I discovered that there were other similar bulletins and that my copy was an authentic one.

Before taking up the first point I find it necessary to say that if my article, which so upset Comrade Kerry, had been replied to as I expected, that is, in the calm and reasoned way Comrade Joseph Hansen did in the same bulletin, in his "Are Things Really That Bad?," I would have been satisfied to let matters stand even though Comrade Hansen failed to convince me. But the flood that Comrade Kerry doused the party with does such a disservice that a reply is mandatory.

Comrade Kerry, in one of his opening points, informs us that if he had my position he would not call for a correction in policy as I did but for the removal of the leadership. This illustrates the difference between us. I made some criticisms in a reasoned way and in the hope that they would lead to some corrections. As I explained in my article, on two questions some partial corrections had already been made. This can be construed to require a removal of the leadership only by distorted, irresponsible thinking. I made no proposal to remove anyone.

On the same point Comrade Kerry accuses me of saying the leadership acted "surreptitiously" and "behind the back" of the membership. This is false from one end to the other. The accusations are not buttressed with proofs or quotations and the reader will find that I said nothing of the sort.

I did say that the questions in dispute had not been settled in the National Committee and that the membership should make the decision. This is the procedure we learned from Jim Cannon, Tom Kerry notwithstanding.

Pouncing on what I wrote on this point, Comrade Kerry then goes on to assert that I want to introduce a relationship between the National Committee and the membership in which all differences in the committee would be communicated to the ranks of the party as soon as they occur. And his substantiation for this absurdity? It is a distortion of my observation that a knowledge of differences can be of educational value to the membership. But I wrote this in the context of differences that *have not been resolved* in the committee and Cannon is my authority that in such cases the party ranks must make the decision.

Comrade Kerry's reckless insinuations that I am trying to smuggle in New Left participatory democracy and even restore Abernism in the party are not only inaccurate but downright disloyal.

I must also add that Comrade Kerry's habit of putting words between quotation marks in his article, which is directed solely against me, gives the impression that he is quoting something I wrote. On top of page 16 of his piece he does this with the words "inside dope," which I did not use and which is his invention. This is hardly in the Trotskyist tradition and not the only example as we shall see. Comrades should be warned that anything written by Tom Kerry has to be carefully examined.

Comrade Kerry asserts that my position on giving critical support to Stalinist candidates is so full of errors and contradictions that ". . . it is difficult to disentangle the thread of the argument." This is a recent discovery. In the transcript of his remarks at the Political Committee meeting, which I will take up later, Comrade Kerry had no difficulty in understanding my position and even agreeing with it. Since he was good enough to append these remarks to the article under discussion anyone can check just what he said and whether or not he agreed with me on the question of critical support to CP candidates.

It is possible to take the best reasoned argument made by the most logical thinker and give it a ridiculous interpretation merely by omitting certain parts or by distortions and in other ways. Comrade Kerry is a master practitioner of this kind of thing. I believe everyone's accomplishments should be noted and attested and Comrade Kerry is entitled to recognition of his talents in this field.

My position on critical support to Stalinist candidates is not very complicated, if anyone is interested in the reality and willing to forego the Kerry school of fairy tales. I do not think we should give critical support to *token* CP candidates. These are the kind Stalinists often run for unimportant posts so as to appear to be engaged in independent politics, while at the same time they support a capitalist candidate for an important post.

They have done this many times and I think the party made a mistake whenever it gave critical support to such candidates. Our party compounded the error in some instances by referring to the CP as a "party in the socialist movement." In some cases our propaganda failed to expose treachery on the part of the Stalinists. I am referring here to their running token candidates as a cover for supporting capitalists.

I believe that exposing what they are up to can influence their members and followers much better than undeserved compliments such as those used, for example, in the Aptheker campaign in 1966. The *Militant* article on this campaign is reproduced in the bulletin under discussion on page 13.

Aptheker is described as "an open and avowed Communist." This is wrong. He is a Stalinist and not a communist of any kind. The article also says a reason of our support is "... as a means of opposing the two capitalist parties and supporting independent working class and socialist political action against them." This, in my opinion, is far removed from both reality and Trotskyism.

Aptheker and his Stalinist backers were not really opposing the two capitalist parties. If they were, they would have run for governor. Independent working class and socialist political action were not part of Aptheker's campaign and usually are not part of any Stalinist election campaign. Giving Stalinists credit for these things is a mistake.

Comrade Kerry then berates me for not opposing this policy at the time, that is, 1966. Consulting a calendar, and as he says, "If my arithmetic is correct . . ." Einstein-Kerry quickly calculates that seven years have gone by and that I am slow on the draw since I took all that time to come to the conclusion that the party had made a mistake.

We can lay this question to rest. It is true that I made no objection in 1966 and first brought up the question seven years later. The only excuse I can make is that I am not as sharp as some others, perhaps including Comrade Kerry. But if he is so indignant about my taking seven years to wake up to the Aptheker business perhaps Comrade Kerry will be good enough to explain why it took him a third of a century to decide the party was wrong in not giving critical support to CP presidential candidate Earl Browder in 1940.

If seven years is a long time, as Comrade Kerry insists, what can we say about a third of a century? Does Comrade Kerry's arithmetic that showed seven years elapsed between 1966 and 1973 enable him to calculate the number of years between 1940 and 1973? Just in case there is any difficulty I have made an independent calculation and my answer is that it took Comrade Kerry 33 years as against my seven. That gives me an edge of almost five to one but I will not take advantage of it.

Comrade Kerry states that in my first letter to the Political Committee opposing critical support to a CP candidate in Los Angeles I said nothing about token candidacy. That is correct. I freely admit that in this case I opposed critical support for other reasons as my letter states. Is there something wrong with that?

The idea that the CP was using token candidates to screen their real policy of supporting capitalist candidates was not my discovery. I learned this from various exchanges of opinion in letters and discussion. I never claimed to be the discoverer of this but at least I think I learned something from others. That is more than can be said about Comrade Kerry who cannot stand to have someone disagree with him.

The witch-hunt now shifts gears (page 18) while Comrade Kerry makes a crude attempt to make it look like I am attacking the younger leaders of the party. The purpose of this is to prejudice comrades against me and not to clarify anything. He says, "I must take vigorous exception." This last is redundant as everyone who has

ever crossed his path knows Comrade Kerry is always "vigorous." Some say he is even heavy-handed.

Actually, the younger leaders of the party do not need Comrade Kerry or anyone else to defend themselves from me. The real and not phony opinion I have on this point is that responsibility for the Aptheker critical support with which I do not agree, rests with the older party leaders and by no means with the younger ones. However, I have not proposed that anything more be done about this or similar incidents except that something should be learned. I do not think that every move by party leaders needs a vote of confidence and that every criticism requires that they be thrown out of their posts. This is Comrade Kerry's method, not mine.

Comrade Kerry would have done well as a member of the British House of Commons where, if one makes a mistake and loses a vote of confidence, it means getting thrown out of office. He would probably have done even better as Grand Vizier of a potentate who could lose his head if he made a mistake, and best of all, if he was the potentate himself.

We now come to the transcripts of the Nov. 21, 1973, PC discussion of my Oct. 31, 1973, letter. Comrade Kerry moans and groans about the fact that an "*unedited*" (his emphasis) version of the discussion was sent out to the National Committee. Rending the air with great cries, he says, "If I had any suspicion that a member of the NC intended to make factional use of my remarks I would have insisted upon editing the transcript for mailing. I resent very deeply the unwarranted use and abuse of this unedited PC transcript of my comments without either my knowledge or consent."

There is not one single honest fact in the above quotation. Notice the accusation of "factional use" when all that happened was a comparison of the transcript with other material.

First of all, I had no knowledge that a transcript had been made of the discussion and I could not have had. That is why I called attention in my article to the dates of PC meeting (Nov. 21); the letter by Doug Jenness to me (Dec. 6) and the date when the transcript was sent out (Jan. 15, 1974).

Comrade Kerry, hunting witches to burn, says I make a big point of the 40 days that elapsed between the time the Jenness letter was sent and the time the transcript was sent. He interprets this to mean I was "*Very suspicious!*" (his emphasis). But I merely tried to show that I responded to the PC letter very quickly on Dec. 12, 1973, precisely because I knew of no transcript at that time.

I tried to prove and I did prove in my article, "Tradition, Orientation and Program," that the Jenness letter did not correspond to the transcript. *But I only learned this when the transcript came in and that was 40 days after the letter.* It is easy enough to verify who is telling the truth. Both Comrade Kerry's remarks recorded in the transcript and the Jenness letter are appended to the article about flying trapezes. Anyone can compare them. And hush-hush, if Kerry is not watching, take a glance at the flying trapeze and see who is flying through the air.

Two more gratuitous donations are thrown at us that deserve only a mention. The charge that I have been factional would be hard to prove as I have no faction and have not tried to form one. The other, that I suspected hanky panky because of the delay in sending out the transcript is Kerry's invention, and like almost all the rest

of his contribution is worth just about as much as a paper Confederate dollar, in 1866.

Comrade Kerry has made a big stir, as I said, over the fact that the transcript was not edited. But he neglected to say that this was not noted at the head of the transcript. How is anyone to know at a distance of 3,000 miles if a transcript has been edited or not? The PC minutes made no mention of a transcript and I did not know of its existence until it arrived in the mail. Comrades can see for themselves on page 25 of the bulletin we are discussing that there is nothing said about this being an unedited transcript. The reproduction begins with the first page of the transcript.

Comrade Kerry now informs us that he was involved in editing the Jenness letter to me. If that is so, and we have to take his word for it, then his role in this matter is all the more reprehensible. Because, as I proved with quotations, there are discrepancies between the remarks at the PC discussion and the letter.

Comrade Kerry has appended his remarks and the letter. That is good. Does he deny what the transcript says? He does not say. He only complains that he did not edit it. Comrades who are interested can read both and they will find that on the point in dispute, that is, critical support to Stalinist candidates, Comrade Kerry agreed with me but the letter did not indicate this. This is the real reason that Comrade Kerry, if I may borrow an expression he uses, has thrown more heat than light on this question.

Comrade Kerry treats us to some razzle-dazzle on whether I accused him of "misunderstanding" or "misrepresentation." This refers to his statement in the transcript that said I was wrong in believing that the Communist Party is now composed ". . . exclusively—or even primarily, as far as I know—of hardened Stalinists," as he put it. This is what I objected to and rightfully so because, first, I do not believe this and, second, I have never written or said such a thing. If Comrade Kerry read my letters, as he insists all PC members did, he could not possibly come to this conclusion.

Whether he misrepresented or misunderstood my position is of little importance. He *mis-stated* it, according to the transcript, and that is what requires clarification, if anything does.

Comrade Kerry, in his indignation about the transcript being distributed without editing is completely phony. If he wants to change anything in it, why doesn't he do it now? Or why did he not find room to do this in his lengthy article about flying trapezes. The truth is more likely that he did not want the party to know that on the important question of critical support he agreed with me. Conscience, which Shakespeare thought made cowards of us all, restraineth not the intrepid Kerry.

Comrade Kerry, his magnifying glass firmly in hand, discovered the fact that I referred to the present-day Communist Party as a "sect." He sure makes a lot of capital out of that. But it quickly turns out to be fool's gold. Comrade Kerry acknowledges that I was not referring to CP politics but rather to their size compared to what they once were.

Giving this a convoluted twist, Comrade Kerry accuses me of using only their numerical strength or weakness to determine our attitude to the CP. Numbers are an important but not the only factor. Comrade Kerry forgets that in my letters on the CP I also used political factors to arrive at my position, some of which he agreed with

according to the transcript.

Another big point he tries to make is that I wrote it was "proper" for Trotsky to propose critical support to Browder in 1940. Anyone interested in facts can see that what was meant by me was that it was *proper or correct in principle* to take the position that Trotsky defended. I don't know what is wrong with that.

Does one have to spell out every word, dot every i and cross every t in a letter to the PC? If Comrade Kerry is going to look at all correspondence under a microscope, hunting for deviations, perhaps it will become necessary to be more precise.

But our author "doth protest too much, methinks." He got no chance, he says, to edit a transcript of remarks made while thinking out loud. But I am assaulted for doing the same thing in a letter.

Comrade Kerry has some fun trying to prove an inconsistency on my part because I say that they are both a sect and an obstacle to us. These, he believes, are mutually exclusive. He forgets that the CP is such a sect (numerically) that is still larger than we are. My opinion is that sect or no sect, they are an obstacle to us.

I am among those comrades who have urged more and not less attention to the Stalinists and their milieu. My record is clear on this: the many articles I wrote for our press at one time, the many classes I have given on various aspects of Stalinism, the public meetings where I have spoken and even special letters sent to various comrades and editors urging more attention to the CP and YWLL. I will not burden the reader with a list of my activities in this respect but I can assure anyone interested that it is impressive and not at all what Comrade Kerry is trying to convey.

I am also attacked for making a concession in the case of critical support in San Jose. Evidently Comrade Kerry does not remember the differences between tactics and principle. I have always said and say again that it is permissible in principle for us to give critical support to the CP. If I thought it not the best tactic in recent years and even in San Jose, there was nothing wrong in principle. I do not practice in our movement the kind of politics Comrade Kerry attributes to me, that is, as he says, ". . . the head on assault, with no quarter granted and no mercy shown, . . ." This is a good description of his own style as anyone who has ever differed with him can testify.

Throwing all caution to the winds, Comrade Kerry accuses me of either "sheer demagoguery or a deliberate falsification of the record." This little jewel is in regard to his allegation that I said giving critical support to Stalinist candidates attributes something progressive to them. However, it appears that Comrade Kerry cannot remember what he wrote only one paragraph before this where he quoted my objection to referring to the CP as "part of the socialist movement."

The falsification is all with him. He knows that I called attention to "part of the socialist movement" as "giving them credit for something progressive" and not giving critical support. Trying to crawl out of the hole he has dug for himself (see the transcript) Comrade Kerry then goes on to explain the basis of his opposition to putting the Stalinists into a "socialist movement." This formula is not precise enough, you see.

I am also taken to task because I wrote the Communist Party is both a working class party and not a part of a socialist movement but rather a part of an "anti-socialist"

movement. This, I think, is the traditional Trotskyist assessment of the Stalinists, that is, they defend the capitalist system. I thought Comrade Kerry had noticed that. Isn't that what they are up to in this country, France, Italy, Portugal, England, etc., etc.? If they are trying to replace capitalist with socialism, Comrade Kerry should tell us where this is taking place.

For his further edification I am compelled to point out to Comrade Kerry that there are other anti-socialist tendencies that are parts of the labor movement. This should be ABC to Marxists. George Meany and the union bureaucracy are both anti-socialist and working class in character. No?

On page 23 of the bulletin Comrade Kerry twice more puts words between quotation marks, thereby giving the impression that he is quoting me. The two instances describe Norman Thomas as "our" candidate. I never referred to him in that way which implies that he was our choice. We did not choose Thomas, he was the candidate of the Socialist Party in 1936. But it just happened that at that time we were members of the Socialist Party carrying out a maneuver there and for that reason we supported him in the campaign.

My question, which Comrade Kerry ridicules, was not whether or not we supported Thomas in 1936, which we had to do, but if he, that is, Tom Kerry, would have favored giving Thomas critical support, if we had then been *outside the Socialist Party*. He answers this in the negative and that should have sufficed.

Another big thing is manufactured by Comrade Kerry in a point regarding my contention that we could not have gained anything by giving Browder critical support in 1940. Comrade Kerry says something to the effect that since we gained nothing anyhow from the CP by not giving critical support, what was there to lose by giving such support? You cannot get less than nothing, he claims.

If we had nothing to gain from the CP, as I claimed, we did have *something to lose* among other parts of the working class. Comrade Kerry conveniently omits that this was what the party leaders who discussed with Trotsky thought. I agree with them.

Two points in Comrade Kerry's hysterical outburst near the end of his article require a response. One, I never insinuated that there was a division in the central leadership between the older and younger comrades. Neither Kerry nor anyone else can substantiate this and he does not even try. Two, I have never made a "venomous slur," as he calls it, against the younger comrades and this also is incapable of proof. If there is any venom in this discussion, and there is, it all comes from Kerry.

On the point that I urged close relations between the younger leaders and the older ones because the former lacked, through no fault of their own, I said, first-hand experience in the unions, while the latter had such

experience. This plain and true remark which I used to argue against eliminating the category of advisory membership on the national committee is transmogrified by Pope Kerry the First into the idea that I am putting myself forward as that comrade from whom our leaders should seek advice on union questions! Can anything be more absurd? Comrade Kerry, in an unusual display of moderation and reasonableness, refers to me as "the Great I Am, Milt Alvin!" I will demonstrate this is not only in poor taste but a big lie.

In the years when I was active in union work I depended heavily on comrades who had experience in this field and I have always urged newcomers to this field from our party to do the same. However, it is many years now since I have had any first-hand connections with the union movement.

A few years ago, while on a speaking assignment in San Diego, a comrade asked me for advice on a problem he had in his union. I declined and urged him to confer with other comrades in the area who were much closer to union activity than I have been.

For years I have made no effort to interfere in any way, with advice or anything else, in union work and have no intention at this late age to give advice whether it is sought or not. Comrade Kerry knows this quite well.

From his perch on Mount Olympus Tom Kerry hurls thunderbolts at any and all who have the nerve to disagree with him. He knows that these will not clarify anything and that I will reply to him. But the purpose of his article about flying trapezes was not to silence me, which he knows he cannot do. It was to create a witch-hunt atmosphere against me in the party so that comrades will be afraid of his wrath if they give consideration to my views. His aim is to try to make me a pariah in the party.

But there is also a danger that his bombast will make comrades hesitate to express opinions because they do not want to get the kind of treatment I have been favored with. After all, who wants to be assaulted in the manner of a Kerry gone berserk?

I urge every comrade to remember that the founders of our party wanted a critical-minded, thinking membership. Comrades who have something to say or write should not be intimidated by the kind of article Kerry has contributed.

(A Note: I am submitting this reply to Kerry's slanders mainly to clarify the issues but also for the reason that no one in the party should get the impression that he can silence those who disagree with him. The spectacle of two old men in the party engaged in such a dispute is not a pretty one. But it would be far worse not to reply and permit the idea to get around that because Tom Kerry has opinions different from mine I have to bow down and keep my mouth shut.

It would be a disservice to the party not to reply, if only for the reason that Tom Kerry would be encouraged to silence others if I did not.)

Placing Our CLUW Work in Perspective

by Chris Hildebrand
Central-East Branch, Los Angeles Local

July 13, 1975

I want to discuss a couple of aspects of the development of the Coalition of Labor Union Women in the fifteen months since its founding convention, and discuss our work in CLUW in relationship to our trade union work in general.

What has CLUW accomplished since its founding convention? It has recruited nearly 4,000 members nationally—certainly not spectacular growth. It has over forty chapters. Since we have party branches in many of the cities where CLUW exists, we know that these chapters fall basically into three types as outlined in reports sent out from Linda Jenness.

1) Chapters that are controlled by sectarian opponents of ours—generally the October League or I.S. These have no participation from the official labor movement and are very small, even though they tend to be some of the more active chapters.

2) Chapters which are composed of primarily a group of women officials and a group of radicals with not much in between.

3) Chapters which have a certain layer of independent activists.

The chapter I am most familiar with, Los Angeles, falls somewhere between number two and number three. With close to three hundred members we have a large number of active trade unionists on our books, but they have not become very much involved in chapter activity as yet.

Without a doubt CLUW has established itself *nationally* as a legitimate part of the official trade union movement. Yet its development has been very contradictory.

Since its founding convention, CLUW has held three national coordinating committee meetings—attended by over 100 elected delegates each. These gatherings formulate the official policy decisions between conventions. They have taken a number of positions on questions of no small importance to women or the labor movement as a whole.

1) Come out strongly against any attempts to roll back gains in the right to abortion.

2) Taken a strong position in defense of Black students in Boston and support to mass actions around this issue.

3) Support to bi-lingual and bi-cultural education.

4) Opposed forced sterilization.

5) Supported the struggles of Native Americans.

6) Called for Martin Luther King's birthday to be a national holiday.

7) For release of all political prisoners in Chile.

8) Against any attempts to blame undocumented workers for the economic crisis and denounced deportations of these workers.

9) In support of the UFW boycott in spite of staunch resistance from the Teamster bureaucrats.

10) Supported the UFW organizing drive currently in progress in Southern Texas.

11) Most importantly, last January, before almost any other actions of the labor union movement around the jobs issue, CLUW initiated an ambitious program against the layoffs as its main priority for attention and action. This continues today. In launching this campaign, it drew up a series of demands which was to form the framework for its programmatic approach to the question. I think it is worth calling attention to these demands to note the difference between CLUW's "official" program and that of the AFL-CIO, UAW and other labor organizations:

*shorter workweek at no loss of pay.

*no overtime as long as anyone is laid off.

*no wage controls.

*cost of living clauses in all contracts.

*no speed-up or other form of job harassment.

*full SUB pay backed by the employer's assets for the duration of layoffs for all workers.

*unemployment insurance raised to two-thirds of gross pay, top limit removed, with no one to receive less than the minimum wage for the duration of unemployment for all categories of workers, including first time workers.

*more jobs at union wages and working conditions including public works jobs and any other measures to create full employment.

*unions to place the burden of past discrimination of minorities and women on employers rather than the workers.

*no runaway shops.

*legislation to roll back prices starting with the necessities—food, rent, utilities.

*oppose budget cuts in programs for people and recommend a cut in U.S. military spending to pay for these programs.

CLUW supported mass actions of the labor movement for jobs, also those initiated by P.U.S.H. and in some areas initiated actions itself.

While CLUW has not supported the idea of a labor party, neither has it moved towards supporting any bourgeois candidates yet, and has taken an official stand against endorsements of political campaigns.

These are positions it has taken since its founding "Statement of Purpose," which was also quite a sound document. Taken as a whole, these positions place CLUW *on paper* far to the left of most of the organized labor movement today.

Even though CLUW has a program on economic and social issues which could serve as a model for a class struggle tendency in the unions, it is *not* taking that course at the present time. Why this contradiction?

First the reason CLUW has taken so many better positions, is because of the *relative weight* of radicals and revolutionaries within CLUW as compared to the weakness of these forces in the labor movement as a whole or even in particular unions.

But one of the reasons CLUW's program remains largely on paper is because neither the officials nor the collection of numerous ultra-lefts/sectarians in CLUW, which greatly outnumber ourselves, have any perspectives to reach rank and file women and mobilize them in struggle around any of these issues.

In spite of continuing problems with the sectarians and bureaucrats, CLUW has continued to develop. It hasn't disappeared and the Socialist Workers Party has played no small part in pushing it forward. Our role is recognized by everyone—friend and foe—as rather significant. This has been in spite of very limited numbers of comrades involved.

CLUW today retains its importance as a bridge between the feminist movement and the trade unions. It is an organized expression of the current radicalization and a confirmation of our party's analysis. An excellent step was taken here in Los Angeles in strengthening this bridge when CLUW voted to endorse the August 26th activities being organized by a coalition of a dozen or more women's groups. We pushed for the perspective of CLUW actively participating in the coalition and demonstration, to raise the issue of the layoffs, and protest the effects of the economic crisis on working women. Because of CLUW's intervention, this issue will be taken up in the march and was welcomed by the coalition. This will be the first time L.A. CLUW has related organizationally to the feminist movement.

Today CLUW is just a shell, though it retains the potential to develop into a fighting organization of working women, the first organization of its kind to come on the scene. Comrade Barry Sheppard's report to the plenum on party tasks correctly points out that CLUW will be built and realize its potential to the extent that it becomes a real organization in the unions themselves and that this should be the direction of our work. To aid in this process, we must become active in our own unions to help build a base for CLUW there. Where we've tried to do this we've been moderately successful. One thing we've done is to put constant pressure on our own officials to take certain steps to build CLUW. We've also succeeded in bringing a small number of rank and file women into CLUW.

I want to point out another reason why CLUW's program remains largely on paper at this time. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, CLUW suffers from the same general conditions as the unions as a whole today—as Jack Barnes pointed out in his political report to the plenum, most young workers today do not look to their union for solutions to their problems. But as Barnes also points out, this is changing slightly and what is more important is that workers *must* look to their unions for solutions, and if the unions are unresponsive, transform them so they can become revolutionary instruments of class struggle that lead social and political fights forward. If they don't, the unions will become the police agencies for the bosses and their government.

At this point in time, our role in organizing a class

struggle left wing to help the transformation of the unions, is primarily a propaganda effort. But this is an important job for us. "The class struggle left wing will not blossom without the participation of revolutionists," to quote from the Barnes report.

I hope that comrades don't underestimate the value CLUW serves as a form through which we can interject our ideas into the unions. Our participation in CLUW makes our efforts far more productive. I say this in spite of the *present* limitations of CLUW in terms of its composition. The fact that we have fought for CLUW taking all these good positions is a tremendous asset. Most of CLUW's positions are ones we want to raise within the unions. We can use our positions of respect and authority which we've earned in CLUW to raise many aspects of CLUW's program in our own unions and among co-workers on the job. The work we did in CLUW enabled a number of comrades to become shop stewards. We can get weekly or monthly articles or even CLUW columns in our union publications. Through activities of this kind, we can come in contact with radicalizing workers beyond the narrow layer that are currently active in the unions.

While at this time there are not many activists in most CLUW chapters that are potential recruits to the SWP, there are thousands of women and men in our own shops and plants and offices that are potential recruits and who we can reach easier because we are active in CLUW. Some are recruitable now, many more will be, as the radicalization deepens. As Barry pointed out in his Tasks and Perspectives report to the plenum, our gains will not be immediate or spectacular as we begin to work more in the unions. He reminds us that it took the YSA a lot of time and hard work to build up its campus fractions. But I believe that the respect and authority we've earned through CLUW makes this task somewhat easier than it would otherwise be, and will continue to make it easier as other women comrades get union jobs and become members of CLUW. Additionally, if CLUW grows, it will enable us to reach women in other unions, where we do not have fractions, with many of our ideas.

Because of everything I've said, I believe the assignment of comrades to CLUW remains a very important area of trade-union work for us, and will continue to reinforce all our other work in the unions (except in areas where the CLUW chapters are so ostracized from the labor movement that it *inhibits* our ability to work in our own unions). But it should also be obvious that the assignment of a comrade to CLUW work entails a great many things besides attending occasional city-wide CLUW meetings. In order to win influence in CLUW we must be active in our own unions. Additionally, our activity in CLUW helps us to meet people and win respect in our own unions—we work through women's committees, as shop stewards, and in some of the other ways I described. This is in addition to our responsibilities as builders of the local CLUW chapters. Of course we shouldn't be activists for the sake of activity. We should not take on responsibilities that don't merit our efforts. It is important that we now begin to organize this work more formally and think out how we can begin to carry out some of our political campaigns in the unions. The ground we've broken through our CLUW work will prove a valuable asset.

Comments on the Trade Union Movement, Affirmative Action and Seniority

By Frank Lovell

July 14, 1975

Unions and the civil rights movement

Most unions were not sympathetic to the civil rights movement. Some endorsed the general struggle against discrimination because that is part of the CIO tradition, but such endorsement was largely token.

The union bureaucracy in general, as represented by George Meany, was hostile to the civil rights movement. They grudgingly accepted and finally endorsed some of the civil rights goals only after the Johnson administration was forced to grant concessions in the form of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

When employment quotas for Blacks and others were established under Title VII, Meany and other building trades bureaucrats lined up among the staunchest opponents.

This was one of the reasons Walter Reuther gave in 1968 for pulling the United Auto Workers (UAW) out of the AFL-CIO. He understood that the reactionary position of the Meany gang was giving the union movement a bad reputation, hampering its ability to organize the unorganized workers, and threatening its political influence inside the Democratic party. Reuther was interested in projecting a different image. He endorsed the civil rights movement, while doing nothing to help build it.

The CIO and "equal rights"

The traditional position of the CIO unions against discrimination was different from and more limited than the goals of the civil rights movement. The CIO won the support of Black communities in its formative years because it opposed discrimination on the job and in the union movement. That was a big advance in those days. It gave equal protection to all workers in their assigned job classifications, and it admitted Black workers to membership on an equal basis.

This was an important and necessary change from the practice of most of the old AFL craft unions which either excluded or segregated Blacks.

But the new CIO unions never took into account the special needs of Blacks and other minorities.

The auto industry is an example of the limitation of the CIO unions. It employed Black workers, not many. The Ford Motor Company had a policy of hiring Blacks, but they were used in the steel mill at the River Rouge plant, on some heavy assembly line jobs, and for menial work. These Black workers helped build the auto union and were consistently among its most active members in the prolonged struggle to establish its control throughout the industry.

Some women were also employed in the auto industry, doing "women's work" in sewing rooms. Women were prominent in the 1937 sit-down strikes and the auto union could not have survived those early struggles without the support of strikers' wives and other women who helped win the initial victories.

The UAW, from its earliest beginning through the years of its greatest strength, never demanded jobs for women and Blacks those in departments where they were traditionally excluded by the discriminatory hiring policies of the auto corporations. Black workers won promotions and in some instances managed to break into the skilled trades with union support and backing, but these were exceptional instances. It was not the general policy of the UAW to demand special consideration for its Black members to break down long established racial barriers. It never occurred to the white male leadership to make such demands.

The history of the UAW on discrimination in the selection of top union officials is similar to its limited protection of equal rights on the job. By comparison to most other unions it has a "progressive" reputation. But the record shows that the Reuther leadership during the decade of the 1960s always kept its distance from the civil rights movement, and never took the lead to break down the barriers of discrimination and segregation.

Nelson Jack Edwards was the first Black member of the UAW's International Executive Board, and he was put there in 1962 only as an accommodation to the new pressures of the civil rights movement. He was a token Black on the board, selected by the Reuther machine because he was a compliant and reliable supporter of the bureaucracy's policies. He was finally made a vice president in 1970.

The same is true of Olga Madar who was likewise put on the UAW International Executive Board as a token, a symbol of women's liberation and the "advanced thinking" of the union's white, male leadership.

The Reuther bureaucracy in the UAW expressed the prejudices and the complacency of "old time" white workers in the auto industry just as the Meany gang in the building trades represented and upheld the privileges of white workers there. There was no difference between them on the question of the pariah status of Blacks and their failure to break this down by recognizing the special needs of Black workers.

Reuther rejected *in principle* the idea that minorities and women deserve representation in the leading bodies of the union; that they ought to be represented in proportion to

their relative numbers in the membership; that they should represent the special interests and needs of their constituents; and that they should be chosen by caucuses of women, Blacks and other minorities at union conventions.

Reuther was opposed to all caucuses except the Reuther caucus. He argued that all officials ought to be elected on "merit" which was always judged and determined by the Reuther caucus. Reuther may not have invented the "racism in reverse" argument, but he was among the first to use it. Whenever the growing number of Blacks in the union demanded that a Black be endorsed by the Reuther caucus and elected to the International Executive Board, it was always Reuther who seized the occasion to "explain" that anyone elected to the highest decision-making body must be "qualified" by virtue of proven ability in the service of the union. To elect anyone because of race would be "racism in reverse."

This was hardly a convincing argument in light of the caliber and qualifications of Reuther's supporters who sat on the Executive Board, but it served their purposes and no Black person was ever elected until they were forced to bend to the pressures of the civil rights movement.

They had no trouble then finding a Black with "merit," one who conformed to their standards—but they set a quota of one. This is the only kind of "quota" they favor. They also have a quota of one for women members on their Executive Board.

To the present day, the UAW bureaucracy now headed by Leonard Woodcock, is as much opposed to "quotas" in hiring or firing or advance on the job as is George Meany or Albert Shanker.

They have their own compelling reasons for defending and seeking to perpetuate the old racial relations in the work force that resulted from discriminatory hiring, but their defense of the privileges of white male workers stems from the needs and demands of the employers.

Strength and weakness of the union movement

The union movement with its 20-million members, its financial reserves, and its established organizational structure appears powerful. But the truth is the unions as presently constituted are weak, not powerful. They are retreating right now all along the line before the concerted drive by the employing class to reduce the standard of living. This has been going on since August 1971 when Nixon imposed the wage freeze and announced the government's New Economic Policy. The retreat on some sectors of the economic front has become a rout, as in New York City with the municipal workers unions.

The union movement has great *potential* strength, but this can be realized only when its forces are rallied to defend the social and economic gains that have been won in past struggles. The union ranks will be organized, educated, disciplined, and inspired to new victories through mass actions in concert with the natural allies of the unions—the Black people and other minorities, the millions of unorganized workers, the unemployed, the student youth, women workers and housewives, and all the poor.

This is how unions were founded initially and how the CIO movement was created in the crucible of the Great Depression, out of class struggle and solidarity.

The meaning of class solidarity

Present day union officials have such narrow interests in keeping existing union contracts, saving the dues check-off system, protecting fringe benefits, pursuing past collective bargaining procedures, and other daily worries—that are all part of the business of running a union in the way today's officials have been trained to think it should be run—that they have lost sight of how the unions were organized in the first place, who organized them, and for what purposes. Details of union operation and efforts to hang onto real gains already won are important, but the routine methods of class-collaboration and political toadyism acquired during the post World War II period of economic expansion are no help today. Union officials with no other experience don't know what class solidarity means, and most of them have abandoned the principle of union solidarity.

This is revealed in their near-unanimous endorsement of strict seniority rules when it comes to layoffs. None of them think there is much they can do about the layoffs, but they are all convinced that those who were last in should be first out in accordance with company seniority lists.

Wayne K. Medders, president of UAW local 1250 in Cleveland, told a reporter for *Business Week* magazine, "There is no way I would stand for bypassing seniority." Medders thinks, "That's how the union was built." That's how much he knows, and he is typical.

The union movement was built in struggle to organize the unorganized, to protect the weakest and most exploited, and to force the employers to recognize and respect the union and its representatives who were employed in the shops and mills.

The CIO movement was more than this. It was a social movement of the working class seeking to bring industrial democracy to the privately owned and mismanaged industries of this country. It promised to satisfy the needs of the unemployed, the hungry, the outcasts of this society. It fought for jobs, equality, and a better life for all. It was a movement of the working class against the employing class. It recognized the employing class as the enemy, responsible for mass unemployment, scarcity, starvation, social degradation. In the great class battles of the 1930s against these evils, the CIO movement engendered a strong feeling of class solidarity in millions of poor people of all races and nationalities where none existed before. That's how the union movement was built. It was built on class solidarity and could not have been built otherwise.

Seniority

A survey conducted by *Business Week* earlier this year "failed to find a single employer who openly flaunted seniority in order to retain minority or women workers."

Why is it that employers *favor the seniority system*?

The economic depression prompts the employers to reduce and streamline their workforce. They impose speedup, disregard union work rules, combine job classifications, rearrange work departments, and eliminate Blacks and women workers from "unsuited categories."

One of the means for accomplishing these purposes is the *seniority system* through which those longest employed are kept on and shifted around (and in the process many of the older workers nearing retirement are sifted out) to suit the

needs of the employers. Under these circumstances the seniority system serves to provide a *stable workforce* just as it always has, despite the use the unions were able to make of it in periods of rising militancy to protect union members against flagrantly arbitrary victimization.

This explains why the employers are unanimously in favor of applying the rules of seniority in the current round of layoffs. It is a good excuse for them to brush aside the court-ordered affirmative action programs and to reestablish their control over preferential hiring, i.e. the hiring of those they prefer.

As layoffs continue, the employers use the seniority lists to fire those they want to get rid of and keep those they prefer. This is the way they like it.

With all the outlandish claims made today for the virtues of the seniority system, it is useful to recall what part the so-called *principle of seniority* had in union organizing drives.

Seniority had little or nothing to do with organizing the unions. Those who fought for the union in the basic industries returned to their jobs when the big strikes were won and stayed on to improve conditions under union control. Others who stuck with the company and scabbed during the strikes, usually had to leave. Among the scabs who left there were often quite a few loyal employees who had been with the company for several years with high seniority ratings. That didn't help them because they had low ratings with union workers.

After the unions were established and many company-minded workers had either left or been promoted to the lower ranks of management, then the unions undertook to supervise and enforce the seniority lists to protect older union workers and younger militants against attempts by management to lay them off out of line of seniority.

In this way the company seniority lists were turned to good advantage. They were used then to serve the needs of the union. Union stewards were often placed at the top of the seniority list, regardless of years served with the company. In the building trades, the union steward is always the last person on the job when the work winds down and the project is finally finished.

There have always been adjustments in the seniority list. When the unions are strong and viable, certain adjustments are made to protect the basic interests of the workforce, and to promote solidarity of the working class. In recent years as unions have become weakened under corrupt or compliant leaders, other adjustments in the seniority lists are commonly made to suit the needs of the employers. It is an accepted practice now for a worker who has been promoted to foreman or some other management job to retain his seniority listing if he is returned to the bargaining unit. This often squeezes out some middle-ranking seniority worker who otherwise would not have been hit in the layoffs.

Those workers recently hired under affirmative action programs are demanding an adjustment of seniority lists in the face of the current massive layoffs. The purpose is to guarantee *no reduction in the ratio of Blacks and women on the job*. This is a perfectly fair demand. It is not an unusual demand and will not be an unprecedented procedure. It will not destroy seniority. It is different from other adjustments in seniority only because it will serve to break down the lines of racial discrimination and benefit Blacks and other minorities and women. The NAACP has endorsed this demand. The union movement would be strengthened if it

also supported this demand that will help to restore the class solidarity upon which the union movement must depend for its survival.

The revival of unionism

Unions are coming under heavy attack. The most powerful weapons of the employing class are trained upon them. These include the various agencies at all levels of government that regulate labor-management relations, the courts, and the mass media. Already the unions have suffered some serious losses without much fighting. The most crippling losses to date are the massive layoffs; forced reduction of the work week with corresponding loss in pay; the enforcement of no-strike laws, and stiff fines levied by anti-labor judges; the imposition, in some instances, of compulsory arbitration; mass firing and lockouts of isolated strikers; the destruction of some local unions. Teachers and public workers have been hardest hit. Big unions in basic industries have also been winged—the Auto union, the Steelworkers, the Machinists, some locals of the Teamsters union, all building trades unions. No union is immune from the effects of mounting unemployment.

We can expect that the union movement will suffer further losses before its forces rally to defend themselves. There will be big changes within the unions as the class conflict sharpens. Workers are bound to turn to the union in large numbers for defense, because they have no where else to go. But when they do they will bring with them their own methods of class struggle which are alien to the present class collaborationist leaders.

Within the mass of union members there are now the forces that can organize and lead new struggles. They need only to be grouped together, given some experience in class actions, and gain the feel of their own power. How this can be done was demonstrated recently in a modest way by two locals of District Council 37 of AFSCME in New York City when they called a joint action of all victims of the drastic cutbacks in city services.

Their call went out to all the unions of the city, and it also went to student organizations and to the Black and Puerto Rican communities. The mounting pressure of the city administration on the unions, combined with the growing unrest caused by further reduction in all types of public service, insure that similar united front protest actions in the future will have broad support. These in turn will prepare the necessary popular support for union strike actions that demand basic social and political changes. These actions will not be limited simply to the immediate economic demands of a small group of workers in one particular union.

The various unions with the narrow self-centered outlook of their present leaders are squabbling among themselves for the small advantages that each hopes can be gained at the expense of the others. This reflects and contributes to the divisions within the union movement and within the class. But the more basic divisions that hamper the workers in any serious struggle to improve their conditions are between the organized and unorganized, the employed and unemployed, whites and the national minorities, the youth and older workers, men in industry and the women who are trying to break into traditional blue-collar jobs. These divisions will be overcome in the course of mass struggles to organize the unorganized, create jobs for the unemployed, and win equal status for Blacks and women— *providing there is a leadership that understands*

these issues.

Trotsky taught us that the program is decisive. "The correct program not only arouses and consolidates the masses, but also trains the leaders," he said. We cannot expect that the masses will be aroused and will rally around only one point of our transitional program. At different times the issues make some parts of the program more prominent and immediately applicable than others. But the entire program must be understood, explained, and applied.

At the moment, because of the shock of mass layoffs, the question of discrimination and preferential employment has assumed greater importance than it appeared to have previously, when industry was expanding, new jobs were available, and younger workers moved easily from one job to another with little thought of seniority. This question of protecting the rights of those workers who have recently been hired under affirmative action programs has suddenly become a big issue in the union movement.

Our duty is to explain that if the unions fail to protect the weakest and most vulnerable of their members, and if they allow the employers to reinstitute discriminatory employment practices, then the union movement itself will be further exposed and isolated from the sources of working class power and will be subject to new and fierce bombardment.

Our defense of affirmative action programs and other

gains won by the civil rights movement and by the women's liberation movement is neither revisionist nor opportunist. It is strictly in accordance with our revolutionary tradition, our proletarian orientation, and our transitional program. It serves to unite the working class; strengthen the union movement; raise the social and political consciousness of the masses; and prepare for the class battles that alone can win full employment and equal job opportunity for all.

Can we convince the mass of workers that this is true? We think we already have a good start. We begin with the most conscious and militant Black workers, with Puerto Ricans and Chicanos, and the women, and the radical youth including young white workers. These are the ranks from which the new class conscious leadership in the unions will come.

We must, of course, explain our program and our method of mass action. What we have to say is not limited to the current dispute over affirmative action versus seniority. But unless we are clear on this issue then what we have to say about the rest of our program will not be convincing. Our purpose in this is to demonstrate how to strengthen the union movement by uniting all victims of capitalist oppression in struggle against the employing class. That's what unionism is. That's how the unions were built. That's the only way they will survive.

"BLIMP" TAYLOR'S 1973 CAMPAIGN FOR LOS ANGELES CONTROLLER

by Stu Singer, Houston Branch

July 14, 1975

Bill "Blimp" (for his inflated appearance) Taylor, the Southern California Chairman of the Communist Party, ran for Los Angeles Controller in 1973. One campaign endorsement Taylor and his supporters did not welcome came from the Socialist Workers Party. Comrade Milt Alvin disagreed with our extending critical support to Taylor at the time. In his strongly titled articles in the present discussion, Comrade Alvin raises this question again. It may be interesting to look back at that campaign and its context.

The Communist Party in Los Angeles is weaker—absolutely and relatively—than in the last radicalization. But the Moscow oriented Stalinists are still a big obstacle to socialism. Their old network of wealthy sympathizers stretching from Malibu to Beverly Hills to the white suburbs of the San Fernando Valley were cultivated for years by Dorothy Healy, and it has not all been lost to the C.P. since Healy's departure. Stalinist influence is not just among liberal patrons, but also among a fairly large number of young Blacks and Chicanos.

In the period prior to the Spring 1973 election, Bill Taylor and Dorothy Healy were the main public spokespeople for the CP in Los Angeles. Taylor would be featured in the *People's World* (West Coast CP weekly) and the *Daily World* as issuing the proclamations on CP line. He would be the main speaker at Stalinist events. The division of labor seemed to have Taylor work more with maintaining CP contacts in the Black and labor movements while Healy traveled the suburban circuit for coffee and cocktails and kept up her radio show. She played a bigger role than Taylor in organizing the CP wrecking operations on the campuses and in the antiwar movement. (Healy found it too hard to defend the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to her friends in the Democratic Party, and she publicly broke with the official line on this. Taylor remained loyal to Gus Hall and Moscow. Over 5 years after the invasion, Healy and some people around her parted ways with the CP.)

In the 1973 L.A. municipal elections, the focus was on the race for mayor. The incumbent was right wing cretin Sam Yorty, who had entered politics as a progressive supported by the CP. Yorty practiced yoga to blend in with the Southern California lifestyle. He spent the city budget on world tours for himself and more equipment for the cops. Yorty was being challenged for the second time by Black City Councilman Tom Bradley, an ex-cop and UCLA track star who had come very close to beating Yorty in the previous election. Yorty won then by a racist and red-baiting campaign. But as Yorty himself noted, by 1973 Los Angeles politics had moved to the left and was catching up to other cosmopolitan cities. In 1973 Bradley was supported by the *Los Angeles Times*, the Democratic Party, the Communist Party, most of the Black community

and many radicalized young people. The Communist Party's support for Bradley was complete and unequivocal. The only thing that dampened their expressions of public support was fear that it would give Yorty red-baiting ammunition to hurt Bradley. When Black Panther leader and Democrat Bobby Seale came to Los Angeles during the campaign and endorsed Bradley, Bradley denounced Seale. The CPers must have shaken their heads at Seale's irresponsibility.

There was an alternative offered to the ex-cop and the yoga practicing red-baiter. The Socialist Workers Party ran a young Chicana activist, Olga Rodríguez, for Mayor. She was on the ballot, won a court fight to partially do away with the filing fee, and in general ran a very aggressive campaign. Although the direct gains we made through recruitment were modest, we probably underestimate the impact of that campaign.

Through the radicalization of the '60s and early '70s Los Angeles remained a little behind the rest of the country. I think this was because of several factors. The Southern California economy continued to expand, especially because of the concentration of war industries. A very repressive policy was carried out toward the Black, Chicano and antiwar movements and against the left in general. Major attacks took place such as the Century City police riot in 1967 against an antiwar demonstration outside the hotel where Lyndon Johnson was speaking, the police murders of Black Panther members, and the vicious attack on the Chicano Moratorium antiwar demonstration in 1970. Un-uniformed cops, like the CIA gusano terrorists conducted a long violent campaign against the left. It is continued today by the Nazis. All these attacks made people think twice before participating in an antiwar or any other kind of demonstration in Los Angeles. An additional negative factor was the weight of the Communist Party, especially among the liberal forces needed to build an effective movement. The C.P. was against building a large antiwar movement. Their approach was to alternate organizing ultra-left actions to soak up the militancy of antiwar activists and then steering them into campaigns for Democratic Party peace candidates and lobbying. This approach did hold back the antiwar movement in LA to some extent. (There are also deeper origins to the relative backwardness of Los Angeles, going back to the failure to unionize the *Los Angeles Times* around the famous McNamara Brothers bombing incident in 1911. Another aspect of the ruthlessness of bourgeois development in Los Angeles is more or less accurately portrayed in the movie "Chinatown".)

The combination of all these forces kept the antiwar movement fairly small. Our intervention before 1972 did achieve some important gains, especially around GI defense work. In 1972 a national effort was made to

strengthen the antiwar movement there, and Los Angeles was chosen as the site on the West Coast for the national demonstrations called for April 22, 1972.

After repeated head-on and flanking battles, the Communist Party's wrecking operation against the demonstration was blunted, and the antiwar movement in Los Angeles took a big turn to the left. The success of the April 22 demonstration also represented a shift in the relation of forces in Los Angeles away from the CP and toward us. But this shift is still not decisive. The CP remains a big obstacle for us.

This is the context leading up to the April 1973 municipal elections. The branch decided to run Olga Rodríguez for mayor and a number of comrades for various other races such as School Board, Community College Board of Trustees and City Council. We did not announce a candidate for City Controller. I think there were several reasons for this, having to do with a high anticipated filing fee, and the feeling that Controller was not a post that was considered important, and it would not provide many speaking engagements for us. After we had been campaigning for a while, we learned from the *People's World* that the CP was announcing a candidate for the municipal race, Southern California Stalinist Chairman, Bill Taylor. Both in the *People's World* and other literature put out by the CP, they made a big deal about running this "veteran Black labor leader and community organizer, head of the Communist Party" for Los Angeles Controller.

After discussion in the LA branch which lasted several weeks as a result of Comrade Alvin's objections, the branch voted to recommend to the Political Committee that we give critical support to Taylor for Controller. The idea that our support to Taylor was to be analagous to the support a rope gives a hanging man was well-understood by the branch. (There should be some kind of analogy to a rope holding down a blimp.) The Political Committee agreed and the Campaign Committee put out a leaflet. As reported in the *Militant* April 6, 1973, page 17, the open letter from Rodríguez to Taylor and his supporters explained that: "the SWP favors a vote for Taylor to help further the idea of independent working class political action against the Democrats and Republicans." The SWP said its call for a vote for Taylor was "despite the reformist program of the Communist Party. The record of class-collaboration of the CP is well-known: supporting capitalist politicians for President . . . supporting the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia . . . supporting the deal between Nixon and Brezhnev to defeat the Vietnamese revolution." In appealing for support to the SWP candidates the open letter said: "The issue is whether you will support the candidates of another tendency within the working class or . . . the twin parties of war, racism, sexism. . . ."

Unfortunately, the decision to extend critical support to Taylor came quite late in the election and we did not have too many opportunities to use this critical rope to hang the Stalinists. One meeting we leafletted was called something like the Echo Park-Silverlake forum. This obscure organization had a small classified ad in the *People's World*. The old Stalinists attending the meeting were not pleased to find a group of Trotskyists delivering open letters to them. It was the main topic of conversation. A few days later a comrade was browsing through the CP

bookstore when Dorothy Healy came in. As the comrade leafed through Boris Leibson's *PETTY BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONISM-ANARCHISM, TROTSKYISM AND MAOISM* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1970) he overheard Healy talking about how "the Trotskyites are handing out a leaflet supporting Taylor for controller." Noting Leibson's contention that "Trotskyist ideology is essentially cosmopolitan" (page 160), the comrade paid his 85¢ for the book and left after Healy finished her tirade.

I assume our leaflets caused a good bit of questioning on the part of young people in and around the CP. Especially young Chicanos could not easily dismiss the Rodríguez campaign and the impact it had at some of the Chicano high schools. (After the election the *L.A. Times* said some people in the Chicano community were not optimistic about Bradley, because things were so bad already under Yorty that people were afraid things would get worse under a new mayor. This election strategy should probably be called the "worse evil" theory.) The effect of our critical support maneuver went beyond the CP. In the milieu of radicals who had come in contact with both us and the CP prior to the 1973 campaign, we were seen as running a very aggressive, principled campaign and not being sectarian. In the eyes of these independent radicals the left was represented in the election by Olga Rodríguez for Mayor and Bill Taylor for Controller. And while Rodríguez publicly supported Taylor, Taylor supported the ex-cop Bradley and refused to support Rodríguez or any of the other socialist candidates. At least one prominent person whom we had worked with but assumed was in the CP milieu, donated some money to our campaign after we put out the statement on Taylor.

The April 13, 1973 *Militant* on page 16 quotes an article by Ron Ridenour that appeared in the March 30, 1973, *L.A. Free Press*, a widely circulated weekly. Ridenour himself is one of the people who has shifted between our milieu and the CP at various times. The article entitled "Leftists Seek City Posts" contrasted the SWP position of critical support to Taylor with the CP's position. Ridenour interviewed Communist Party campaign manager Pierre Mandel who tried to explain rationally why the CP supported Bradley for mayor and refused to support Rodríguez or any of the other socialist candidates. Mandel said the CP supported Bradley because "a victory for him makes it possible to defeat the racists." But as far as the SWP is concerned, it is "the difference in program. We don't support the efforts of Trotskyites."

The attitude of many radicals that the left should all get together is uninformed. But it represents a healthy attitude against sectarianism. Expressing our political disagreements while calling for a vote for Taylor put us in a very good position to discuss politics with people having this point of view. The *Free Press* article portrayed us in a very good light.

As already mentioned, I think we sometimes underestimate the effects of our election campaigns. We have to take into account criteria in addition to the most immediate—number of recruits. I think our campaign in Los Angeles in 1973 cut into the ability of the Communist Party especially, but even of the Democrats, to corral radicalized people behind Bradley's campaign. With our absence, the field would have been left open to them. I think the alternative we posed is remembered even by many people who voted for Bradley. Many people voted for him as a

lesser evil than Yorty and, especially among Blacks, because he is Black. But all the people who voted for him can now observe that in office, if Tom Bradley is "less evil," conditions are not much better. What is the solution? 'Well, there was that socialist who ran and said things would not get much better whether Yorty or Bradley was elected. . . .'

Just to take up a couple of the points Comrade Alvin makes about critical support to the CP:

1. The Communist Party in Los Angeles is not a sect in any way. It has more members and sympathizers than we do and still has significant influence in liberal and radical circles.

2. Taylor's campaign was not token. A look back at the *People's World* and the *Daily World* shows a number of articles on the Taylor campaign. In fact, the Taylor campaign was the major public activity of the Stalinists in Los Angeles for that whole period. It is true that the race for Controller did not receive much publicity; but because of the small number of candidates, Taylor received a large number of votes. The Stalinist press has made a big deal

out of this. In addition, Taylor is no insignificant figure. Bill "Blimp" Taylor was one of the main public figures of the CP in Los Angeles.

There must have been several reasons the CP ran Taylor:

1. to counter our campaign.
2. to give them a public activity to recruit from.
3. to provide a base for organizing support for Bradley, without embarrassing Bradley.

The CP did not run in order to promote independent political action breaking with the Democrats and Republicans. But an independent campaign by the leading CPer appeared that way to many people. Our maneuver of critical support to Taylor helped educate people about the need for independent working class political action and also helped expose the counter-revolutionary, anti-socialist line of the Stalinists. I think the *Free Press* article especially, made Pierre Mandel, "Blimp" Taylor and the rest of their gang appear to be twisting slowly in the wind, choking on the rope of our critical support. This was a modest but progressive development.

THE PARTY AND THE TRADE UNIONS

by Tom Leonard, Houston Branch

July 15, 1975

There can be no question but that the 1975 *Political Resolution* speaks emphatically of a turn toward the working class. First and foremost is what is meant by this turn. Does it mean that at some point in its history the SWP turned away from the working class? There is nothing in written resolutions supporting this contention.

From its inception in 1938 the world Trotskyist movement has had a proletarian orientation which was affirmed in the Transitional Program adopted at that time. During the long period of witch-hunt, followed by years of relative class peace, the Party lost its cadre in the working class. Despite this defeat, the Party nonetheless, for a number of years, presented resolutions on the trade union movement which defined the work comrades could do in these organizations, which was minimal and almost exclusively propagandistic in character.

It is therefore unfortunate that the Party leadership did not find it necessary to present a Trade Union Resolution as a supplement to the *Political Resolution*, which clearly defines what we can expect to do in the trade unions in the coming period. This has led to a considerable amount of confusion in the Party, and positions are being taken without coming to grips with this important question. There is undoubtedly some confusion in the Party that the turn toward workers means turning away from the priorities we place on the Chicano, Black, youth, women, defense work, etc. Nothing could be further from the truth.

On the contrary, if comrades will make the effort to review what the tiny handful of trade union comrades have been able to do in the past period in pushing support for these struggles inside the trade union movement, it should enable them to come to the conclusion that these areas of work are inclusive and not exclusive. The principle difference is that while we were able on occasion to effectively participate in mass actions outside the union movement, our work inside was primarily propagandistic, and only in a few exceptional circumstances were Party comrades able to mobilize organized support to these struggles.

It is nonetheless a fact, however, that the organized labor movement generally abstained from or was hostile to many of the struggles and actions that have arisen in the past period. Sections of the radicalizing population, including layers of the youth, developed a hostility toward the working class, and most especially to white workers, to the point of viewing them as a reactionary mass.

In connection with this comrades should take a hard look at their own attitudes on this question. How much have we been affected by the years of relative class peace? How much are we affected by liberal cynics who view workers as either "bestial" or at best reactionary? How much are we affected by the derogatory Archie Bunker image of workers gleefully projected by the capitalist-controlled TV media?

It is clear that this attitude has shown up, at least in part, in the pre-Convention discussion and it was probably

inevitable in light of the projected turn toward the working class, which the Party has not been able to influence or intervene in on a broad scale for a long period of time.

If these comrades think that workers are reactionary, sexist, racist and bestial, they should realize that they are only posing a problem for us and not offering any solution. Let us supplement this sociological view of the working class with some remarks on the trade unions, the organizations that purport to represent them in this period. This will give us some idea of the enormity of the task before us.

The trade union bureaucracy is in complete acquiescence with the bourgeois state and bases itself on the most conservative and backward layers of the union movement. It views with suspicion and hostility even the most modest attempts to raise issues at union meetings that are in the day-to-day interest of the rank-and-file. Instead the bureaucrats negotiate with management in secret, depending on their legal staffs to inform them of what they can or can't do within the framework of the antilabor legislation that has increasingly strangled the political independence of the unions over a period of 40 years. Add to this their endless quest for, and support to, friendly capitalist politicians, whom they rely on to bail them out politically, and you get part of the picture of what makes the bureaucracy tick. Aside from a few more enlightened union leaders, the bureaucracy contains within its ranks not only opportunists, but outright thugs, not a few Klan members and other right-wing elements.

They are also conscious of maintaining their continuity, by taking bright young workers and even watered-down militants into their ranks. Young workers are submitted to a rigorous test before full acceptance to higher positions in the union. This includes special schooling, seminars and even union colleges, where they are introduced to the art of class collaboration and "responsible" union leadership.

From the point of view of rank-and-file participation, union meetings are generally small, rigidly controlled and routine. Some exceptions to this occur when the union bureaucrats are compelled to mobilize their conservative base so they can outnumber and put down militant moves by uninitiated rank-and-file militants, operating in loose formations. In isolated instances independent union candidates run outside of bureaucratic slates and win top local leadership positions based on rank-and-file discontent.

If the bureaucrats fail to whip them into line behind their conservative policies, they resort to the stratagem of isolating these locals from the mainstream of the international. They will not hesitate to remove their shops from the jurisdiction of the "rebel" local and shrink its size and influence. If this fails they maneuver to place the local under receivership because, of course, these rebels are incompetent to run their local since they know nothing about complying with anti-labor laws, or what judges, politicians or lawyers to go to for help. If all this fails, they

can resort to trumped-up union busting charges or economic attrition against the rebels by closing the purse-strings of the international.

In organizing the unorganized, the campaigns of most unions are essentially of a defensive character. They are not motivated by any ideals or concern for the well-being of the workers being organized. Some of their real motives are: 1) a declining union membership and financial coffers; 2) jurisdictional disputes and fear that other unions will move into their area, thereby giving them less social weight in their class collaborationist policies; 3) crumbs thrown to the unions by bourgeois politicians to revise anti-labor laws enough to open up new areas of organizing, i.e. government workers under Kennedy; 4) initiative—but rarely—in the past period by unorganized workers coming to the unions and asking to be organized.

Whatever the reasons for organizing, one thing is certain—that newly organized union locals come under the same conservative bureaucrats as the old ones.

In the case of lost union elections, the bureaucrats for the most part cynically walk away and wait for another day. It is almost unheard of for them to retain as union members workers who remain in shops that have lost union elections. As a result many of these militant workers are victimized or given the ax by the bosses at the first opportunity.

This is especially true in the South where union organizing is difficult to begin with. One of the signs of the times is that because of such defeats militants remain hostile to the bosses, but develop a healthy contempt for union leaders. In effect they are in the contradictory position of being anti-union and anti-company in the same breath.

It would appear to be hopeless in the face of such opposition to do serious work in the unions. Yet it can and must be done!

It won't be done by rushing to the floor at every union meeting demanding mass action or simply passing resolutions that won't always be implemented. There is a time and place for such moves and it's not usually at every union meeting—and never without preparation of support. The ultra-lefts have been getting zapped for a number of years with this approach. And no one, especially the rank-and-file, is going to be permanently attracted to perennial losers, especially those who have to live with their jobs; but they will be attracted to consistent fighters for their interests—win or lose.

Contrary to the pessimism some comrades have regarding workers and despite the gloomy picture presented above of the union movement, there are increasing opportunities for us to effectively intervene in the class struggle through the unions and to bring young workers around the Party. One of the most important things we have going for us is the changing attitude and receptivity to radical ideas of young workers—men and women, whites and minorities. Let us review briefly what some of these changing attitudes are: 1) the company needs me more than I need them; 2) do not see their jobs as a lifetime perspective; 3) have a casual attitude towards production; 4) want more time off; 5) jobs are a secondary part of their life; 6) tend to be anti-company and anti-union leadership; 7) act spontaneously on job grievances instead of adhering strictly to grievance procedures (this requires loosely organized formations); 8) more open to radical ideas and more mobile; 9) totally uneducated on

the history of class struggles inside and outside the unions and have no identity with militant union traditions; 10) have a better formal education; 11) most have little or no organized experience in mass class actions, but increasing layers of young workers have been involved in spontaneous strikes, most often over the resistance of union bureaucrats.

Obviously these brief observations do not exhaust the changes that are occurring, nor are they meant to obviate the fact that sexism and racism exist in the working class and in the trade unions. In saying this, we are discovering nothing new.

As a matter of fact we would be naive if we did not recognize that the struggle against racism on the job led by Black workers has been the most consistent principled activity carried on by union workers over the last 20 years, and further that it predates present affirmative action positions.

In some instances Black workers, especially in the South, took positions in union disputes—especially relating to Black rights and trade union democracy—that the Party could learn from. A case in point was the Abel-McDonald dispute in the United Steelworkers which occurred in the mid-60's and was preceded by a rank-and-file democratic revolt against McDonald's "tuxedo" leadership. The Party did not support either McDonald or Abel, correctly viewing them as birds of a feather, but we did support rank-and-file democratic demands that led, in part, to McDonald's defeat.

We did not know, and could not know at the time, that many militant Black steelworkers in the South were supporting McDonald. The reason for their support was because white racists and Klan elements were backing Abel's "reformist" union program to gain and consolidate racist union leadership positions in the USW in this area. Obviously if we had Southern steelworkers, or Party members in Steel, we would have known, and been able to round out our analysis to link up the question of trade union democracy with Black demands, which are inseparable.

We could give many similar examples, but suffice it to say once again, we can't turn to workers without turning to their organizations. In turning to the working class we won't learn all we have to know to be effective, without being inside the unions. In connection with this, one important issue not spelled out in the *Political Resolution* in its turn toward the workers is how the Party sees itself as an organization in relationship to workers organizations, especially the trade unions. Are we going to transform unions by militant Party appeals from outside or are we going to do it with selective day-to-day work inside.

The obvious answer is that, of course, we do both.

There is no question that if the Party, especially through its press, addresses itself to the unfolding problems and struggles of the working class and gets the paper into the workers' hands we will quickly find a response in noticeable recruitment to the Party.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to think that direct recruitment of workers to the Party is an alternative to work inside the unions.

Both the workers we recruit and comrades who are sent into the unions must be educated, encouraged and inspired to do revolutionary work inside the unions. Without this approach, all talk of turning to the workers or building a

left-wing in the unions, is meaningless. Assignments of comrades to work in the unions should be elevated to the level of a major political assignment, in the way we approach all areas of Party work. In this connection, we can deal with the problem of trade union fetishism—which is not a threat at this time and can be dealt with if we approach the question in the above fashion. It can hardly be said that this has been a problem for the Party in the last 20 or more years. The most recent attempts to turn the Party toward the trade unions did not arise out of our participation in unions or by workers coming to us from this direction. They arose, developed and grew primarily out of our student youth work, in a period of virtually

complete isolation from the union movement. No, the problem confronting us today is not one of adapting to union fetishism, but of seeking to enter these working class organizations with a long term perspective of doing revolutionary work.

In this connection, it is in order for the National Committee and the Trade Union Director to undertake the task of drafting a Trade Union resolution which would:

- 1) clearly define the relationship of the Party to the trade unions based upon the Transitional Program, and;
- 2) clearly define the nature of the conjunctural demands and transitional demands that are applicable to our work in the unions in this period.

"You Sound More Like an English School Teacher"

by Mareen Jasin, Houston Branch

July 15, 1975

While agreeing with the general line of the political document, "The Decline of American Capitalism: Prospects for a Socialist Revolution," I have some criticisms that are more technical than political, hence sounding "more like an English school teacher," as one comrade claimed. Some parts of the document are well written and express clearly having a finger on the pulse in explaining what is happening politically in the American working class and among its allies—Blacks, women, and labor. However, some parts of the document are unclear, not well stated, or truncated. What follows is a list of these criticisms and questions.

The first is the use of the term "depression" to describe the American economic situation. The second paragraph speaks of the "American depression . . . longest and deepest of the six U.S. post war slumps . . . is a component part of the first world recession." To me, a depression evokes images of a "Grapes of Wrath" atmosphere, breadlines, unemployment at 25 percent to 30 percent, huge rates of bankruptcy, astronomical rates of inflation, etc. It is possible that living in Houston where the City has a surfeit of \$14 million and unemployment is about 4½ percent, affects my view of the American economic picture, but if a depression exists in this country then the document should give facts and statistics to back it up. I just couldn't say that America is in a depression because our document says it is!

The second point of confusion is also in the second paragraph, and in the last sentence, which says, "the first world recession since 1937-38, simultaneously affecting all the major capitalist economies." Pierre Frank in an article entitled "World Capitalist Leadership in Disarray" (*Inprecor*, May 8, 1975) says, "The defeats of imperialism are occurring in a capitalist world profoundly affected by recession, the first recession since the end of the second world war to develop simultaneously in the major capitalist countries." So, are the major capitalist countries facing a simultaneous recession since 1937-38 or since World War II?

Next criticism is with paragraph or sentence six: "The defeat in Southeast Asia was a setback of historic proportions for U.S. capitalism." This should be elaborated as to why the defeat is of historic proportions. Merely a one sentence paragraph does not do justice to the political importance of the fact.

The fourth criticism is the first paragraph under the section heading, "Crisis Of Perspectives of the American Ruling Class." "The American ruling class . . . is now floundering in search of a new world strategy." What should follow is how concretely the ruling class is "floundering." Instead, we get subjective reflections of bourgeois statesmen and commentators. The last sentence in this paragraph says that ". . . many of them act as if

they are looking for a 'new Hitler.'!" This should be substantiated as to who said that, to have more impact; otherwise it sounds merely glib, especially in view of the uncoverings of the CIA, FBI and police agencies, which tend to give the impression of strengthening "the American Democracy."

The fifth criticism is in the third section, "Changing Consciousness of the American Working Class," paragraph 11, which says "As the Watergate scandal unfolded, American workers began to see the spectacle, not as an isolated case of crooked politicians being caught, but as proof of a general threat to fundamental democratic rights." I disagree that the American workers see Watergate as "proof of a general threat to fundamental democratic rights." Students and liberals think in terms of democratic rights much more so than American workers. If anything, the impact of Watergate has made the workers more cynical, distrustful and fed up with all politicians and government. In fact, the pollster, Louis J. Harris, presented a poll to the Mayors Conference in Boston indicating that the American people have much more trust in their local garbage collectors than politicians.

Next, in the section "The Oppressed Nationalities and National Minorities", the section under Chicanos. In the ninth paragraph, it states that "Sixteen percent of the Chicano population remains employed as agricultural workers . . ." Well, what about the other 84 percent? In the sections dealing with the Blacks, Women and Puerto Ricans, the document gives some breakdown as to where these people are employed, and should do likewise for the Chicanos.

Next, in the section dealing with the middle class. Some mention should be made of the artists and intellectuals. Many artists, especially in the movies, have actively participated against the war in Vietnam and for democratic rights. Many artists like Fonda, Brando, De Antonioni have become outspoken critics of capitalism. We know that many artists and intellectuals were radicalized in the thirties and often played influential roles in giving expression to the general discontent and questioning of American Capitalism. In fact, it would not hurt the Party to have a Paul Newman or Warren Beatty supporting our banner!

The document, in the main, deals with the main components of the working class. However, it doesn't mention one section that consists of 22 million people—and that is the elderly. The 65 and over people, one-half of whom live below the poverty line, have organizations, have demonstrated and picketed for better treatment and consideration. Under a declining capitalism they suffer fixed incomes, discrimination and no future. Now, I'm not proposing a Transitional Program for the Elderly but just

that our party should take some cognizance of this section of the (ex)working class because otherwise it smacks of age chauvinism.

Another thing the document could mention is the polarization on the right. The document points out very well the shift to the left on the part of the working class and its allies, but says nothing about what is occurring on the right. After all, fascism is an alternative strategy that the ruling class in its "floundering" can resort to.

The above does not distract from the political line of the

draft political resolution, but only attempts to improve it and make it more readable.

In the draft resolution on Black Liberation which I think is very well written, I have just two points: one, I believe that the Muslims are the largest Black organization in this country, with 750,000 members, and not the NAACP, which has both Black and white members totaling 450,000. Secondly, why is some mention of the Muslims not made concerning their activities and politics?

THE PARTY'S ROLE IN REGIONAL WORK

Mike Kelly, Detroit Branch
July 15, 1975

In the "rush" to implement our turn toward the bigger opportunities opening up for work in the trade unions and the working class in general it would be an error to let our justifiable excitement lead us to decreasing the emphasis we place on supporting the regional work of the YSA.

The absence of our opponents from most regional campuses in the past has made it an arena of relatively high recruitment for the YSA. Few of the other tendencies show signs of recognizing this error in the coming period. There is no reason to expect a change for the worse in the prospects for recruitment off regional campuses.

Quite the contrary. Struggles of workers and urban students which we expect to see more of in the coming period will undoubtedly reinforce the tendency for regional students to struggle. Recruitment possibilities should increase here as elsewhere and probably remain proportionately higher for an initial period of time.

With recruitment such a vital task many branches could significantly strengthen their support to YSA regional work.

The different ways the Detroit branch has strengthened its support to the Detroit YSA's regional work has helped develop a very large region with 9 locals and more than 130 members (19 Black, 2 Chicano). The Michigan-Indiana region is probably not exceptional in any fashion, rather, the size of the region is due more to a steady strengthening of regional work over the last 3 years.

Good organization of the regional financial apparatus has meant that the Detroit branch has not had to support this area of work financially for more than a year. The branch has found other ways to lend important support to this work however.

Besides the numerous campaign, speakers bureau, or other tours through our regions we have come to expect we have added traveling educators. The branch has committed itself over the last two years to providing educators for class series sponsored by regional YSA locals.

Our commitment is a big one in terms of branch time and energy. The class series cover "fundamentals", ranging from a class on the Communist Manifesto to one on our current program for Black Liberation, and are held on a weekly basis with as many as four locals having them simultaneously.

These educators help the integration of new YSAers and the recruitment of others. The classes are generally well publicized on campus and draw non-members. It's a weekly activity that locals bring their contacts to which facilitates their recruitment.

Side benefits flowing from these visits are not inconsequential. Weekly contact with comrades from the center, generally more experienced party comrades, allows many questions of day to day activities, about our program, etc., to be raised and discussed. The visits help break down the isolated feeling these regional YSAers often get. The

authority of the center is strengthened and its attractiveness as a place to transfer is enhanced.

Another aspect of regional work where the branch pitched in was this spring's regional Young Socialist team which recruited more than 30 new members to the YSA. The branch freed up an Executive Committee member, a leading comrade, to take the assignment of team captain at the request of the YSA. No comparable comrade was available in the Detroit or regional locals. The comrade had a leading assignment, but faced with the clear need and importance of having a strong team leader we found a way to shift assignments.

Besides the recruits and transfers (Bloomington's annual dozen plus!) to center locals, other areas of work are made easier by a network of active regional locals.

Campaigns are one area where the results are immediate. A tour of local or national candidates can achieve broader geographic exposure much easier with a strong region. The recruits, publicity and impact are greater, as was the case with our spring Camejo tour.

S.C.A.R. work got off the ground very quickly in our region. One reason was the participation of YSAers in so many regional locals. It showed in the number of buses Michigan-Indiana sent to Boston May 17th. These regional S.C.A.R. chapters got important endorsements, thousands of dollars for buses, activities and established good relations with various Black, Chicano, trade union and other organizations.

Another way to strengthen regional work we use are regular propaganda teams of party comrades and sometimes Detroit YSA members not on the Wayne State University campus. Comrades with daytime time, the full timers and trade union comrades on the night shift or who have a weekday off—and there are quite a few of these comrades—volunteer to go on a once a week team to sell and set up lit. tables on a nearby regional campus. These teams take two forms.

One type of team is a "trailblazer" team. We have had 3 or 4 of these going out on a weekly basis to different campuses, from 20 to 90 minutes traveling time from the hall. The idea here is to break ground with the papers and other literature, make some contacts, hold some public talks and recruit and move toward a local. For example, the party organizer and a teamster comrade on a night shift sold once a week, sometimes with other comrades, at one regional campus for a period of two years. Over this period the basis was laid for recruiting four people to the YSA. The importance of this city, Flint, means we'll continue to send teams there until we have a strong YSA local there.

Another type of team is the one we send out when the regional campuses are just opening up. The teams help the YSA make itself visible on registration lines, often making contacts and recruiting several right away. Special

emphasis is put on helping new and small locals get back on their feet after the summer break etc. We also send our YS team onto these campuses for the first few weeks, to strengthen the smaller locals. Then it goes trailblazing.

Subtle, but important, is the three-way relationship of the branch, center local and the regional local. It's easy to cut across the authority of the regional center by heads of party areas of work such as the campaign by-passing whatever regional apparatus the YSA has and speaking directly to the regional YSAers. Generally it's best not to do this. Besides cutting across the authority of the center, confusion can ensue with the left hand not knowing what the right is doing.

In Detroit all areas of work go through the regional apparatus—in this case a regional committee. Either the regional organizer-traveler or the regional coordinator (residing in the center) will take up the matter with the

regional locals. Centralizing the communication has proved less confusing to the locals since the coordinator has a better feel for their strengths, weakness, priorities, etc.

One new idea we'd like to experiment with in the coming year is for the larger YSA locals (10 plus members which we have four of outside Detroit) to get a small team off the campus once a week to a local unemployment line or plant gate. Some of our regional campuses are in or near fair sized cities. There they will likely find several workers who have radicalized, are interested in socialism and have no where else to go. Likely they will already have heard of the Socialist Workers campaign and may be interested in the local organization supporting it, the YSA. If the YSA has been highly visible on its campus they may already be disposed to giving it serious consideration.

ORGANIZING PARTY CONTACT WORK

Linda Thompson, Chicago Branch

July 15, 1975

As was outlined in the Tasks and Perspectives Report to the May plenum many new possibilities are opening to the party for bringing around a new layer of contacts and periphery from our work in the struggles against racism, in the trade unions and our election campaigns.

A consciously organized approach to party contact and periphery work was begun in Chicago after the petitioning experiences of the 1974 statewide and 1st CD election campaigns. The branch found that many names and contacts on the growing mailing lists from petitioning and campaigning in the black community were older, working, off-campus types who would be more directly attracted to the SWP than the YSA.

In addition to these supporters from the Black community we had also developed a layer of supporters from the work that the comrades were doing in the trade unions. Due to the tremendous impact of the Mayoral campaign in the city we found that a number of ex-comrades and sympathizers were beginning to get more active again.

Since this was a new situation for the party and there were no established routines or procedures for party contact work we had to develop some. A recruitment director and a committee were assigned to work with the campaign to begin to organize the work.

The branch membership was asked to submit the names of the contacts, sympathizers and periphery that they most often worked with on a prepared form. The majority of names submitted were not on the campaign files and were submitted by less than a third of the membership indicating a low level of consciousness toward contact work in general. Through regular reports to the meetings the general level of consciousness was raised and names began to be turned in to the committee on a consistent basis.

For the first time the branch had assembled a complete list of its supporters which could then be analyzed as to how to best bring these supporters closer to the party. We held regular discussions in the committee on progress and out of a key list of 100 determined who the 30 or so potential activists and recruits were. We then began more systematic phoning to this layer and thought out ways of involving them in activity and educate them politically.

One step we took towards the end of the Mayoral campaign was to organize a series of classes on socialism for campaign supporters who wanted to discuss our ideas more in depth. We held three classes which 5 people attended.

In addition to this group we found through phoning to the broader list that there were a number of supporters whom we had never met who were extremely enthusiastic but who for personal reasons, transportation, work, children etc. had not been to any event. So we decided that **IF THEY WILL NOT COME TO US THEN WE MUST GO TO THEM.** This attitude is the key to all good contact work. It is a simple fact that people in this country at this

time are simply not driven to seek and become active in the revolutionary party. They must be individually convinced that such a life is worthwhile.

Since Chicago is so large we decided to build socials to meet the candidates out in the neighborhoods where we had supporters. These events were built through invitations and phoning and stood out in contrast to most of the previous party events in that the independents outnumbered the comrades assigned. Of the four that were organized we had 7, 20, 17 and 22 contacts present.

Because there were always more supporters than comrades we were able to avoid the in-group atmosphere that in my opinion plagues many of our social events where the reverse is the case. The socials were valuable to the comrades as well as the contacts as we gained information about the neighborhood, community organizations and the questions on supporters' minds. They afforded us an opportunity to have *intensive* political discussions with our supporters in a relaxed atmosphere.

I have long heard comrades disparage the fact that the Communist Party brings people around it on a social basis. In spite of the fact that they often use methods that we would not, they are quite skillful, aggressive and conscious of the importance of doing consistent contact work. I believe we should learn something from this. There is nothing wrong per se in bringing people around on a social basis if our goal is to educate them in our methods and politics.

A person's social life is very important to them and before they become a committed revolutionary often the atmosphere in the organization or their relationship to one or another individual in the party figures prominently in whether they stay around or eventually join. Thus well thought out and well organized personal contact work and social events play a valuable role in recruitment.

Consistent work with supporters pays off in increased participation in campaign activities. At the final rally for the Willie Mae Reid campaign over 50 contacts attended over half of whom were Black and most of whom had been around for the entire course of the campaign. Many had taken campaign assignments for the street rallies, distributions of the Bill of Rights or helped on the socials. Ten supporters took assignments for the Presidential campaign rally held in June.

Of this new layer of party supporters there are those who are potential recruits and those who will not join in the near future. However there is need for consistent work with both groups. Understanding the deepening working class radicalization means that the supporter of today will be the member of tomorrow as the impact of the economic crisis deepens.

It was pointed out in the plenum report that recruiting from a wider layer is going to entail some adjustments. It means becoming sensitive to the personal situations of our supporters and new members and not making excessive

demands of them. A person can be driven away unnecessarily if they are made to feel they cannot live up to an unrealistic level of activity. A welfare mother who attends school cannot be expected to keep up with a student or worker without children, etc. I believe it also means that we will have to be more patient in explaining our ideas, shedding any tendency to use in-group language, listening to people's questions and in general being prepared to spend a longer period of time to recruit a member than would be necessary in the YSA. We should also be prepared for contacts to come to us with more backward attitudes on some questions than those who have come from the campus milieu. People can shed their illusions and prejudices very rapidly through calm patient discussions if they are not made to feel apolitical or uneducated for their ideas.

The ability to do contact work is like any other skill in the party that comrades must develop. One key to it is to develop an attribute which I have found belongs to every

good organizer, the ability to listen and to learn from those you are working with. The contacts who are coming around the party now come from various backgrounds and bring valuable life experiences with them that aid in the building of the revolutionary party.

Our goal should be to have every comrade conscious of the need to develop and work with their own personal set of contacts on the job, in their neighborhood or in school and not merely to turn over names to the recruitment committee.

The possibilities for exploring creative ways to approach party contact work are limitless. They could include thought-out plans for neighborhood work in areas where the party received a significant vote to special campaign social events for our trade union, black or Latino contacts. I have mentioned just a few. Every branch must begin this work to take advantage of the opportunities opening up to us.

ON OUR PROPAGANDA

Steve Beck, Upper West Side Branch
Floyd Fowler, Brooklyn Branch

July 17, 1975

Writing from his cell in Sandstone Prison in 1944, James Cannon encouraged his comrades on the *Militant* staff "to talk to the workers without 'writing down'; to have elementary propaganda for the new workers without eliminating the more serious political material for the more advanced." He observed that "the fifteen-year habit of writing for the politically initiated hangs heavily on us all." (Letters from Prison, p. 114, 99) Toward this end he took an interest not only in political articles but in such projects as a songbook, a calendar, political cartoons and poetry.

Now as then we face the dilemma of how to maximize the growing interest in our movement among working people, many of whom have never before been politically active. In this effort no media or form of expression should be neglected if it can carry our message effectively.

In carrying out general propaganda we must recognize and combat an routinist and conservative approach. Unfortunately, precisely such a problem has and continues to hamper our propaganda work.

This conservatism has been in large part a side effect of our attempt to differentiate ourselves and our campaigns from the trendy propaganda of the ultralefts. These currents, under the influence of counter-culturalism, sacrificed mass appeal for "hipness". But in our overzealous attempt to be "serious" we adopted a style that was lifeless and without impact. This still characterizes much of our propaganda today.

POSTERS AND BUTTONS

A case in point is our poster art. In the real world a poster must be bold, bright and dramatic enough to take on and defeat the billboards, traffic lights, store displays, and the million other distractions of urban life with which it competes for the attention of passersby; it must be "a shout from the wall".

The posters we put out today, with rare exception, are increasingly becoming standardized—in some of their worst aspects. In particular we have picked up from bourgeois campaigns precisely what we should most want to avoid: The empty and slick "names and faces" technique. Smiling faces. Their names. The party to support. End of message. We have adopted this technique wholesale when it should be used—by us at least—only with the greatest caution. It is to be emphasized that such posters are the overwhelming *rule* across the country.

The same could be said of our candidates buttons. The current Camejo and Reid buttons are only the continuation of a wretched tradition that should cease. No one wears them except when they feel obligated. Producing such "candidate buttons" is a positive waste of the Party's resources, especially when compared to what could be produced. An example of a genuinely *popular* campaign

button was the "Capitalism Fouls Things Up" button. The poster version was also exceptionally attractive. The recent "Education is a Right" and "Jobs For All" buttons were a great improvement, *but* the name of the party was left off, a mistake that shouldn't be repeated.

Comrades are encouraged to obtain and study *Prop Art*, (Darien House, 1972) a collection of the best in contemporary political posters. Sixteen of our movement's posters are represented, *all* from the late sixties. All carry a *graphic*, *symbol*, *slogan* or combination of all three. These reflect the period of our best in poster propaganda. It should be noted—none of our more recent "serious" posters are included. The twenty-six NPAC and SMC posters reproduced nearly *all* carry a large graphic *and* slogan. This is in striking contrast to the work produced today.

THE NEED FOR A LOGO

Of particular importance should be our adoption of a logo, a symbol that could appear, *nationally*, on all party propaganda. *This is an elementary promotional technique.* We are virtually the only party that has not done so. The advantages of such a logo are numerous and self-evident. We should cease delaying. We hope that in this pre-convention period the campaign committee moves to consider various designs for a logo, and makes a concrete motion at the convention. This time factor is crucial. For best effect, a logo should be adopted *now*, before the flood of local and national material which must be printed in the coming year.

BANNERS AND CHANTS

Another area in which we have too often been routine is in our propaganda interventions at demonstrations. We consistently arrive with too few banners, poorly made, and only once in a blue moon attempt a graphic of any kind.

A picture *is* worth a thousand words. We should learn something from our encounters with YAWF, (particularly at the Boston march) one group that hasn't made our mistakes in this field. Their maneuver at that demonstration was tremendously facilitated by the fact that their easily-held, easily-identifiable banners outnumbered ours by ten to one.

We could also stand a great deal of improvement in our chants. The purpose of chants at demonstrations is to add to the militancy and confidence of the participants (and this can be crucial at small demonstrations such as the NYC anti-cutbacks march June 28). And we shouldn't feel bad about stealing others'. We did this in NYC with the Maoist-stamped "They Say Cutback, We Say Fight Back", though some comrades were uncomfortable. The Maoists were furious. Too often we bring only one good chant to a march. *No one* is going to march for an hour or more

chanting the same slogan over and over. Marchers end up not chanting, or chanting slogans of questionable political merit. The preparation of several lively chants should become a part of the normal logistical preparation for any march.

OUR HEADQUARTERS

Another opportunity we are missing is in establishing the visibility of our headquarters. Few headquarters have prominent signs of any kind (*all* should have), and most are well-nigh invisible. While security is a consideration, invisibility is far from being a defence against vandalism or attack by right-wing groups. They know where we are. Since for financial reasons we rarely have a storefront, a well-advertised headquarters takes on even greater importance. The bookstore would benefit from the increased walk-in sales, as would the Party and YSA.

The headquarters should be better and more consistently decorated as well. Political posters and portraits are an obvious and inexpensive means of accomplishing this, and would project the kind of organization we are building.

OUR OWN LANGUAGE?

A continuing curse to the Party and YSA is the mode of written and spoken expression best known as "Movementese", or "Trot-talk"—especially disturbing when it creeps into campaign literature, speeches, forum talks, etc. This language is only understood by "insiders", and is detrimental to our propaganda. Even words like "opponent", "cadre", and "masses" are outmoded and over-used. "Perspectives", "periods", "whole periods", "coming periods", "perspectives for the whole coming period", "key tasks", "best builders", "broadest and deepest", "broad new layers", "contacts", "independents", or a newer addition; "pariah" are words that simply are not used or *politically understood* by most people. We agree with Comrade Sell's contribution. (Bulletin #6)

A concerted drive should be launched to purge such terms from our collective vocabulary. Everything we say will be more interesting. Classes in public speaking should be initiated, especially for candidates, just as we give writers for the *Militant* technical instruction.

POTENTIAL PROPAGANDA TOOLS

Our approach to propaganda work should be as multi-faceted and, we might add, as multi-media as our modern communicative techniques. Many propaganda tools within our reach are not being used or considered.

Millions of workers and young people own tape cassettes, for example, yet we who want to reach them do all recording (forums, summer schools, etc.) on reel to reel. While reel to reel is best for the tape libraries we maintain, with existing equipment cassette recordings could be made for mailing to the region, etc. Many other distribution possibilities also suggest themselves.

The appeal and power of music, and the cultivation of the musical talent of our own members has for long been overlooked as a Party-building propaganda tool. The value of attention to this art form is, regrettably, well understood by our opponents. The CP, with its impressive periphery of musicians, as well as the PSP, (with their own, very popular group, "El Grupo") both set an example we should follow.

The recent performance of Gaudencio de Mello for PRDF in New York is a positive example of what we should strive to do much more of.

Films are also a potential propaganda tool. The YSA film of its 1970 convention was important and proved very useful. It should be seen as only a first attempt. The Party and YSA should consider further efforts at using film as a Party and YSA building technique.

In addition, we should not consider Cannon's suggestions and ideas old hat. Many are as useful today as they were then (pre-paid subs).

AN AUDACIOUS APPROACH

What we have pointed to above are only some of the most blatant examples of propaganda that has either fallen or been well below the standards our Party has maintained in most other areas of work. We have also tried to sketch a different, and audacious approach—one more in line with the opportunities before us and the creative capacities of the ranks and leadership of the Party.

AGAINST THE "DEMOCRATIC-SECULAR PALESTINE" SLOGAN

Walter Shaffer, Oakland/Berkeley Branch

July 15, 1975

During the course of a discussion on the international situation organized as a part of the regular preconvention discussion in the Oakland/Berkeley Branch, the question of the Party's use of the "Democratic-Secular Palestine" slogan arose. I took the position that it was a mistake for us to use this slogan in our Middle East work. In the ensuing discussion, I was unable to clarify for the comrades just exactly what my position was. In his summary, the reporter said that I was accusing the Party of being in favor of a democratic-secular *state* in Palestine. This being not the case, and because I feel the confusion to be at least partly my own fault, I should like to take this opportunity to briefly clarify my position in the written discussion.

The "Democratic-Secular Palestine" slogan originated with the Fatah grouping which, under the leadership of Arafat, took over the old Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO had been under the tutelage of the Egyptian government. Fatah sees the main tasks of the Palestinian movement to be the liberation of Palestine from Zionism, the establishment of a bourgeois republic, and an end to what they view as the sectarian strife between the the Hebrew and Moslem communities. Rather than seeing Zionist Israel as an imperialist phalanx thrust into the midst of the Arab Middle East, it is viewed by them as a Jewish theocracy bent on religious intolerance towards Moslems. The Israeli Jews are not seen as the oppressor nationality but rather as a religious community. Hence the call for a secularized Palestine.

Fatah now dominates the PLO, which in any case contains no organizations which are not either of a strictly bourgeois nationalist character or which do not subscribe to the Stalinist "two stage theory" of revolution. The next "stage", of course, is the bourgeois democratic stage. The "Democratic-Secular Palestine" slogan plays the role for the PLO of an umbrella under which its program is propagated. The PLO has popularized the slogan with the masses in the Middle East and has made it quite clear that they are for a

democratic-secular *state* in Palestine. The slogan, therefore, is identified in the minds of the Middle Eastern masses as being the call for a bourgeois republic by the nationalist and Stalinist currents.

That, by itself, should be sufficient reason for the Party to use some other formulation to express our program for the Palestinian revolution. While it is true that the PLO frequently formulates its demand as being for a "Democratic-Secular *State*" and while we, of course, never do so, the semantical similarities between their formulation and ours render the political distinction too difficult for agitational purposes. The PLO, no doubt, often uses the "Democratic-Secular *State*" version of their slogan in order to make it crystal clear what they mean by it. The Party would do well to follow their example in this instance, and so formulate its slogans as to make its meaning likewise crystal clear. We are not for a "Democratic" Palestine; we are for a Socialist Palestine. The operation of the permanent revolution in the Middle East does not excuse us from the responsibility of programmatic clarity in our slogans. We are not for a "Secular" Palestine; we are for the self-determination of the Palestinian people. The secular question is used by the Stalinists and by the opportunist sectors of the Palestinian movement to obscure the national question in Palestine. They portray the struggle not as one for national self-determination, but as one for religious equality. Just as we have witnessed in northern Ireland, the phony issue of sectarianism is used to mystify the real issue of national liberation.

The above, right or wrong, is an outline of the position which I tried to put forward in the oral discussion. I hope that it is sufficiently clear to exclude any notions that I am accusing the Party of having a reformist position on the Middle East. My point is that the use of the "Democratic-Secular Palestine" slogan by us shows a mistaken estimation of the role this slogan actually plays in the Middle East and perhaps a misunderstanding of the nature of the political formations which make up the PLO.

TWO CRITICISMS OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTION

by Paul Le Blanc, Pittsburgh Branch,

July 18, 1975

I'd like to make a few critical comments on the draft resolution, "The Decline of American Capitalism: Prospects for a Socialist Revolution" (Discussion Bulletin, vol. 33, no 1). I think its merits have been amply discussed by Jack Barnes in his report to the National Committee (Discussion Bulletin, vol. 33, no. 4) and by other comrades. It's an excellent document. While recognizing that, I think we should look at it critically to see if it might be improved in any way. It seems to me that it could be improved in at least two areas.

1. *Imprecise terminology.* This is perhaps a minor point. In the section on the "Radicalization and Mobilization of the Allies of the Proletariat," on page 8, there's one reference to the petty-bourgeoisie which I find confusing.

In discussing the problem of overcoming divisions within the working class, the document states: "In accomplishing this, the working class will also win the oppressed layers of the petty bourgeoisie. . . ." Several lines down from this there is reference to "the exploited layers of the petty-bourgeoisie." The definition which the document gives to the term *petty-bourgeoisie*, as laid out later in sub-sections on Small Farmers and the "Middle Class" (pages 12-13) is fairly clear and coincides, I think, with the classical Marxist definition. (In the *Communist Manifesto* the petty bourgeoisie is said to be made up of "the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant"—in short, those who own their own means of production but employ few or no workers.) The document notes that the agricultural workers and the various white collar and "professional" workers are not really petty bourgeois, but instead are layers of the working class.

I assume that the reference to "oppressed layers of the petty bourgeoisie" means such petty bourgeois elements as small farmers and independent truckers. But the reference to "exploited layers of the petty bourgeoisie"—while perhaps meant as merely another way of saying the same thing—suggests something different. In Marxist terminology, "exploitation" means more than simply oppression. It implies the extraction of surplus labor (or unpaid labor) from a laborer by a capitalist. So far as I know, there is no *exploited* layer of the petty bourgeoisie. If there is such a layer, this is something new, but the draft resolution doesn't explain it anywhere.

2. *Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.* The two most influential leaders of the black liberation struggle of the 1960s were Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. In the section on "The Oppressed Nationalities and National Minorities," on page 8 there is a passing reference to "the 1968 nationwide outbreaks after the death of Martin Luther King." (We are not told what King's death had to do with these outbreaks.) This is the only reference to King in the entire document. Malcolm X is mentioned four times.

In the section on "Prospects of American Bourgeois Democracy," on page 16, there is the following passage: ". . .

motivating the struggle [for legal and democratic rights] is a basic stand in favor of what Malcolm X called *human rights*. This was the aspiration in the struggles against the legal superstructure of Jim Crow — the *right* to be treated as a human being, not a second-class citizen or one of inferior birth. It motivated the 'freedom now' generation and was the concept Malcolm X sought to popularize by carrying the struggle of Black Americans to the United Nations. It inspired the Black workers struggles in the South where the sign 'I am a man' was sometimes the only one carried on a picket line."

The mention of Malcolm X in this passage is quite appropriate. Yet the phrases "freedom now" and "I am a man" and "human rights"—particularly in relation to struggles against Jim Crow in the South—are popularly (and correctly) associated with the name of Martin Luther King. But he has been left out of this passage.

A third mention of Malcolm X is on page 9, where reference is made to "calculated policy of the powers that be of eliminating any potential individual leaders—such as Malcolm X—who seemed capable of inspiring the Black masses in the direction of independent mass political action." The other major leader of the black movement to be eliminated, of course, was Martin Luther King. Yet the wording of the passage—tying the leader's elimination with a position on independence from the Democratic Party—excludes King from being mentioned. I would argue, however, that it was not simply his position on the Democratic Party that made Malcolm X a target but, instead, his potential capacity for uniting the Black masses in a determined struggle for human rights which could eventually disrupt and overturn the established order. And this is true of King as well.

On March 4, 1968, an FBI COINTELPRO memo, expressing the FBI's intention to "prevent the rise of a 'messiah' who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement," warned: "King could be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed 'obedience' to 'white liberal doctrines' (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism." ("FBI memos detail plot to crush Black movement," *Militant*, March 22, 1974.) This was one month before King's assassination.

It is natural for our movement to focus on Malcolm X as a model. Unlike King, he was a revolutionary, and—as is noted on page 8—"the unconditional opposition of Malcolm X to the Democratic party" posed a serious threat to that instrument of capitalist rule. An explicit contrast between the two men on this very point would emphasize what was perhaps the most serious limitation of the "civil rights movement" led by Martin Luther King and might strengthen our document. As it stands now, we seem to be writing him out of history. This can hardly impress the many people who remember King as the central leader and martyr of a great struggle.

THE PROBLEM OF LAYOFFS

A Proposed Amendment to the National Committee draft Political Resolution

by Milton Alvin, Central-East Branch, Los Angeles, Calif.

July 16, 1975

Accepting the problem in these terms—affirmative action *versus* seniority—is a big mistake because it plays right into the bosses' tactic of "divide and rule." They would like nothing better than to see workers fighting among themselves over a dwindling number of jobs, rather than wage a united fight against the boss for laying off *anybody*.

The fact that during a period of economic growth the question was "who should be *hired* first?" does not mean that in a period of recession the question should simply be stood on its head to ask, "now who should be *fired* first?"

The efforts by women and Blacks to protect their jobs and change the *discriminatory* aspects of the seniority system should be supported. These efforts to protect women and Blacks from the brunt of the layoffs are laudable, but they are not enough. The effect of these actions is limited unless those involved develop a broader perspective.

Neither seniority nor affirmative action in and of itself really addresses the question of unemployment. And that's the fundamental question right now: *how to stop the*

layoffs and provide jobs for all.

The pressure of united mass action by the labor movement could force implementation of a shorter work week, with no reduction in pay, to share the available work among all who need jobs. It could win an emergency public-works program to provide useful employment for millions.

Some may complain that these proposals are utopian and impractical. Far from being unrealistic, a struggle for a shorter workweek and a massive public-works program is the *only* way to halt unemployment.

One thing is certain; if we do not strive to build a united movement for jobs for all, if we simply accept that male and female, white and Black workers must fight it out over who will be fired, then the only winner will be the boss.

(end of amendment)

A Note: All the above has been excerpted from an article in the *Militant*, "Blacks, Women Fight Discriminatory Layoffs," by Linda Jenness, Dec. 27, 1974.