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Marxism and the Trade Unions

(October/November 1970)

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I. Marxism and Trade Unions

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I've been asked, in connection with this class, what there is to read on the subject of *Marxism and the Trade Unions*. And the answer is, perhaps surprisingly, virtually nothing. Now the reason I mention this is that, as Marxists like to say, that's not accidental. At least one of the reasons for the total lack of literature on a subject which would seem to be at the very heart of the whole theory of Marxism is that, essentially, no Marxist group has ever carried on any systematic revolutionary work in trade unions.

What about the Bolsheviks? Well, I think Lenin would have, but unions were illegal in Czarist Russia. He didn't have the opportunity, and of course he faced a different situation. Even so (and I'm not going to deal with this here), the whole problem of the activity and relationship of the Bolsheviks to whatever trade unions sprang up is important and interesting. But it was an

illegal and conspiratorial situation hardly the typical one that we're concerned with.

Is there anyone else? You may have heard the rumor that the German Socialist movement was Marxist in its early years, before the First World War. Did they ever carry on revolutionary Marxist work in the trade unions? In the most revolutionary days of the German socialist movement they carried on no revolutionary work in the trade unions that you could call such. How about Rosa Luxemburg? No, her position on this question was absolutely monstrous and completely contrary to that of Marx.

Here and there in the socialist movement there have been important experiences. Eugene Debs, for example, although of course he wasn't doing it from the point of view of an application of a revolutionary Marxist theory to trade unions, came out of a militant and objectively revolutionary Marxist struggle in the trade unions. There are a couple of other examples, but nothing of any size.

We have here, then, a subject which is paradoxical. On the one hand, by its very nature, it raises the basic questions of Marxism, the relationship of Marxism to the labor movement. On the other hand, in a century nothing has been written on it and revolutionary Marxist work in trade unions could be put into a nutshell. And let me remind you of another fact about the trade union movement and the socialist movement. The simple idea of socialists favoring trade unions took most of a century to sink into the socialist movement. That is, before Marx there was a half a century of socialism – and how many socialists do you think there were in that period who were just in favor of trade unions? The answer is – none.

Now look at that for a moment. England is the home of trade unionism, is it not? Capitalism arises there first and with it, trade unionism. Socialism arises in England on an anti-trade union basis. Owenism was anti-trade union. More surprisingly, the Chartist movement was anti-trade union, and that includes also the revolutionary wing of Chartism. By anti-trade union I mean a negative attitude towards the trade union movement. In general, the attitude was, “the political movement is primary and the trade unions are just a lousy reform outfit that we're really not interested in, because we're interested in bigger game.”

In connection with that, incidentally, there's a paradoxical historical point to be made. The Chartists were fighting for a series of political demands which they viewed as amounting to a social revolution. In fact, in hindsight,

we know that all the planks of the charter which the Chartist movement was fighting for were later carried out by the bourgeoisie. The trade union movement, however, which they scorned, is still struggling – maybe not on the same level, but for the same things. Their program was not carried out by the bourgeoisie – couldn't be, as a matter of fact. The difference, then, between being revolutionary for one's time and being on a much lower level, flows not from the revolutionary fervor of the people involved, but from something else.

It is not only a question of movements before Marx's time. Right through the 19th century you can look around anywhere and ask yourself: "Just who's in favor of trade unions?" And the answer still is, with the exception of the Marxist movement, almost nobody. Only Marxism as a socialist theory was pro-trade union.

Now, the point that I'm interested in is not only that Marx was the first socialist to favor trade unions. The point is that Marxism was and is the only kind of socialism that establishes an integral link between socialism and the struggle for social revolution and trade unionism. That link does not exist for any other kind of socialism. In terms of socialist theory, Marxism is the only one which establishes an integral link between trade unionism and the social revolution which sees the trade union movement as a revolutionary fact, even if and when the trade unions themselves are not revolutionary.

Now, of course, by the end of the 19th century the trade unions had established themselves and everybody favored them. Once the thing gets established, it gets a lot of favor, but by that time that doesn't mean very much. Because the trade unions fought for reforms, they were favored by all sorts of reformist currents. But, around the turn of the century, you get another facet of this. It's no longer true that nobody except Marxists favors trade unions. What is still true, however, is that everybody who considers himself a revolutionary socialist has a negative attitude towards trade unions, with the exception of Marxists, on more or less the same grounds as the Chartists: "We're revolutionaries, they're a reform organization – what have we got to do with them?"

In every country, almost every type of would-be revolutionary – except, again, Marxists – has taken a negative attitude towards trade unions. This takes different forms. One peculiar form it took was syndicalism in France. This was a trade union movement – was it not? Yes and no. But it was a form of negative attitude towards the mass trade union movement. What I am talking about is also the basis for a long-standing British sectarianism which

has sterilized Marxism in England for a century. That is, divided English socialism between reformist socialism on the one hand and sterile sectarians calling themselves Marxists on the other. And, of course, there's the American Socialist Labor Party.

There are different ways of being negative towards the trade union movement. For example, the SLP in DeLeon's days was not against trade unions at all. They were for revolutionary trade unions, the SLP's trade unions, which are excellent trade unions with only one defect – they lack existence. In the early years of the Communist International there was a tremendous upsurge of the point of view that Lenin polemicized against in **Left-Wing Communism** – which on the trade unions meant a negative attitude towards the mass reformist trade unions.

So, outside of Marxism there has been no revolutionary socialism which has any theoretical basis for linking its revolutionary perspective with support for the trade union movement as it actually existed. The question is – why?

The answer, to begin with, is a very simple proposition, one which has never sunk into the Marxist movement: that only Marxism can establish a link between the trade union movement and a revolutionary socialist perspective, because only Marxism is based on a class view of the social struggle. What could be simpler than that? The class view of the social struggle is the A of the ABC of Marxism. Everybody knows it and yet nobody knows it – it is very rarely institutionalized with regard to the trade union movement. Until it is applied to the relationship between Marxism and the trade union movement, it is not really being understood. Let us see what is involved.

It has been said, quite rightly, that Marx did not invent the class struggle theory of history. What is distinctive about Marxism is that it, and it alone, bases its socialism on the class struggle. That, too, is a simple proposition which has more to it than meets the eye. Sects rival to Marxism saw socialism primarily as a set of ideas to propagandize. Marx did not.

How do you propagandize? In order to propagandize you have to find people to talk to. So you orient yourself in a particular direction. Different socialist or revolutionary sects have oriented themselves in different directions, and that is one way to differentiate between the sects. For example, the Bakunin anarchists oriented themselves to the declassé lumpen-elements, in theoretical theses as well as in practice. The Russian

SRs oriented to the peasants, and the Fabians toward the middle class. Other socialist groups have oriented themselves to the intellectuals and intelligentsia, and still others to the working class. They oriented themselves in these directions because they believed that these were green fields for recruitment. Now, that is one way of looking at social sections. It is not the movement of a class itself which will re-make society – it is your “army.” And for the purpose of recruiting your army, you orient yourself to different sectors of society.

There is a difference between such orientations. For example, the first socialist to decide to adopt the working-class orientation was Saint-Simon. He was very clear in his mind – he was addressing himself to the working class, saying: “My ideas are right, you adopt them and then convince your boss to do what he should do in order to carry out the ideas of Saint-Simonism.”

Lassalle very consciously oriented himself to the working class because he believed the liberal bourgeoisie was hopeless. He oriented to the working class to recruit the Lassallean army. Che Guevara adopted a “class orientation” towards the Bolivian peasants; that did not mean he thought the Bolivian peasants were going to run his movement!

Now, that whole approach is completely alien to Marxism. For Marx and for Marx alone the significance of working class socialism was not simply that you orient to this class because you can get the most out of them, but that it is this class which, when it gets into motion, shakes the foundations of capitalist society. This is a statement about the working class which has no equivalent for these other orientations. This characteristic conception of working class socialism for Marx is not even of the same family as other class orientations. It is an entirely different view of working class socialism. It follows, therefore, that the primary aim of the Marxist movement is not the use of the working class as a recruitment ground of alienated people.

Marx’s approach is somewhat different. It starts from the point of view that the reason why the working class, once in motion, shakes the foundations of capitalist society is not basically psychological, but economic. That is, that capitalism cannot, in the long run, solve the economic problem of providing a human life for the masses.

You have heard that before, too. But put it in its place. This proposition provides the basis for the class approach to Marxism, and without it you have

no class approach, and cannot have one. If it is not true, there is no reason not to be a good liberal.

This is of particular relevance today because of the frequency, in circles which consider themselves revolutionary, with which one runs into the idea that capitalism has shown it can solve the economic problem, and that therefore the tasks of socialism have to be viewed in some other way. Like what? The “quality of life,” alienation, etc. Nowadays there is a label which is applied to the Marxist approach; it is “consumerism.” The term involves a very negative attitude towards holding important such things as sending your kid to school or getting a raise in wages, and other “bourgeois” values.

In fact, the basis of the trade union movement, as long as it is a struggle for a more decent life for the masses of people, still remains essentially economic. And capitalism has not solved its economic problems. Anyone who believes it has must draw a couple of conclusions. One of them is that you can no longer base socialism on a class point of view. The petty-bourgeois ideologists like Marcuse and Max Nomad who have run down the working class because it is too much interested in getting these good things of life point with contempt at the workers. But, you may have noticed, in the ghetto riots of 3 years ago the blacks, in their resentment of capitalist society, did not rush to steal Marcuse’s books from the department store in order to improve their souls. As a matter of fact, they were degenerate enough that they went after TV sets – “consumerism.”

Looking for “The Meaning of Life” is a possible occupation only for those sectors of society for whom, literally, the economic problem has been solved, and who look at the problems of society from the point of view of their sector. That is why I do not hesitate to say that this point of view is an absolutely typical petty-bourgeois ideology.

One might ask at this point: what is the bearing of this on the non-economic struggles that take place in the trade union movement – around questions of the humanization of conditions in the plant? Aren’t these struggles around the “quality of life,” etc.? Sure they are. That is why I am not running them down as such. But, now, when you get to the question of the “quality of life” for workers on the assembly line, what are you talking about? You are talking about an economic situation where humanizing working conditions is a pure-and-simple question of surplus value for the capitalist. Such improvement of working conditions and its consequences on the quality of life must be paid for out of the capitalist pocket. The roots of these struggles are the same as those involved with wages – economic

demands. They are called by different names – economic demands and non-economic demands – but from the point of view of the capitalist and the system, that distinction does not exist, because it costs money to humanize working conditions.

If it is true that capitalism has solved the economic problem, then the working class has been removed as the motor force of social change. However, consider the role of the reformist trade union leaders, who see labor's goals as simply "more," in the sense of Gompers. These reformists take the class struggle at its least common denominator. For 50 or 75 years now, socialists have pointed out that Gompers' slogan was pure reformism, but that the reformist leaders who use it really don't believe it themselves, and have been unable to carry it out consistently. Time and again, class collaborationist unions give up the struggle for "more" and settle for less, in order to keep the boss in business, or agree, as in World War II, to no-strike pledges. Only a Marxist revolutionary can mean it consistently. The struggle for more becomes revolutionary when it goes beyond the capabilities of the system to provide that "more." That is the link between the Marxist fight for reforms and the revolutionary perspective. It depends on the root idea that the economic problems of the system cannot be solved by the system. The class struggle depends on this "more." All that Marx claims is that in the course of this fight for "more" out of the system, regardless of what it does for the system, the struggle becomes, in the end, a revolutionary struggle. In the end; but not in the beginning. In the beginning it means a struggle for reforms and it means organizing on a low social and political level. From the point of view of Marx, that is what you have to do.

The class as a whole begins on a much lower level than the Marxist program itself, but the Marxist program says that this is revolutionary to begin with. From the beginning Marx puts the stress upon the basic goal – that the primary aim was to get the class as a whole moving, and that any such movement of the class as a whole was in itself and of itself progressive and revolutionary in its implications, because the class was. And this is true even if that class, as it begins moving, moves on a basis far from satisfactory to the Marxists or revolutionaries. That is the conception of the class struggle held by Marx and Engels in a completely thought-out and consistent way, and by very few others.

In this country, the trade unions are the only class organizations of the proletariat. Trade unions are class organizations par excellence because they organize only the members of a class and they organize them for the sole reason that they belong to that class. The class character of an organization

does not depend on its ideas; it depends on its objective role and function in society.

For Marx, the First International was a working class movement because it organized workers. A socialist propaganda group is not a class organization. The problem for a socialist propaganda group, even of the best kind, is how to establish its relations with that real movement of the proletariat which is not yet socialist itself. Marx's definition of "sectarian" was a mode of thought which counterposed the socialist propaganda group to the real movement of the proletariat, because that real movement of the proletariat was so backward.

In the U.S. in 1970 the working class is in motion only on a trade-union basis, and on a level which doesn't satisfy us. It therefore provides a test for the last question I want to take up: Does a class collaborationist union carry on the class struggle?

The problem behind that question is the fundamental problem of building a Marxist movement: the relationship of the Marxist movement and the labor movement. Let me put it in its most extreme way. Take a lousy union like the Teamsters Union – scabbing on the Farmworkers Union, not very democratic, racist, etc.; or the Plumbers Union in New York: That union is carrying on the class struggle, from our point of view, at a very low level. The Teamsters carry on some of the most energetic social struggles in this country

The United States, in many respects, is the ideal country to take for these purposes. In the U.S. you have the combination of energetic, even violent, struggles on behalf of "more," combined with some of the most disgusting and reactionary practices. Is a union in which the membership has practically no democratic rights at all carrying on the class struggle? Sure it is. You have got to get clear in your mind that there is a difference between the objective meaning of a class struggle and what we fight for in trade unions. They are not the same thing at all.

Time and again revolutionaries have been carried away by their hatred and disgust of the practices of the trade union movement – of its leadership, its bureaucracy. So we have a situation where Rosa Luxemburg, in **The Party, the Mass Strike and the Trade Unions**, gives no discussion of the problems of trade union work. Her whole career as a revolutionary socialist has no connection with trade union work whatsoever. When she was up against the problem after 1905–6 in Poland, where she was faced with the

development of legal trade unions, Rosa Luxemburg's party, and she herself, took the position that they were against the organization of legal mass reformist trade unions and for the organization only of trade unions under control of the party. As her biographer says, this was no doubt her reaction to having come through a decade of fighting in Germany against the Social Democratic trade union bureaucracy, which was one of the main sources of reformism. "Why should we organize in Poland the kind of movement which is giving us so much trouble in Germany?" The answer to this question wraps up everything we have been talking about. In Poland, as in Germany, those trade unions show the working class as it is in movement. The job of a revolutionary, therefore, is to choose between two standard approaches: that of ultimatically counterposing, to the real condition of that class in movement, your revolutionary program (which is what Luxemburg did), or taking the entirely different line, saying, "We are revolutionaries; that is where the class is. Therefore, we go in there with our program supporting the struggles as they are taking place underneath the layer of the bureaucracy, in order to accomplish our ends – which are a series of things with regard to the trade union movement and a series of things with regard to the recruitment of trade unionists to our revolutionary party."

And, if it is true, as is likely, that Luxemburg was not for building the kind of mass reformist trade unions such as she fought in Germany, it is also true that she had no conception of organizing a struggle inside the German trade union movement against the bureaucracy, just as she never put forward the conception of organizing a struggle inside the German party which she knew was getting lousier and lousier. That was where she failed. It is the revolutionary answer, therefore, which combines an approach to the working class where-it-is with a revolutionary perspective, without that debilitating dissent, too common among revolutionaries, with the state of the trade union movement.

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Discussion

[Response to a statement on the problems of the First International:]

The main problem with the First International, with respect to the subject we are concerned with here, was that it was an attempt to organize – not just within the same International but, nationally, within the same organizations which had to deal with each other – working class organizations which were on entirely different levels. So that you had trade unionists affiliating along with Proudhonist sects in France, etc. From that point of view, the lesson of the First International is a realization of the mistake of trying to organize, under one organizational roof, organizations which are on such disparate levels. That was the main problem of the First International with respect to the relationship of trade unions.

When the Second International, which was organized on the basis of the separation of trade unions and political organizations, was formed, the question came up of the relationship between the two types of organizations. And there the original sin came early. It was precipitated by the 1905 revolution in its impact on Germany and the question of a mass strike as raised by Luxemburg and others. When that spectre of a mass strike was raised in the trade unions, the trade union bureaucracy acted in a rotten manner. The problem then came up: What relationship do you establish between the unions and the socialist party? The solution of the party leadership – and this was a fateful moment for socialism – was a deal with the trade union leadership that the trade union structure was given a veto vote on any revolutionary action which might be undertaken by the party. That conception, which began the concept of neutrality in the trade unions, is a very important one for our purpose.

The leadership adopted the view that the trade union movement is parallel, so to speak: “The political movement is our barony. We decide in our barony, they decide in theirs.” But, of course, in actual life things don’t divide in that way. The left wing, represented by a motion by Kitschy against the proposed deal, urged the following: that the political party reserves to itself a free hand to direct its members inside the trade union movement. That was the idea that was foreign.

Marx, however, never had any trouble with that. There was a honeymoon period with the British labor leaders of the First International, which broke up when some of them started going over to the liberals. Marx had no hesitation in breaking with them (rather abusively as a matter of fact).

The test comes where there is a question of politics. What happened in the German Social Democratic Party was that, when a political gulf developed, a break with the bureaucracy was avoided at all cost. That is the

sort of problem you run into – breaking with the tops in the labor movement, in order to carry on your political work below in the trade union movement. That is the fateful question in the Marxist movement with regard to the trade unions.

[Response to a question on which side of the class line is the Teamsters Union in Salinas, where that union is scabbing on the Farmworkers Union:]

Hal: You have to look at the situation historically if you are going to determine class roles. If you think the Teamsters are working for the growers, then your whole view of that situation is going to be skewed, because they are not. They are working for the Teamsters. A class-collaborationist union is one which works hand in hand with the employers. But that does not settle the question of their historic social role at all. In the case of Salinas, suppose the Teamsters won out and took over, and let's say that 20 years from now, after our bitter feelings have died down, when we look to Salinas we see a union-organized area organized by the Teamsters. Time after time areas have been organized originally under the most terrible auspices, by real company unions which later got taken over by their membership and became real unions. The Teamsters have organized the trucking industry, and not simply for the trucking companies. They have serviced their members much better than some unions that are more democratic, have gotten tough and won benefits for their members at the same time as they have carried on their class-collaborationist activities. So you always have to ask yourself the question: What is my role as a revolutionist in this situation? Whom do I fight? What do I fight for?

In all of these cases it is still true that, until the trade union character of such organizations is completely quashed, the class struggle goes on. And this struggle cannot be repressed by the bureaucracy, as much as they try to fight it.

One's conception of the meaning of the trade union movement has to be a very broad one, precisely because we're talking about the class struggle. The trade union movement is not only the bureaucracy; in case after case it is not even some given organizational structure of the union. The trade union movement is a wider entity from the point of view of a Marxist than it appears either to the bureaucracy or the rank and file. For example, time after time trade union struggles have to emerge from, go beyond the immediate organizational structures of the trade unions. In the case of the no-strike

pledge during World War II, class struggle was still carried on in the form of job actions. But when they went outside the structure of the trade unions, they didn't go outside the trade union movement. The class struggle remained operative within that trade union movement. The typical trade union bureaucrat during this period had to go along with the class struggle, because, although the bureaucracy is the transmission belt for the influence of the bourgeoisie and the government in the labor movement, it is still the labor movement's agency for that purpose. When push comes to shove, the class struggle has its impact upon the labor bureaucrats.

The point I am trying to make here is the objective role that the trade union movement is forced to play in the class struggle, regardless of the ideas it holds about its role.

[Responses on the question of the Teamsters, etc.:]

Hal: ...we get down to the question: What is the state of consciousness as a class of the Teamsters (not the Teamster bureaucracy)? Taking the teamsters as a sector of the working class – where are they at? Is it the bureaucracy that is holding them back from becoming a revolutionary union, or is it not true that if you were to assassinate the entire bureaucracy within the next 24 hours and institute complete democratic rights to elect a new bureaucracy, the membership still would not elect you or me?

Anne: When you discuss the problem of the Teamsters in Salinas, you are taking a very specific example. This does not negate the fact that the Teamsters are not merely in Salinas. The main drive of the two-million-member Teamsters Union is the thousands and thousands of job actions that go on day after day. Every day of the year workers on the job, in plants and offices, are engaged in class struggle in conflict with the employers. The bulk of the Teamsters' activity is class struggle against the employers.

[Response to a question of borderline cases of unions: Where do you draw the line?]

Hal: In the case of unions, there are all sorts of borderline cases. It's not just a question of undemocratic unions. There are all kinds of undemocratic unions where the class struggle still goes on. Even when a sweetheart contract has been negotiated--the class struggle begins in other fashions.

The horror story to end all horror stories is what happened when Hitler came to power, when the leadership of the trade unions begged Hitler to accept them as his trade union leadership. The interesting thing is that the Nazi regime said “No.” They could not accept any movement at all which maintained a vestige of independence, and which could act as a core for the crystallization of a real social struggle independent of the regime. Even when the union bureaucrats crawled on their bellies before Hitler, the state had to tell them: “No. It is not enough to crawl. The movement itself has to be destroyed.” That is the crux of it – the destruction of the movement.

Question: Granted, the leadership reflects the level of the membership. But, doesn't the leadership itself play a role in accelerating or retarding the movement?

Hal: Of course the leadership retards and accelerates, but that is not unique to the trade union movement. It is also true of the socialist movement. My conclusion from that is that workers should go in there to fight inside that union. When they go in there, who is there to fight? The bureaucracy. There is the subjective element of the social situation in which that struggle takes place.

After you have gotten through saying all of this, what remains is the fact that all of these monstrous atrocities are not only the result of the prod of a bureaucracy. The bureaucracy, in its own way, is a reflection of the pressure that is coming from the outside. Even if the bureaucracy were removed, the outside pressures would still be there, with all of the consequences that implies.

II. Working Class Lifestyle and the Radical Sect

The subject for this evening is how to get from here to there. “Here” is society today, and “there” is the socialist society as a goal. We take as our starting point the problem of the radical sect.

One part of the question of getting from here to there has been popular in the socialist movement: that part dealing with “how to make the revolution.” That is not the subject I’m going to be speaking about. For some self-styled revolutionists that is all there is to the question of how to get from here to there. The Marxist attitude on this point is that the job of the socialist vanguard is to *help get the mass of the working class moving as a class*, independently of the ruling class and the state.

Moving where? Toward the social revolution in general, to be sure, but in the first place on behalf of its own class interests. The central idea of Marxism on this question is that insofar as the working class does this consistently and without drawing back from the consequences, it thereby moves in the direction of social revolution. This is a brief formulation of the crux of Marxism. That is the primary political meaning of those three volumes of **Capital**.

Capital seeks to prove that capitalism is incompatible with the consistent advancement of the interests of the working class. What is meant is that the workers in their struggle can go only so far and still stay within the boundaries of the system. Marx’s conception of the elementary process of social revolution is that it is the process by which the mass of people press beyond the limits of capitalism in the course of their class struggle (whether they think that is what they are doing or not). It is in this sense that every strike is a sort of rehearsal for revolution – not in the minds of the strikers, but from the point of view of the Marxists.

This is also the reason why a strike settlement always raises the question of the limits of capitalism. This happens in two ways. The capitalist raises it himself: “I can’t afford it.” And, increasingly, you get from the government: “The economy can’t afford it.” What they are demonstrating is the point of **Capital**.

The pressure of a purely economic struggle does not automatically lead to revolution, but it does lead to the recognition that the economic struggle

has its limits and, therefore, has to go over to a political struggle which brings it beyond the limits of capitalism – *if* that struggle is carried on consistently and without drawing back from the consequences. That is a very big “if” – especially for the trade union movement – and that defines much of the function of the socialist vanguard in this situation.

If this much is clear, let’s go back to what I said is the central idea of Marxism. That was that the job of the socialist vanguard is to help to get the working class moving as a class, independently. That statement is very carefully limited not to say too much but to say just enough. This does not mean moving in a revolutionary action. It does not mean moving, necessarily, on a socialist basis. It just means moving on its independent class basis – moving on its own level, not yours or mine.

Now here is where the problem for socialist sects comes in, because the level of the working class is always, until a late stage, unsatisfactory to you and me. Therefore, it also always means all kinds of horror stories about how unsatisfactory the state of affairs is. It involves the problem of what has been the great failure of socialist movements: that is, the inability of the sect to bridge these two levels – the level that the working class is moving on, and the level that the sect is thinking on.

On the one hand, you have socialists who bridge the gap by driving right across it and over to the other side, losing themselves (and their socialist ideas) in the mass movement. This has been a very popular thing to settle for, and it is one way of solving the problem personally.

On the other hand, you have the absolutely natural reaction which would make it impossible for that to happen: Avoid all temptation to lose yourself in the mass movement by keeping as far away from it as possible. That guarantees it.

The sect guards against the first possibility by counterposing its own very fine ideas to the actual mass movement of the class, and it remains a sect. Marx and Engels had much to say on the problems of sects that existed in their time.

The chronic problem becomes acute when the socialist sect arises as a congregation of intellectuals who have, to begin with, no organic connection with the working class at all. This congregation of intellectuals has the additional problem of changing itself before it can change anything else. It is not rare for socialist groups to begin as congregations of intellectuals. Marx

and Engels were very sensitive to the question of even admitting intellectuals to socialist groups; in the First International it was Marx who proposed and put through the rule that branches had to consist of at least $\frac{2}{3}$ workers. (I wonder what Marx and Engels would have thought of a Marxist sect that consisted only of intellectuals; I think it would have blown their minds.)

At this point, then, you have a grotesque political animal – a “proletarian socialist movement” without any workers but with lots of fine ideas. Your problem is becoming a working class group, even a working class sect, and you have two strikes against you: Firstly, the life of an ideological sect is congenial only to ideologists, to intellectuals. And time and again those same individuals who have sincerely passed the most burning resolutions really don’t want to change the life of the group, which is congenial to them. Secondly, assuming a real desire to change, you must find some way of breaking out of the vicious circle: on the one hand, you really can’t change until you have workers in your organization and you can’t recruit and keep workers until you have changed.

The first way out of that vicious circle, historically, has been the conversion of the intellectuals into workers – the industrialization of the intellectual membership. There are varying degrees of experience in this. As far as this country is concerned, the best two cases that I know of were: the Communist Party (I’m leaving politics aside, now), particularly during the period of the organizing of the CIO; and the Independent Socialist League in the Second World War.

Now, just a couple of points about the CP in the CIO days. When the drive started, a symbiotic relationship came into existence between the CP and John L. Lewis. The CP took advantage of the situation by getting their people into the early organizing drives of the CIO. In doing this, they were doing something different from two other ways of getting into the trade union movement: working in a shop or factory, or becoming one of the intellectual flunkies of the bureaucracy. What the CP did wasn’t either of these. They weren’t simply rank and file workers, and often they weren’t “bureaucrats.” This opportunity arises every now and then. They went in and did not make communist speeches at CIO meetings. They went in and tolerated Lewis’ dictatorship. They lived under that, and it was damn hard for them to do so. But what they got was invaluable experience which you will never get in any other way. They got a second thing – something that comes from organizing workers on the job, who know that you fought for them – moral authority. They got their credentials as militant trade unionists while they were tolerating Lewis’ dictatorship on top. Thirdly, while they couldn’t get up and

make revolutionary speeches, they spread their influence and their ideas – a little more subtly and in some ways more effectively.

On this question of getting more experience: I take as a contemporary example the question of whether or not radicals should go into the United Farm Workers organizing drive. While Chavez may be a “bureaucrat,” he does not compare with Philip Murray, John L. Lewis, or others who were better than those two. The sect will say: “Chavez does not let you make your own decisions. He tells the organizers what to do.” But Chavez is not the problem; he is not *your* problem. The best thing that could happen to some of our radical intellectuals is that they should go organize for UFWOC even if they keep their mouths shut for a while in order to gain those three other things. That is, get the “feel” of it. If there is one thing that is true of socialist sects, it is that they consist of people who have the best ideas of what the working class ought to do, and who are right, but who have no “feel” for it. They do not know how to talk to workers. Through these organizing drives you learn to talk to workers. You don’t begin as the professor; you begin as a pupil. You have to learn a few things you don’t know and get your credentials in the workers’ eyes. You get the authority to talk. “After all, who are you to tell them what to do? Have you ever organized two workers? And you are going to tell the union bureaucrats how to organize?! Why should a worker listen to you?” That is the nature of the problem.

So we come to the problem of industrialization, of really changing the character of the socialist sect. Once you start doing that, a number of questions are raised.

Anne and I had an opportunity to face the problems of industrialization in the period of the Second World War. I am referring to the experience of the ISL, when it was possible to a far greater extent than at present to industrialize and proletarianize the membership, an opportunity seized by the organization. What happened from 1942 to 1946 was the relatively large-scale industrialization of a large part of our membership. This opportunity arose from two sides: on the one hand, the alternative to going into a factory was getting drafted. Since most of the membership faced the draft anyway, we decided that everybody should go into the factories and get industrial deferments to avoid the draft for as long as possible. On the other hand, because of the war and the period, jobs were wide open.

What do you run into when this process starts? One of the first problems we ran into was a small fact which changed the life of the branch: we had to end every meeting at 10 p.m., for the simple reason that we all had to get up

at 5:45 a.m. You would be amazed if I were to spell out to you the changes in the life of a branch brought about once you have to shorten the duration of your meetings and when none of your active people can attend four committee meetings a week because they have to attend four union meetings a week. The branch activists were not active within the sect; they were active among the workers.

Secondly, and thirdly, let me mention two things which differentiate the people we were working with, as compared with what is enforced upon us today. First there is the question of responsibility. Students are “irresponsible” in the literal sense. Students are not weighed down and shackled by the obligations which most workers have. They are free in many respects. Workers are not free. Politically, when we talk of responsibility, we are dealing with the social consequences of lifestyle. When you make proposals, you have to think them out in a new way, to a much greater extent than you would for the student movement. Otherwise, you’re likely to get the reputation, among the workers, as the kind of person who makes an irresponsible move at the drop of a hat. And you won’t be listened to by people who are interested in keeping their jobs, paying off their mortgages, and supporting their husbands and wives.

What does your program mean to the lives of these responsible people whom you are trying to organize and whose lives and careers may depend on you if you are a union organizer, for example?

Another aspect of the difference between students and workers is that you are dealing, for the most part, with people who have a permanent prospect of having to be workers. You or I, even when we enter the workplace, always have alternatives; for the average worker there are no alternatives. In this respect, therefore, there is an inescapable difference you can’t get over. You can only realize it, you can’t get over it.

There is, in the working class, something equivalent to the temporary state of being a student. In the past, it has always been true that women workers, especially young women workers in offices, have been hard to organize because they viewed their jobs as temporary, a situation they pass through on the way to getting married. Whereas the worker who is working in a factory or the like looks upon the union in a totally different way. The union means something different to him than it means to those women workers, or to a certain sector of young workers today who may work for six months and then disappear for a while.

So, consider what this whole situation does in terms of the life of the radical sect, in terms of its educational life. A lot of our membership then (and undoubtedly now) found it difficult to get interested in “low-level” things like explaining elementary socialism to workers, to whom it is a brand new idea. They were bored. Intellectuals get bored very easily; they live in the world of ideas, and if the ideas aren’t challenging enough they lose their interest. We had comrades who could listen to five or six trade union reports and find it just a lot of mumbo-jumbo. It just wasn’t “interesting.” The solution to this problem comes about only insofar as you participate in these discussions not simply as an audience that needs to be amused or interested, but as a group of comrades interested in presenting these elementary ideas to workers. Comrades should listen to, say, a discussion on elementary socialism, asking themselves, “Could I do this?” Think in terms of learning to be the leader and focus of a circle of workers yourself. If you do this, you can find a good elementary talk on socialism fascinating. You are going to have to get across these ideas to people who are operating on an entirely different level from yourself, and if you can’t do that, you aren’t worth a damn.

There is one other question I want to take up. As I told you, there is not much written on the problem of getting from here to there. But there have been some interesting verbal discussions on the subject. One way of dealing with the question of the social composition of your group is purely mechanical. Trotsky, perturbed by the composition of the Trotskyist group, made the proposal that every member of the group be required to recruit, in the course of one year, three workers or be demoted to candidate status (i.e., second-class citizenship). That proposal was never considered seriously; it was too mechanical. At least Marx’s $2/3$ proposal was easier to enforce because most of the branches of the First International did begin as workers’ groups.

Now, if I were to propose that we expel our students or non-workers we would have an obvious difficulty. The L.O. people would say that was because we started off on the wrong foot. What the L.O. people have done is take seriously the idea that if you are building a proletarian socialist movement, then workers are the first-class citizens in your movement and the others are either second-class citizens or not citizens. In my opinion, that is absolutely right. It has been the case for every revolutionary socialist group that was worth its salt, although perhaps in a different form than in L.O. In L.O. it is done mechanically, and I am not sympathetic to that, but in the best groups it has been true. Another thing that has been done is packing the leadership

with workers, even if they are not the majority of the organization, in order to orient the organization.

Let me give you two examples of what this orientation means. When I went to L.A. in 1942, as party organizer, I kept my mouth shut about trade union problems for six months – and I was not even completely alien to trade union work. The branch was involved deeply in trade union work and you could not even begin discussing intelligently the problems they faced until you got a feel for their situation. So I'm trying to emphasize that this has nothing to do with your social position or the imposition of discipline. It has to do with the climate of opinion in an organization – the relationship between comrades who are involved up to their hips in serious trade union work as socialists and those others who might be much better at making speeches on Marxism.

This problem, when faced by a revolutionary group, must be met by an understanding on the part of at least a minority of the intellectuals of what their place is. Until and unless that happens, the concrete organizational solutions which one can discuss are not even thinkable. That is the way for getting from here to there – intellectuals in a socialist vanguard group must know their place.

Question and Answer Period

Comrade A: I think that you began to go into some of the problems of a revolutionary organization and the problems people face on the job when trying to relate to workers – problems of arrogance and inexperience. But that is only one side of the question. The other side of the question is why it is that the working class has the consciousness it has today. The problem you have to deal with is the objective circumstances that a worker faces. A worker worries about keeping his job; what does this do to his consciousness? This problem doesn't escape revolutionaries when they go into the workplace. They face the same pressures that all workers have to face. One of the functions of a socialist organization is to help counteract these pressures by allowing the socialist worker to bring his socialist perspective to the job, by giving him the political and moral support to carry on so that, if necessary, he will take the risk of losing his job in order that he may see the pressures for what they are and get around them.

Two things disturbed me. I think it is nonsense to praise revolutionaries for spending all their time with workers and not having time to take part in the life of the organization. It is all the more critical in that situation that the

life of the organization be structured so that what meetings there are are oriented toward discussing the work of those people who are active on the job, so that they can maintain a perspective on the work they are doing.

The second thing that worries me: were you not advocating that ISers become staff organizers for unions like UFWOC – organizers not responsible to the workers they are trying to organize, not representing them in any way but responsible for their jobs to a union bureaucracy? If that is so, I think it is a serious mistake.

It seems to me a program for industrialization has to include that kind of work, but by going into the shops, so that the organizing you are doing does reflect what ability you may have to raise the consciousness of the workers there and reflect the struggles going on in the shops. Especially today, with all the problems that exist for ISers and all revolutionaries, to go in and take positions as paid organizers who are responsible to the bureaucracy and not to the people being organized is to be put in an untenable position.

You have to take account of both aspects of the relationship between a revolutionary sect and working class work – the aspect of revolutionary sects gaining experience and learning from the working class, and the fact that only a revolutionary sect can provide the base for a revolutionary to survive in the working class. It seems to me that you failed to deal with that whole second half.

Hal: Let me correct you as to what I said. I think you ought to be disturbed if anyone thinks that worker comrades should not come to meetings or take part in the life of the organization. You did not hear me say that. I said that one of the things that happens when comrades go into the working class movement is that they get lost there. That is one of the dangers they face, and one of the first symptoms of getting lost is never coming to meetings or taking part in the life of the organization. What I was referring to is what happens to the life of the organization in order to make it possible for worker comrades to take part in it – such as ending meetings at 10 p.m.

Secondly, about staff organizers. You can advocate that all of our comrades should become staff organizers or that it should be forbidden for our comrades to become organizers – paid or unpaid. I don't advocate either. I take it that comrade A was advocating that we should never do that. I was advocating that that was one of the things comrades should do. If you want to exclude it, you are absolutely wrong. In the industrialization that took

place in the ISL, most of the time there was not that opportunity. Our comrades just went to work in factories. I raised the question of organizers with regard to a different kind of period and a different kind of situation – the opportunity of the CIO organizing drive. Did the CP go into the CIO as paid organizers? They were probably paid something. If you want to exclude that you are absolutely wrong and you ought to answer the five or six considerations I gave and not rest on the Principle of Bureaucrats. That is the answer of a typical sectarian.

Now, today in UFWOC you could do the same thing. If one or two of our comrades did that, I think it would have a great effect on the organization. You gain the benefits of experience, a feel of the situation and knowledge of what it is to be in the working class movement, without giving up your principles at all. If you are thinking of a situation in which, to become an organizer, you have to sell your soul, then I will inveigh against that. That was not the situation in the CIO; it is not the situation in UFWOC. You say you exclude taking jobs as staff organizers because you would be under a bureaucrat. I tell you, you are wrong. As long as you do not compromise yourself politically, you can both build yourself as a working class leader and, at the same time, do good work in the class struggle.

Anne: I would like to add to the comments. Fresh from college in 1939, I became a CIO organizer for the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and I considered myself a revolutionary then. There was a group of socialists working within the CIO organizing committee. They were known as the most confident, active, dynamic and idealistic organizers. Phil Murray controlled that steel workers organizing committee up until 1942; for five years it was under his total control. Anyone who thinks that you cannot function as an organizer because someone sits in Washington and controls that union is thinking in very abstract, mechanical and sectarian terms. We built trade unionists and socialists while we were at it. The CP built the CP on the basis of its organizers. We could only gnash our teeth in envy. As the CP built the CIO, they were building for their party communist cadres steeled in the class struggle. Those of you who ought to know better and know the experience of the Teamsters in Minneapolis know that it took revolutionaries to build that union under the reactionary Dan Tobin. Our comrades now, whether they be in the teachers union, government employees, or the farm workers, can play a similar role when thousands begin moving in new areas, such as women workers, etc. It would be blindness on our part to ignore the possibilities for revolutionaries as union organizers in such a situation. It goes without saying that if you have to compromise your political principles, you don't accept that

position. If you have to sell the Democratic Party to the workers, for example, you don't accept the position. But there are situations where possibilities do occur, and we ought to take advantage of them.

Comrade B: Very few situations today are similar to the CIO organizing campaign. In the CIO a mass union movement was coming into being and, however dictatorial the bureaucracy formally was, they did not have such a consolidated power and apparatus that they actually could police that power. In most situations now, one of the things that is imposed on you is that you can have no ongoing relationship to the people you organize, and this is certainly a critical factor. If you are sent in to get that election done and pulled out when it is done to do something else, that really affects the kind of work you can do.

I had a great deal of sympathy with much of what you had to say. There is a problem that comrades do not understand the concrete situation. The three months probation period at the place I work is the best thing for radicals who go in there, because it means that they have to keep their mouths shut instead of making fools of themselves. There are all kinds of problems of people coming in with romantic notions. But the other side of this is that there seems to be an assumption which I don't think is valid for the IS today. There is a difference between the IS and a movement which has a certain substantial amount of working class cadre dispersed in a number of industries, a certain body of collective tradition which has been the basis of their work in the past, etc. These are things that have to be created; they don't exist in the IS today. More particularly, a good proportion of our working class cadre are recruited from the working class with all of the good and bad things that come out of that experience. The question is: How does a revolutionary socialist organization have some effect on the development of its cadre in the shop, given the situation portrayed in your presentation?

Take the whole question of program: Do we intervene in a positive way? Do we have some way of training our people in the shops, giving them that experience and then taking that experience back to the organization and testing it in some way? Developing the organization by training new cadre – that interaction has been left out. What you say is right; however, people in the working class can make mistakes too, which can be very costly to themselves and to the organization. I think you are bending the stick so far the other way that you do not deal with the other problem – of gaining experience and of that experience becoming an integral part of the life of the organization, of training people, of developing a program, of teaching people the need to have a program and to work in that direction.

Hal: Comrade B is perfectly right about bending that stick, but he wants to bend the stick back in the other direction on the importance of laying down a program. In this IS, which is all that I was talking about, if there is anything which is not needed at this moment it is speeches about the necessity of adopting programmatic declarations. Of all the things the IS is good at, it is that.

Comrade B: The IS program exists on paper; it isn't taken seriously.

Hal: Exactly.

Comrade Z: I just want to make a couple of comments. When Jack raised the question of the CIO workers being different from those today, he was right. But that is also true for work in the shops. It is not true that organizing situations are very rare. There are lots of circumstances in which you can do good work organizing. The point involved is that, especially for an organization with little experience, the organizing experience is a very good one.

There are lots of places where workers are organizing for the first time. The whole point about the CIO organizers is that they weren't dependent upon bureaucrats even though the bureaucrats were dictators, even to the point of liquidating their opponents, like Lewis. Lewis and others were dependent on revolutionaries because, by and large, you can't get paid hacks to organize workers. One of the reasons why the trade union movement in this country has difficulty organizing workers is that it depends on paid hacks. There are all kinds of organizing situations where you can get in and it is good to do so.

One thing which Comrade A raised is absolutely true – that everybody who tries to organize workers faces the problem of having to meet those workers, whether just through sympathetic vibrations, or because he happens to be in the same economic situation (which most of our comrades aren't) – that is, he really needs the job. Even if you industrialize and are in there ten years, you aren't in the same economic situation as the workers. You can quit and get another job. The problem is that no organization and no individual can be any counterbalance on those people who are trying to organize in the working class except those who have done that job. There is no way that they can gain that moral authority because all their ideas, as good as they are about how to organize, are simply not fact. They are not going to get fired for that idea and therefore it becomes a purely abstract moral

imperative. It is only when people with socialist principles succeed in organizing workers that it is at all possible.

[Summary:]

Hal: Comrade W made a comment about needing a Marxist analysis. I'd like to say something about that. Since that is what I'm working on most of the time, you hardly have to convince me. In fact, who are you convincing of what? As I said before, that is one of the things the IS does best. However, for just this evening (and for the first time in the history of the IS) I'm discussing a different question. That's what gets at this business of bending the stick. I'm perfectly willing to bend the stick, provided what I say is true. But that doesn't mean that every evening of the year, no matter what the discussion, I have to cover all the bases. On this day of the year I am devoting myself to talking about something the IS is doing very badly and on which it needs a reorientation. I get the feeling that Dick's main thought was, "My God, there wasn't enough in there about a Marxist program," rather than, "What can the IS do to implement this new direction that it has to go in?" This is one of the difficulties we face; given the comrades we have, they are not sufficiently keyed up to the vital importance of making a break in the other direction.

Now, on the question of the interaction between a program for the working class and activity, all I have to say on that is that you can't even begin to talk about interaction until you have something to interact with. In those years when our comrades were hip-deep in the trade union movement, we spent our meetings on discussing the relationship between our work and our political goals. But this is a problem the IS has yet to run into. I hope that we get to the point where we face that problem. I assure you that when it was a real problem it put itself on the agenda.

It is interesting to hear so much of the discussion center around the question of becoming organizers. That question, in a way, is kind of a test of your soul. One way you make clear that a question is the all-important one for you is that you spend most of your time discussing it. This is not the key question for me. As I told you, during the war period when our most intensive trade union work went on, that question didn't even arise. It arises in certain times of crisis and in a limited way.

One of the most important revolutionary slogans is, "Organize the unorganized!" One of the main indictments revolutionaries make against the bureaucracy is that they fail to organize the unorganized. Time after time it

is only revolutionaries in specific situations that have gone out and organized the unorganized into unions (and not by telling them in the first place about the dictatorship of the proletariat).

I'd like to say something on the question of working for bureaucrats who are going to fire you. There is nothing wrong with that. It may happen. You may get fired out of any job, not just that of organizer. As a worker in a shop you can and should be an organizer, and the best militants have sometimes started as unpaid, unappointed organizers – shop floor organizers. And as a result of building up support in their shops, they have been able to become shop committeemen or organizers with a base in the rank and file and not simply being at the mercy of the bureaucrats.

Someday, when the IS gets to the point where it faces some of these problems as realities, we can go more deeply into this subject. But at the present time, that is a little theoretical, except for the purpose of bringing out some general ideas. Again, the problem of organizers is not the central issue. It is peripheral. In a number of situations being an organizer means being under the control of a bureaucrat. Those are the situations you avoid. However, if you come at it with the sectarian idea that you're against it on principle, you're going to be screwed.

Right now, we have to get to the point where we face these problems concretely, and to do that we have to change the organization. This is not a problem peculiar to the IS. What is peculiar, to some extent, is the degree. This, also, has nothing to do with the IS but with the times. There is no backlog of experience to give us continuity in approaching trade union work. In the ISL we had no problem, not because we were smarter or better than IS comrades today, but because we already had developed a small cadre of experienced trade unionists who knew what the score was and who could pass something on – who could affect and determine the political or public climate in the organization. The climate of the organization today is different because of the times. There is a lack of continuity with the revolutionary tradition of trade unionism. It has to be relearned. We are in the process of relearning it.

III. Rank and File Organization in the Labor Movement

When dealing with rank and file organizations, one encounters a tremendous amount of variation. Therefore, it's very risky to generalize. I say this in advance because the actual situations are much more varied than I'm going to be able to indicate to you, which is why it's very difficult to become an "instant trade union expert." This is true even for people with some experience in the trade union movement; often they will find themselves faced with a situation where their experience doesn't apply. Especially when you get down, concretely, to what has to be done.

Let me give you a personal example. The first union I belonged to, and of which I became president at the age of 21, was the most peculiar union local I've ever heard of. It was an honest-to-goodness local of WPA workers. There were about 50 teachers, employees of the Workers Educational Project, and every single one of them was some sort of communist, socialist or Trotskyist. The reason I became president was that I was a member of the Socialist Party and we had the largest fraction there!

If anyone were foolish enough to think that his "experience" in that local was much of an indicator of trade union work, he'd have to be out of his mind. You could go through a year and a half of "trade union activity" in that WPA local and still know as little about trade union work as you did when you started.

I took that as the weirdest example I knew of, and therefore it is an extreme case. But, in one way or another (leaving the weirdness out), that's true of most specific situations. For example, the next union I was active in was the Teachers Union, and work in the Teachers Union is quite different from work in a blue collar union, or many other unions. So, I emphasize the difficulty in generalizing, in order to counteract some of the generalizations I'm going to give you.

The problems connected with rank-and-file opposition movements and organizations vary according to a great number of things. First of all, there is the nature of the times. Clearly, the problem of rank-and-file organization will be different in a time of radicalization than in a period of apathy in the labor movement. I don't mean that the principles of Marxism change. But the specifics of what you have to do may change considerably.

Then there is the nature of the industry. When Anne and I were working in the shipyards, for example, the workers by and large had two advantages for trade union work that you don't have in most plants. One was mobility on the job; the other was the ability to talk on the job. Two little things like that make an enormous difference.

Another important factor is the tradition and structure of the union. An outstanding example of this is the difference between factional or caucus organization in the Typographical Union, where it is a standard procedure (although within the bureaucratic shell of the union) and, say, the Carpenter's Union. And of course there's the whole question of whether the plant is organized in the first place.

The problems you face depend also on whether there's already a movement to which you have to relate, or whether it's a question of initiating such a movement. You may find yourself in a situation where the issues are already laid out for you, or in one where you have to develop the program yourself. And, of course, if the issues are laid out you still have to ask yourself if you want to steer a different course, or if you should.

There are other factors according to which the situation may vary. One, which I want to deal with now, is the nature of the union leadership with which you're involved – both the local leadership and the top leadership. Because, since we're talking about rank-and-file organization and opposition groups, that's what you're going to be fighting.

I said "union leadership," and Standard Operating Procedure demands nowadays that you talk only about the Union Bureaucracy. This brings up a terminological point. The "bureaucracy" has become an ambiguity, especially in the student milieu. (For example, I hear comrades talking, only semi-jocularly, about the "I.S. Bureaucracy," meaning, say, the Area Committee. Of course, to think of the International Socialists' Area Committee as a bureaucracy just about reduces the term to absurdity.)

For students and the academic milieu generally, the concept of bureaucracy has taken on all the flavor suggested by the Weberian theory, where it is looked upon as a social institution taken in a vacuum. But when you look at the union leadership, there are some important ramifications you're going to have to take into account.

In another session, I commented upon the "horror story" approach to the union leadership or bureaucracy – an approach which is absorbed

especially by people outside the trade union movement, from two sources particularly: the press and communications media and the academy. In both cases, in other words, from the bourgeoisie. But what I'm going to try to explain is why, from the Marxist point of view, that is misleadingly one-sided. From the point of view of Marxism the trade union officialdom, bureaucracy, structure, has a dual social function – and this is what I want to stress.

I should make clear that the other source of ambiguity of the term “bureaucracy” is the fact that in common parlance it has two different meanings. On the one hand, “bureaucratic” means undemocratic. On the other, it refers to a type of social institution, with a certain structure, whether democratic or undemocratic. What I am discussing now is the institutional aspect, the social role and function of the union officialdom or bureaucracy-democratic or undemocratic – as an institution.

From the point of view of Marxism, the union leadership necessarily has a dual social function, and it is important to understand both sides of it. One side of it is the fact that this union bureaucracy is the organizational leadership of our class. Whereas, the state bureaucracy, for example, is the organizational leadership of their class. Now from the point of view of the academic sociologist, it doesn't make any difference; there's no such thing as “our class” and “their class” – you just have bureaucracies. You have the union bureaucracy, the state bureaucracy, and 15 other bureaucracies, and one bureaucracy is just like another bureaucracy. They all conform to the same system. From our point of view, you cannot take that phony, non-class attitude.

When you are discussing the trade union bureaucracy, you're talking about the organizational leadership of our class. I make the analogy: if you are in a revolutionary army, you have an officer corps – whether you call them officers, marshals, commissars, or whatever. That's your officer corps; you're fighting with them, while at the same time you may not like them. But you and they are on the same side of the barricades. In the same sense, I mean something similar when I emphasize that the trade union bureaucracy is the bureaucracy of our class.

Now, the second side of that union leadership is that, at the same time as it is the bureaucracy of our class, it is the channel and the agency for the exercise of bourgeois influence on the working class, and for bourgeois control of the working class. And it is both of these two things at the same time.

This, of course, doesn't mean that at any instant of time any particular section of the union leadership is acting simultaneously in both ways equally. That never happens with social phenomena.

I will tell you furthermore that, until the revolution, this union bureaucracy is going to continue to serve both functions. Likewise, it cannot help but serve both functions – even if you constituted it, and it does this in continuing uneasy tension and with varying forms. This duality of the trade union leadership is not just some surface phenomenon about the trade unions. It's a view of the social role of this stratum which is inherent in Marxism and Marxism's view of the class struggle in this society, and peculiar to Marxism. It flows from Marx's view that the proletariat in motion already implies the dissolution of capitalist relations and that actual revolution is only the culmination of that process. Some of you may remember Marx's oft-quoted and very pregnant remark (in the Inaugural Address) on how the passage of the ten-hour workday bill in England represented "the political economy of the working class," not of capitalism. If you examine the meaning behind that remark, you'll see what I'm trying to explain to you.

A sectarian will say, "But the 10 hour day is only a reform that will keep the working class satisfied with capitalism." That, of course, is the official line of the Socialist Labor Party. And it's a statement which is half true! Like almost all statements of that sort. One side of the fight for the 10 hour day, or such reforms, was the fact that when the capitalists were forced to concede it, the class struggle was temporarily eased. That's the side of it which does help keep capitalism together. The capitalists were defeated in a battle and gave in – made a concession that didn't destroy capitalism.

But, as on all of these questions, there are two sides to the everyday struggle of the working class. We see this duality in the development of the whole trade union movement. At first, the capitalists fought it to the death, recognizing that legalizing the trade unions meant giving up prerogatives of ownership. Yet, in most capitalist countries today, trade unions are legalized in some form or another. Here we see that duality which is so characteristic of the class struggle. The capitalist class was forced to accept, and live with, the trade unions. But this didn't mean they gave up the struggle. Capitalism is still here! The capitalists make the best of the situation by utilizing their concession to undercut the class struggle. This started in England in the 1880s with the move from the legalization of the trade unions in order to use them to discipline the working class. And this has been going on for over a century.

Now, that's their view of it, the capitalist class's view of it. But, if that's the only view that you can see – that is, the capitalist's use of these legalized, recognized, trade unions as domesticated instruments – then your view is purely bourgeois. Because, from a Marxist's point of view there is the other side, the other part to that duality I referred to – the working class's class-struggle part of that duality.

Without such a disciplining side to the role of the union bureaucracy, the trade union movement couldn't exist under capitalism! It's true that, from our point of view as revolutionists, we don't like the role of the trade union bureaucracy in disciplining the working class, because of what they discipline them for. But, without this role, the trade union movement couldn't exist under capitalism. We must keep in mind that, until the revolution, the trade union movement exists, for the most part, within the premises of capitalism. And that's what keeps its function dual, even in the most radicalized times. On the one hand, even in the most apathetic times the class struggle is always seething down below. On the other hand, even in the most radicalized times (I'm not talking about revolutionary periods), the trade unions still remain disciplinarian. Neither of these sides ever wholly disappears – although, they change in their degree and relationship.

Now, does this disciplining function of the union leadership serve the bourgeoisie? Of course it does. But, does it serve the bourgeoisie only? Or does it also serve the interests of the trade union movement? I will tell you, that when you get down to disciplining – and not just extremes or atrocities, but the normal disciplining of reformist labor bureaucrats – for the trade union movement to continue to exist and not shake itself to pieces, that still plays also a preservative function.

But in a sense, the function played by that discipline is determined also by the struggle in that union. The union leadership is going to discipline its membership, as long as it is there in power. As a matter of fact, a militant union leadership – even you – will also have the need to discipline the ranks, although you'll do it by persuasion or other democratic means. But if you think that disciplining means only using bats on the membership, you don't know the realities of the trade union movement; that is not what usually takes place. The usual – necessary or unnecessary – restraining of the action from below by the working class takes place through all the various means of internal persuasion available to a leadership.

The meaning of discipline in a particular situation is determined by the struggle, including the struggle of the ranks. It's not simply determined by

pinning a label “disciplining the working class” on it. You have to understand in a concrete situation what that means. Under capitalism, the union as an institution and its official leadership are inescapably in the middle of two pressures. One is the pressure from above, which means, concretely, from the bourgeoisie and all of its institutions – political and non-political, state and non-state, especially non-state, which also means from outside the working class. The other is the pressure from below, from the ranks of the class. And it is in the course of the struggle in the trade union movement that the real relationship between those two pressures gets determined.

That is the context in which you should think of the subject of rank and file groups. The function of revolutionaries in the trade unions is to understand the constellation of forces, and to understand that their special role in that trade union movement, among other things, is to throw the full force of whatever they’ve got towards that other pressure, the pressure from below on that leadership institution, good or bad.

This applies just as much to a good union leadership as to a bad one. Therefore, the role of a revolutionist in the trade unions does not depend, in the first place, on whether you can tell horror stories about the union leadership. The fundamental function of the revolutionist doesn’t change – although the tactics and strategy may change, depending on the situation. This applies even to any union you might be the head of; you would need that countervailing rank-and-file pressure just as much as the next guy.

This brings me back to where I started – to the great variations in actual, living trade union situations with regard to the organization of rank and file groups. There are basically two kinds of situations (not mutually exclusive, or even inclusive): firstly, where you may have to take the initiative in forming a rank and file organization yourself; and secondly, where you come into a situation where you must relate to an existing movement.

Starting with the second, I’m going to turn you over to an expert on that subject. Here’s what I mean. There is a widespread view – not in the I.S. but in the student milieu – that the trade union movement is a kind of desert. That is, there is a bureaucracy which disciplines the working class, and that’s all. I remember talking to a sociology professor who expressed great interest and surprise when I mentioned to him that, in the course of her travels in the labor movement, Anne runs constantly into situations in unions where there are opposition groups and fights at conventions. This was an entirely new view of the trade union movement for this sociology professor! This was completely unknown territory for him, and is to a great many. Now, it’s very

difficult territory to explore, because nobody ever knows what goes on; it never gets written about, or very rarely. Even if you were to read the whole labor press – which is edited, in most cases, by intellectual flunkies for the labor officialdom who don't ordinarily like to write about opposition groups in the unions – you wouldn't find out very much. So, if you wanted to find an expert on this sort of thing, where would you go? You'd have to go to someone who just gets around the labor movement.

Now, in the state of California, there are perhaps a handful of people who do, and I'll introduce you to one who probably gets around to more of the California labor movement than anyone else. Over a period of time, Anne gets around to most of the union conventions on the West Coast. In the course of doing so, she has run into people in opposition groups who are fighting the leadership, who she never before knew existed. She gets up and makes her little speech about the Union Label and the Class Struggle, and, as a result, militants and oppositionists come up and talk to her. And so, over the years, because of her, I have gotten a feel for the absolutely unknown territory that nobody writes about or speaks about – the temporary, sporadic, amorphous, unconnected kinds of fights and struggles that go on in the trade union movement. That's what she's going to talk about for a little while, and then I'm going to come back and talk about an entirely different kind of situation, a more organized kind of situation.

Anne: When I go to these conventions and urge the delegates to give us their solidarity, their support, what I'm trying to do is heighten, in effect, their class consciousness in supporting other union struggles. And, in this particular work, I have been enabled to get a broader view of the West Coast labor movement than one could get even by reading the official labor press. It's not necessary to repeat some of the ground we've covered in previous sessions on the attitude socialists take toward the working class, as the basic class that has the social power, at the point of production, to carry on the revolution. Hence, our concern with the only mass, class, organizations in America, namely, the trade union movement – which embraces some 20 million workers. These workers are fragmented into something like 190 different unions. And every comrade who goes into one of the 190 unions is going to have a different concrete situation. Your first job is to acquaint yourself, in some detail, with what your concrete situation is – on the shop floor, on a regional level, on an international level. What I want to try to do now is give you some picture of the ferment, the antagonism, the struggles that are going on that don't get reported.

In the last six months, something like 20 different international unions held conventions and adopted positions either calling for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, or in some form expressing sharp disagreement with George Meany and the standard AFL-CIO support to Nixon's Vietnam policy. You could read the official AFL-CIO press inside out (as I do) and only in very rare cases where it was impossible to suppress it, read about anti-war resolutions and discussions. This is why, unless you have literally hundreds, if not thousands, of revolutionary socialists in the trade union movement, you can't get too accurate a picture of the ferment that's going on. And I can only go through some of the things that have occurred to me during some of the conventions that I've recently attended.

First of all, the reports at conventions indicate that the official wildcat figures don't even begin to tell the truth of the dissatisfaction, the grumbling in the workers' ranks on the problems of the cost of living, on the problems of automation, of joblessness, of unsatisfactory settling of grievances. Yet, as you read the official reports, you get this picture of ranks wildcatting, striking, and in California the official figures show that during 1969 there were 357 officially recognized, legal, strikes – the highest in California since almost ten years ago.

This rising militancy gets reflected in the convention reports, convention discussions, and the demand for more contract increases. It is reflected by the organizations of blacks, Chicanos, and women. The pressure from outside already has begun to have its impact inside the trade union movement.

For example, at a recent convention of the UAW there was a big battle on the part of the women delegates for more women on the International Executive Board. In the process of fighting for this democratic demand, they set in motion a whole series of objective consequences that can only heighten the consciousness of women workers, of workers in general, and prepare them for bigger battles. Likewise, with black representation on leading bodies and with Chicanos.

You're aware, too, that the trade union leadership, the bureaucracy, is increasingly frightened that their contracts are being rejected by the ranks. Over and over again, they have to report that this is a "bad" thing, an "alarming" thing, this is "destroying the stability of our union," etc. That is a tribute to the fact that the ranks will not stop their rejection, but will be increasing it. At a recent convention, we had not only talk about the American wildcats, but a British trade union leader was quoted about a

dissident group in his Electrical Workers Union in England. He went on in great detail about how these communists and Trotskyists were upsetting the union leadership terribly, upsetting the economic picture; he went on in great detail on how big this group had been. They had control of the union for years, and had just been ousted. And this report was being given to a convention which had not yet had its first battle on the floor!

Then there's the Carpenters' convention. This union is very typical of blue-collar unions, building-construction workers. They have organized some 400,000 carpenters out of a potential of 2 million! And this of course raises an important fact about the trade unions in general. They have not organized even half of the American working class; about one out of every three workers is organized. Huge sectors are unorganized – totally under the domination of the employers and lacking even that level of collective action and consciousness that the organized trade unions have been able to achieve.

At the Carpenters Union convention, held here in San Francisco, the big question which raged in the halls among the leadership, and which went all the way to Washington and Meany's office was: "Will Meany dare to talk about the Vietnam War? If he does, there'll be a floor revolt." So the great achievement was to prevent Meany from speaking in support of the Vietnam war. Now, you can shrug your shoulders and say, "Big deal!" But when you can get George Meany frightened that there'll be a rank-and-file revolt that the leadership may not be able to contain, then that is some indicator of the significance this question held.

There were very few blacks among the 2,500 delegates present. And yet, the questions of racism, apprenticeship, turnover, are just burning in the ranks. Over and over again, workers would discuss the fact that they work only 6 to 8 months out of the year, that their standards are steadily deteriorating, and that they are unable to organize new workers, particularly in the South, because of the racist attitudes of the union.

Also raised was a question which I think we have to be more concerned with: the rising feeling among the Canadian sectors of all the unions that they want their autonomy. You know that unions are called "International" unions because they have sections in America and Canada. In one convention after another, the Canadian sector will get up and demand that they have control of their contracts, control of their organization, and not be beholden to the International leadership. And in some unions the Canadian section is very large – in the Steelworkers it's roughly 1/6 of the union (and the base of the New Democratic Party of Canada).

If this can happen in 1970 at the Carpenters convention, consider the significance; because, the fact that it gets to the floor is an indication of how deep this ferment is.

Take the United Federation of Postal Clerks. Earlier in the year, there was a magnificent strike of postal workers. And that class action impelled, for the first time, the formation of groups throughout the nation that came to a convention of the Federation of Postal Clerks and demanded, and got, a promise from their leadership that they would stand for the repeal of any no-strike law on the federal level and would fight for amnesty for the strikers. A Committee for Effective Leadership, composed largely of the strike leaders, took leadership at that convention floor and raised one issue after another, including withdrawal from Vietnam. The height was reached when the president was voted down a salary increase of 14%.

So, if comrades are concerned with what level you enter a struggle, my opinion is this: when you have an organization concerned with democratizing the structure, such as the Committee for Effective Leadership, if we had had delegates there I hope they would have been functioning within that committee, because that's where the real concrete struggle was taking place. It was what drew the blacks, the Chicanos, the women workers. They ran opposition candidates, and in some cases got them elected. We would function as the left wing, in my opinion, of such a national rank and file caucus.

Take another example: the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, with 400,000 members, one of the largest unions in America. Their hourly rate is one of the highest; in New York, they work 32 hours per week at from 5 to 8 dollars per hour. They have a convention every four years. Their last convention was as silent as the grave; I understand some opposition voices were raised, and immediately gaveled down. But in the interval, they did elect a new president. And every time you have a change of officers, the control is weakened.

The first vote which came up before this particular convention was whether or not to pay the retiring president some astronomical sum, about \$70,000 a year for life. And the convention of close to 4,000 delegates voted that down. This was the first and only time at that convention that the dissidents won; on subsequent votes, the tellers counted more carefully and somehow the oppositionists' motions always lost, even though, as far as I could see from the balcony, the voting went about the same as it did the first time.

Nevertheless, it is important that there were caucuses formed at that convention to defeat the bureaucratic demands for more pay for top officers, and that over and over again constitutional amendments were raised, and a battle took place over the demands of Canadian locals for autonomy and control over their contracts.

Here again, I would say that if we had anyone in the IBEW, he would be part of the struggle, working with such groups as the newly organized sector of 30,000 women telephone workers in the New England states that had just voted to join the Electrical Workers Union, rather than the Communication Workers.

The point I want to underscore with these and similar stories, is that these kinds of oppositions, of spontaneous rank-and-file organization, are but a reflection of the struggles taking place on a local level, and on the shop and plant level. And that the degree to which we know how to function as revolutionary socialists is the degree to which we recognize the problems that workers are concerned with and want solutions to; and with our background, politics and deeper understanding and consciousness, we ought to be able to propose solutions.

Let me just say something about the California State Federation meeting that was held here also in San Francisco. This is the largest state federation of labor in the country, with close to 12 million members. For the first time, a black caucus was formed, and a black vice-president elected. He's an Uncle Tom type, but even that is a concession to the rising demands of the blacks. For the first time, a Chicano caucus was formed at the convention to press the Chicano demands. And for the first time, a women's caucus – not a rank and file caucus but one consisting of secondary and tertiary leaders – was formed. And all of these tended to coalesce around an opposition candidate for vice-president of the union, Art Carter, who had received some notoriety when he stood up on the National AFL-CIO Convention floor and challenged Meany on the Vietnam issue.

A question again comes up: what role would we play in a struggle, for example, to run a candidate like Carter? In this case, they put forward a very weak, ambiguous program – vaguely for democratization, for alliance with the young, with Chicanos, with blacks – and around them were coalesced the most progressive, advanced rank and file delegates. In a sense, they acted as a catalyst, precipitating out the best elements in the trade union movement in California.

We should have, and did, play the role of a kind of left wing within that caucus-in-formation, raising the issue of a stand on Vietnam, on blacks, on the apprenticeship program, etc. The fact that at this State Federation convention, for the first time, one saw the formation of such caucuses opens up all kinds of opportunities which did not exist ten years ago. It is within the past ten years that I have seen this kind of increased militancy and aggressiveness, which has led to the overturn of one established leadership after another in various trade unions.

Just to remind you: several years ago, in the State, County and Municipal union, there was a challenge by Jerry Wurf against the long-time Arnold Zander presidency, which won by a very narrow margin. And, in the course of arousing thousands of members, locals and delegates, he gave impetus to all kinds of democratic impulses that would not have been in existence without his challenge.

The same thing is true with the fight between Abel and MacDonald. Abel attacked MacDonald, head of the Steelworkers Union, for “tuxedo unionism.” MacDonald was known for his chummy arm-in-arm visits (with Management, of course) to all the steel plants – a partnership between management and the union. And when the time came that Abel, who had been part and parcel of the same bureaucracy, felt his job would go down the drain when the membership knocked out MacDonald and his cronies, he began to think in terms of a movement to behead MacDonald, before he was beheaded. But, in starting that movement, Abel and his friends in the bureaucracy set in motion a whole chain of objective events which can help to democratize the union and challenge the bureaucracy – especially if we have people in the right places who know how to conduct themselves.

There were similar fights in the Electrical Workers Union and in the Retail Clerks. I don’t think the fact that eight or ten major unions chopped off their old bureaucracy, and some new bureaucracy came to power, is a sign that the trade union movement cannot change its leadership, is not subject to pressure from below. On the contrary, it proves that even the bureaucrats recognize when their time is coming to an end. And they will separate out, and the more clever and astute ones will begin the process of eliminating the worst symbols of bureaucracy and oppression within that union.

So, the work of our comrades within the trade union movement is now in a far more hopeful period – a period where there is more rank and file rebellion, more discussion and more challenges to the bureaucracy (and I have deliberately not gone into any of the local rank and file groups that have

formed in one local after another, because they are now literally in the hundreds). Our task is already that much more facilitated when workers are already in struggle for democratization of their unions, for greater militancy, more control, better contract demands, etc. And given that kind of position, I think that revolutionary socialists can play a more fruitful role if they recognize the concrete possibilities before them.

Hal: Now, you see, what Anne was talking about is the kind of thing that never gets written about, and is very hard to deal with because it's the kind of rank and file movement which is atomized; it's local, temporary and usually elementary in level. And, although that's the most usual state of things, representing the opportunities, the situations, the problems which any revolutionist faces in the present circumstances, it's precisely the kind of situation hardest to put your finger on. It never gets written up.

I'm going to talk now about another side of this question which does get written up. But you've always got to keep in mind that while the kind of thing which I'm going to be talking about is going on, what Anne was talking about is going on down below, and in fact probably makes the larger events possible. I'm going to talk about a couple of cases of large-scale minority opposition organizations in the trade union movement and the lessons that they can give.

As far as I know, there are just three points in the history of the American labor movement when a left progressive opposition movement of some kind was a real force. One was in the DeLeon days, the SLP days, before they went for dual unionism, when they became a very powerful force in the Knights of Labor, and later in the AFL.

There was a second point, just before the beginning of the First World War, when the socialist bloc in the AFL – in 1911 or 1912 – got a vote of 30–40% for Max Hayes, running for president against Sam Gompers.

Those are episodes that are long ago. I want to say a couple of things about the third and most recent, but not least, case where a left-wing opposition in the trade unions became a real power within the AFL. And that was the case of the TUEL, the Trade Union Educational League, in the years 1922–23. It's an enormously educational scene that I can't begin to do justice to in these few minutes; but let me say just this about it.

The Trade Union Educational League was organized and launched by William Z. Foster before he became a member of the Communist Party. William Z. Foster had been the leader of the 1919 steel strike, perhaps the biggest of the post-World War I class-struggle movements in the country. He was a first-class trade union organizer – before he became a mere Stalinist hack in later years.

He had been an IWW member and a syndicalist. The organization of the TUEL by Foster in 1920 was the result of his coming to the conclusion, after a life of excellent trade union work, that the whole IWW and syndicalist perspective of dual unions was wrong and that you had to organize a left opposition in the existing trade union movement.

Now the TUEL, when he launched it, was him and a group of militants around him. It became more of a power when the early Communist Party took it up. This was the early Communist Party, in the days when its membership, and a good part of its leadership, consisted of people who were trying to be revolutionary socialists, as best they knew how. We're talking now about the beginnings of a revolutionary socialist movement, the early Communist Party, and the problems of its approach to the building of a trade union opposition in the AFL. Now, what happened?

In broad outline, what happened was this: the TUEL, at first just a group of militants who knew and followed Foster, was taken up by the Communist Party as its trade union instrument and had a great success in the first two years, after a series of struggles along the lines of militant unionism. By 1922–23, the TUEL had gained national strength, to the point where its taking over the AFL was becoming a realistic possibility.

It had taken over whole sections of hundreds of locals, sections of national unions and regional bodies, on a mass scale. How did it do this in 2–3 years? The situation was very clear; there were two issues before it which it didn't have to invent. Those were amalgamation (today we would call it industrial unionism) and political action (that is, a labor party). And there was a tremendous amount of steam behind those two issues which the TUEL was able to coalesce.

What happened was not that Foster, or the Communist militants who worked with him, were such terrific trade union organizers that in two years they were able to build from virtually nothing a movement that had the possibility of threatening the leadership of the AFL. What happened was that, as a result of the policy they followed, everything that already existed of

ferment, all of those currents of opposition like those Anne spoke of, coalesced around the TUEL. That's how, in two or three years, the TUEL became a power as a left-wing opposition – led by Communists, to be sure – in the AFL.

Now, what happened after that to the TUEL is a sad story. I can't give you all the details here, but it had to do, not with what the TUEL was doing in the AFL, but with the policies adopted by the Communist Party – policies imposed, or persuaded, upon these trade union militants leading the TUEL, including Foster.

At this point, the early '20s, it was not a question of a bureaucratized or Stalinized CP. The problem was a different one. The membership of the CP had, for the most part, been recruited from two or three directions: from the left wing of the old Socialist Party, from the IWW and other syndicalist elements, and only to a third and lesser extent from a more variegated type of working class militants. And within the organization, a large part of the membership – completely unacquainted, by the way, with Lenin's writings – was not for mass trade unions. They were for revolutionary unions only. Therefore, the whole enterprise that the TUEL represented was off-limits to them: "You shouldn't be in there in the first place – what're you doing, horsing around with bureaucrats in the AFL?" But, since that point of view was defeated in the CP, the form it took was the pressure to turn the TUEL from an organization of trade union militants on a left-progressive trade-union basis into a trade union opposition movement with a revolutionary political program.

The TUEL, for example, eventually adopted a program for socialism. ("How can you solve the problems of the working class without socialism?") It also adopted calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat: after all, if you don't come out with a full program, you're "lying to the workers." In fact, the upshot was that the TUEL, first in terms of its political program, also in terms of its personnel, became more and more the trade union arm of the Communist Party.

For example, in place after place, the TUEL operated out of CP headquarters. ("The only people you can really trust, after all, are Communists. So, the only people you can really bring into the leadership are Communist Party members.") And that whole line of approach toward building a militant movement meant the sterilization of the TUEL, its becoming turned into nothing but the CP fraction, which of course dwindled away to nothing.

That was not the conception with which Foster started. We have here two conceptions of how to operate as a revolutionist in the trade union movement, which go all through the history of the relationship between socialists and revolutionists and the trade union movement. Here is the conception with which Foster started: You take the working class and its struggles at the point where it is now – the struggle at the point where it is now – and you try to find the issue which will move as massive a section of that class as possible against (a) the union leadership that you have to fight, (b) the whole employer class, which always gets involved in such a fight and (c) the state.

What are those issues? The dictatorship of the proletariat? No, that won't move any massive section of this class. That will only alienate them, because they're not for it. The issues of amalgamation (i.e., industrial unionism) and political action were the two issues, at that point, with which the TUEL moved the mass.

Amalgamation: it's an elementary issue; it doesn't mean you're making the revolution. Now, what if someone says: "Well, what kind of issue is that? Suppose you win it! So what!" You may eventually win it; the working class has won those reforms that I've mentioned, and that doesn't make the revolution. What you have to keep your eye on is not these things, typical of the points raised by the outside intellectual in the CP, but, rather, the reality of the struggle itself! And the meaning of the struggle itself. What the TUEL was doing successfully in 1921–23 was moving large masses of workers for this "inconsequential" issue, against the powers-that-be, and that was what was educational. That, also, is what made Communists, so that they then could be talked to about the dictatorship of the proletariat. You have to keep your eyes upon the meaning of the issues in terms of the class struggle itself!

Now it was this approach, you see, which couldn't be understood by the majority of the membership of the CP in those early days, because of their unfortunate past. The elements in the AFL who understood the meaning of the struggle tended to be reformists. In country after country, there was a polarization between people who wanted to be revolutionaries, but who conceived it in ultimatistic terms, and the reformists who understood that was nonsense and turned the thing around – "the struggle is the only important thing; that's all you have to be concerned about, the day-to-day struggle." And in period after period, country after country, the division between those two wrong types has sterilized socialist work in the trade unions.

Thus, periods like 1921–23, for example, when you had an outstanding example of how to do it, are relatively rare. That's why I direct you to that case, because it illustrated on a mass scale what has happened time and again on a small scale: the difference between these two conceptions.

Let me illustrate this difference with a personal case, in terms of activity we were involved with. After looking at the mass movement of the TUEL, which seems very distant from us, let us consider a local case where, however, the problem is exactly the same. I'm talking about the same situation I referred to last time; that is, the situation Anne and I were in in the shipyard workers union during the Second World War with a group of party members – only about a couple of dozen – who were faced with the same problem.

Here you had these shipyards, which were full of ferment, on an elementary basis. There's a war on. Our position was opposed to the war. In our political propaganda, we were opposed to support of the war. But that was a very small minority position; what kind of trade union work could you do? In this situation I think that we showed, on a very small scale, how to approach the problem.

You have ferment in the shipyards. What program do you try to put forward? Do you, for example, try to agitate these workers to oppose the war? Do you get up on the union floor and make speeches against the war? No, you couldn't explain, in 1943, in a three-minute speech, your point of view about the war. (For various reasons, good and bad, it was difficult for people to understand right off.) Just as, in 1922, those same militant workers who were joining the TUEL would have had difficulty understanding why the hell you wanted a dictatorship – the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.

But, the interesting thing about the situation was, we didn't have to invent the issues. There was no problem of program – unless, of course, you invented the problem for yourself. The issues were there. As a result of the war, and of the positions taken by the entire union bureaucracy, the workers' conditions were being cut right and left. One of the first steps – during the war – was the abolition of time and one half for overtime and double time for Sunday. Another, of course, was the no-strike pledge. The latter was a pledge; whether workers went out on strike or not was a different matter. But when time and a half was taken away, that was it! You didn't get it in your paycheck! Those issues were there.

They were elementary bread-and-butter issues. But there are different kinds of bread-and-butter issues in different situations. In 1943, the issue was tied up with the war question. How was it tied up? Not theoretically. It was tied up in the following way, and if I can emphasize nothing else, let me emphasize this: in that year, and in those plants, carrying on a simple struggle for such things as time and a half for overtime meant opposing the war. To whom did it mean that? Not to all of the workers, but to us. Because it tested the willingness of large masses of workers to say, "I will carry on the struggle of my class, regardless of the war." Now, in the last analysis, that is a more important statement about the war than any resolutions that you can sign. Because, as far as the movement of the mass is concerned, the test of the matter was the continuation of the class struggle despite the war.

Now, if you will think for a moment, you will find that Lenin understood this very well. His formulations during the war, likewise the fundamental test, in the Zimmerwald Manifestoes and so forth, was put in exactly those terms, in a highly theoretical document. The test was, not whether you're for "revolutionary defeatism" or some other political term that few people understood, but: Are you willing to carry on the class struggle in spite of the war? That was what these issues meant. And the meaning of a left progressive group in that shipyard workers union, and in other unions – at this time and in this situation – was that you could move relatively large masses of workers on their elementary basis: a movement which would set them against the union bureaucracy, the owning class and the state.

Yet, even in a situation like that, someone comes along and says: "You mean you never once got up on a union floor and proudly presented your position on the war? Why, you sold out!" I would say: that guy ought to be carefully kept away from any socialist movement! Does that mean we ignored the question of the war? No.

Let me give you the other side of this operation. At the same time as all this was going on, we also had our political organization operating. As a political party, we held public meetings and, more importantly, in our weekly newspaper, we said everything. And it was the combination of the two which I want to emphasize. Not just one or the other, because it's the combination that's important. Neither side is complete without the other. Within the framework of the trade union, we behaved as progressive, militant trade unionists (although, of course, we talked with our fellow workers). But in our newspaper, we said everything. The combination of these two things represents an all-sided and balanced revolutionary approach to the problem of trade union work.

On the one hand, you do not sterilize your trade union work by turning it into a carbon copy of your political work. Because that just isolates you, and you come out with what the TUEL came out with: yourself and nobody else. On the other hand, you use your trade union work also to direct people, to move people, to your political position by at the same time doing competent political work. “But you mean you never proposed to the Progressive Group that they adopt a position against the war?” Nope. We never did! We wouldn’t have dreamed of it. We did not propose our politics to the group. Because we had the following conception of the Progressive Group:

The Progressive Group was not just us. If it had been, it wouldn’t have had any meaning. There was a real movement there. It included people who were, so to speak, naturally born revolutionary militants, but who didn’t know it because they had never run across any revolutionary ideas before. It included all kinds of people, and a movement like this naturally will. And, as a movement, it wasn’t merely an extension of our two dozen people; it had its own life. We were revolutionary politicals in that Progressive Group. Our conception of that Progressive Group was that it was not a substitute for a revolutionary party and should not be made into one. It had its own function, role and program – as broad as possible a progressive and militant program that still is capable of moving large masses of workers against those three forces I mentioned before.

That would be my definition for you of the program of a meaningful rank and file movement. It may be a shop committee; this is an organizational question. But it’s the conception that’s important. And if you run into a comrade, for example, who approaches trade union work naively, from a revolutionary impulse (“If you’ve got revolutionary ideas you’ve got to put them forward...”), you just patiently explain that the function, the purpose, the usefulness of a rank-and-file progressive group exists insofar as it fulfills the following criteria: it has as broad a program as possible provided that it is not so broad it misses out on the second qualification – that, in the course of struggling for that program, masses of workers will move against those three forces. And you should take that line in the confidence that as a result of the masses getting into struggle – against the bureaucracy, the bourgeoisie and the state – people will learn (not as a whole mass, but maybe tens or hundreds) and will have their minds open to what next you have to tell them about your politics. If you don’t have that confidence, you’ve got to adopt a whole new set of political ideas.

That's the whole idea about a rank-and-file progressive group in terms of revolutionary politics, and there are damn few cases of any revolutionary movement that has ever done that. Very few, locally or nationally.

Now just consider that picture. Here's a socialist movement, worldwide – in many countries, unlike the US, with large masses. And on this fundamental question – how do you approach the relationship of revolutionaries to trade union work – the approach which I've explained, which Lenin explains in **Left-Wing Communism**, is as rare as hens' teeth – and very difficult for revolutionaries to learn; above all, for new revolutionaries. It has been learned only by a movement which has had time to develop a tradition, a practice and experience.

Before I throw the floor open for discussion, a word about the various attempts of New Lefters to do trade union work. A book could be written about what not to do. Like that famous conference that was held to mobilize students to go into the factories – to get them all together so the FBI could take pictures of them: the Work-in. And other such cases. Here, once again, for the 7,557th time, with this New Left movement of the '60s, when it was better than it is now, when the movement started turning toward trade union work it turned to the same old conceptions that have proven so absolutely fruitless and hopeless, time and again.

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Discussion Period

Comrade V: I'd like to address myself to the most controversial section of the talk tonight, and the one which raised certainly the most difficult questions. I certainly feel the criteria given by Hal were not sufficient. For example, the idea that your action is on one level and your newspaper is on another level, and those two balance each other – it seems to me if your newspaper is not related to your day-to-day action, you run into problems.

For example, on what moves the most people into action: It wouldn't be clear to me, say, why we should raise a labor party slogan, since that will limit the number of people in motion, as against, say, a fight for higher wages. It seems to me, that the whole idea of transitional politics is that you raise what

will move the movement to a higher level – you raise a strategy for the movement. That’s why the idea of amalgamation was good – it pointed a direction, it raised the movement to a higher level than AFL simple craft unionism. It’s not, simply, what will get the most people moving.

You can’t simply keep raising more militant action. Unless you take political action, you’re just going to go down the drain. The whole conception of a transitional program is what will move the movement as a whole to a higher level.

Anne: I think Comrade V’s question raises the problem, that when you try to summarize an experience, and when you try to put it in brief form, it opens you up to misinterpretation. Let me try to restate some of the things that Hal was saying.

Obviously, it isn’t just any broad program that will set the kind of masses into motion. We don’t project just anything. We project the concrete program, based on their concrete demands, rooted in their class struggle. They were being screwed, on every aspect of their trade union achievement. They had just gone through building a CIO shipyard workers union for five to six years before then. These were the militants, these were the progressives, these were the builders of the union. They had struggled and fought and bled to get time and a half, to get double time, to get a repair yard differential, and as far as they were concerned, these were not just any broad issues, but this was why they had built the union. And their defense of the union was the defense of the class! And we, the revolutionists, had just got through a whole assimilation of Trotsky’s transitional program. We went into that yard to carry out that transitional program. What issues did we raise?

”Repeal the No-Strike Pledge!” You cannot imagine the patriotism that existed through 1940–41 and throughout the ’40’s. It was only toward the end that it began to wane. You can’t imagine what it was like to get on an open-air street platform and have the American Legionnaires take you over and make you kiss the American flag. You can’t imagine the kind of patriotic fervor that we faced then, W.

So that, when we raised the demand, “Repeal the no-strike pledge,” we were attacked on the floor as Hitler agents, we were attacked on the floor as traitors; I mean, do I have to tell you all this? We assume that some of you must have understood this. That the Stalinists had control of this union; that’s an important element which we have to mention. They had made an alliance with the administrators, so we had to battle the pro-war patriotic

Stalinist line plus the tremendous brainwashing which the workers had received. And the fact that we built what was called the Progressive Caucus around slogans like, “Take Labor Off the War Labor Board!” – that meant, break with the capitalist state.

You know, you don’t say to the working class, “Overthrow capitalism,” in that many words. As Lenin explained, you say, “Land – peace – bread.” That’s what they want. They wanted their double time; that was the equivalent in the shipyards of 1942.

When we drew up a program for the election of stewards, when we drew up a program which went into details, for the swing shift, for the midnight shift, for the day shift, for women workers, for the blacks in the shop, every one of these was a challenge to the state, a challenge to the war.

And, you think we were quiet on the Labor Party? That was part of our program! All of these points. And, especially as the Gerald L.K. Smith movement came into existence, we were leaders of the anti-fascist marches that took place then. So the Stalinists were in this absolute quandary – how the hell could they attack us as fascists when we were being arrested and hauled off to jail because of our opposition to Gerald L.K. Smith?

Our aim was to bring these militants, these progressives, these trade unionists, to accept this program, to see the logic of where it went. And our political line was carried in greater detail in our weekly distribution of Labor Action. We gave out 15,000 to 20,000, every week, along those shipyards!

I think our great moment of triumph (if I may be given another moment) came, in the middle of the war, when 12,000 workers met in the Wilmington Bowl. I shall never forget that great moment – 12,000 workers roared their approval to go out on strike in the middle of the war! And there were a few no’s. And the chairman said, “I didn’t quite see all those no’s. Will all those who said, ‘No’ stand up?” And I think exactly 17 Stalinists had the nerve to stand up. And he squinted and said, “Is that Kelsine Smith there? Is that Vic Calberry there?” Those names are engraved in my memory; I can’t forget them. The Stalinists hit rock bottom at that point.

And Joe, if you don’t feel that this kind of rank-and-file progressive caucus not only educated hundreds, no, thousands of workers into placing their class struggle, their class organization ahead of the demands of the patriots, then you’re not seeing how you operate in a concrete circumstance.

Comrade T: I want to talk about how we handled the question of labor party and independent political action in the AFT. Because there are a number of us there and we do a lot of work in the AFT, and it's a question that has to come up.

When we went to the National Convention, when we went to the state convention, and when we're in our locals, on the question of the current election campaign – we raise it. Dellums is raised, we stand up and say, “We're against Dellums”; “We're against the two parties,” etc.; “We need a labor party,” and so forth. In our propaganda – the piece that we put out for the National Convention – the key is independent political action as the only way out, the only road ahead.

Now, the point is – what would it mean if we organized a caucus that had this as one of its central foci, if that was one of the key things that really held it together? Well, it would be us and two dues cheaters. That's who it would be. Because we're the only ones – and people who are very close to us – who really understand this. Nobody else understands this. That's why you don't have a movement that means anything today, around that question – independent political action – in the trade unions or anyplace else. You see, if you make that a central point, to try to organize anything would mean you would organize yourself. And you would not accomplish the role that you really mean to focus on. And that is, the notion of trying to get a mass of people in your union in motion (I really enjoy Hal's definition, I think it's a good way of approaching it) against the three elements; that is, your present leadership – good or bad, that is – from below, the state, and the bourgeoisie generally. With teachers, the capitalists don't come in to play immediately, because your employer is the state, so it works slightly different.

Just one more question, on how to handle it. In union caucuses at the National Convention and at the state convention, we raised this. We put forward a motion on independent political action for adoption in their platform, etc. At the state convention, anything anyone put forward was thrown in – but all that meant was that it wasn't a key issue, it wasn't something everyone saw as important.

Now, we lost on that question at the National Convention. But we continue to raise it, because, from our point of view, it's a key to eventually being able to break out of the present political situation. But it's not the kind of thing that you can focus on in organizing any large group of people. Because, today, you can't organize a large group of people around that kind of thing.

Now, eventually we'll be able to do that, and partly because now we're raising it propagandistically. Not as something people have to accept in order to be able to do anything, but as a long range perspective. And that's the way we're handling that question at this point.

Question: ...What I want to know is, when you're in a trade union, and you're trying to come up with a program around which to build a caucus that will include more than just yourself, what do you include in such a program? You would include such things as, "Against speedup," for better wages, working conditions, etc. But do you – or when do you – include such things as "For a Labor Party" as part of the caucus program, not just part of the outside agitation?

Hal: In the TUEL case, one was "Amalgamation," the other was, "Labor Party." In our case, the shipyards (I couldn't go through the whole program), "Labor Party" was an immediate program, in the trade unions. The revolutionary stuff, on opposition to the war, capitalism, etc., that was part of our political work which I referred to. But our trade union slogans were around those that Anne mentioned, including, in particular, "Labor Party," which was very important.

Question: But a lot of militants are against the bureaucracy, etc., but are still trapped in the Democratic Party ... What are the principles –

Hal: – I don't think it's a matter of principle; this is my opinion. I don't think it's a matter of principle. In these cases, as I say, "Labor Party" was a very important slogan because that was part of the reality of the day. I would not tell you that it is a principle that you have got to include "labor party" in the slogan of any given progressive group. That's precisely the kind of ultimatic and sterile approach, in general, that you've got to get rid of! If the situation, in your opinion, has all of the other qualifications – that is, there's a movement, a push in a direction – and "labor party" does not fit – you can't get it in, you can't get it across – then, all right, you let it go. You raise it in some other manner. But it's not a matter of being ultimatic about it.

Comrade Z: I'd like to raise this in quite a different way, partly using experience we had in organizing in AFSCME. What I want to raise occurred to me when W. first raised his question.

There's a sense in which raising a significantly "consciousness raising" issue can actually play a conservatizing role. That is, if you raise an issue that

is so far removed from the immediate struggle, it functions simply to fudge over, make appear irrelevant, the immediate issues. There are two examples of that. The one that I think that most of us in this organization were very familiar with, and cut our teeth on (and it's a shame many people have forgotten the lesson), was the whole experience of an independent political action movement, in this state, especially around the war: the CNP, and later the PFP.

One of the things that the people who either wanted to stay in the Democratic Party or wanted to have a halfway house between the Democratic Party and a really independent thing, one of the things they constantly said was, "But the simple little organizational question of an independent party is so irrelevant. You talk about illusions about the Democratic Party; what about illusions about parliamentary democracy that you automatically raise (and they're right!) when you hold up as a slogan, 'Labor Party'?" That's true. It does nothing to dispel all kinds of parliamentary illusions, etc.

The point is, the reason people like Bob Scheer, and other types, raise that, is precisely that the issue that was relevant right then, in that movement, was precisely the break with the Democratic Party. That organizational question – that was what moved you into opposition at that point. Nothing else. And they wanted to raise these much broader, and, in some abstract way, more important, questions because that allowed them to make the concrete political break appear a tiny, irrelevant question.

Let me raise it a second way, the way it comes up in our union. The question came up with the present electoral contest. What happened was this: we've got a lot of new people in the union. The union started out, more or less, as people who'd been in and around, and knew about, the student movement. Now, we've got a lot of ordinary workers, a lot of black workers, etc. So, the question comes up. We take a position, we argue educationally about no support to Dellums. The CP's line is – support Dellums, support Romo, etc. The bulk of the membership were caught up in support for Dellums. Romo, they never heard of (you could have explained he was running on the PFP ticket, except they'd never heard of that!). That is, it was completely irrelevant to them. That's not the issue that divides the militants in that union, the progressives, from the right-wingers. (It happens to be a union where you can raise questions like that, educationally, but it's not the cutting edge.) If you formed a caucus on that basis, it would not only be just us and, literally, two dues cheaters (in this particular case), but, more importantly, it would not polarize the union the way you want it to be polarized.

For example, all these black people who are, formally speaking, to the right of the CP, on the question of independent political action (that is, in the sense that they wouldn't be for Romo if they knew who he was) – all these people, nevertheless, on what from an abstract point of view might seem to be a tenth-rate issue, came into serious conflict with the CP. I don't want to go into details, because it's very technical. The point is, an issue came up on strike support action for the Building Trades Council strike. (The technical details are very boring, very minute, etc.) But, as a matter of fact, it split the CP, not only from the militants in the union (and some of the right-wingers in the union), but even split some of the black CPers and fellow travelers of the CP. And it was a tenth-rate question.

Nevertheless, it was over a question like that those people actually began to move into opposition and where, for example, the conservative role – in this case, of the CP – became clear, even to some of its own members.

Now I can't tell you what kind of issue will really polarize that union and create the basis for a rank-and-file caucus. I can tell you right now that it will not be independent political action. In the first place, it's not going to polarize the local; it really isn't an issue that's determined by a local union. It's purely a propagandistic educational thing, in a local union. If you're talking about a caucus in the International, then that question might become an immediate issue that was really important for people. And, I think that's the kind of thing you have to keep in mind – what is, so to speak, the bread-and-butter issue – not only for the rank and file, but for the bureaucracy, in terms of determining how seriously you're going to fight.

That's the thing that really raises people's consciousness – whether or not you're willing to fight, for a particular thing, which may be very minute in a particular case. One of the problems, it seems to me our comrades have, which is very understandable in the present situation, is that even such questions as a labor party are simply at a much higher level of struggle than the American trade union movement and the American working class are involved in. And, in their eagerness to get to that position, they overlook the fact that that is not what's going on, and that's not what the fight is. And that, as a matter of fact, the fight is on a much more minimal level. If you concentrate on the abstract situation, which doesn't exist, you miss the opportunity to really organize people who are, nevertheless, willing to fight on all sorts of other issues that don't seem so immediately important, but which, unless you fight on those, unless you organize people around those, they're never going to move to a higher level. They're never even going to understand what you're talking about!

It's not that people are in opposition to you. It's that they don't even understand what the issue is. It just doesn't mean anything. It's not something to fight over. And, on the other hand, the things they are fighting over are, unfortunately, much smaller. But that's where you begin organizing and building a militant caucus.

Hal: I said before that I would consider it utterly absurd to say, "It is a principle that any progressive group that you join has got to be for political action." That I say is absurd.

Now, as a matter of fact (in the case of our shipyard workers group, I don't even remember whether political action was part of its program), let us say that our progressive group did not include "Labor Party" in its political program. That's perfectly all right with me. But we, that is our people, talked about that in the progressive group.

I was also going to link that up with some of the points I told you I wasn't going to be able to cover in the beginning, because of the variations in the situation. There are cases, for example, where we – the revolutionary group – organize a progressive group and lead it. That's one type of situation – and it has its own difficulties. A quite different type of situation is, where there's a movement going on and you join it – and where you don't control it. Now, as a matter of fact, the one that we were engaged in was somewhere between. A lot of people in the group couldn't be sure whether it was really controlled by us or not, because we were so influential. But, as a matter of fact, we did not control it; it had a life of its own. If, for example, we had thought that trying to jam the political action part of our program – "Labor Party" – past a majority of the progressive group would harm its main work, I'm sure we would have been against trying to jam it past talking up the question of the labor party to progressive group members, as well as, of course, anybody else that we talked to.

So, there you have three levels, right? Now, there were some complications on this that we won't get to this evening at all; we'll get to those only when we have some practical problem to face.

But, for example, when Comrade V began by saying the newspaper ought to have something to do with your day-to-day action, well, again, in giving a big picture obviously I missed a part of it for him. The situation was not that in the trade union movement we talked about political action and immediate questions, while in the newspaper we talked about the Russian Revolution, the history of the German Social Democracy, etc. That was not the case at all.

The newspaper, which was a weekly called **Labor Action** – at a time when I was not editing it, therefore I can tell you freely – was one of the best examples of an agitational workers’ socialist newspaper which, precisely in its columns, ran the gamut, did two things.

One of the reasons why we distributed 15–20,000 copies around the area was that a lot of those workers, as a matter of fact, didn’t read the socialist stuff – although it was there for them. They read it because it told them what was going on in the trade union movement!

In the newspaper, within the same eight pages, we had constant reports on the struggles going on in our area and in our union, and there was a whole, big clientele – who we never even got to know – literally thousands who regularly read Labor Action to find out what was really going on in their union at the same time that, in the next column, they could read about other matters.

Now take the business about the War Labor Board. It’s a perfect example of a bridge; because (I’m not sure that you understood this point), there are two different ways you approach the question of “Get the unions off the War Labor Board.” We did both of them, of course. One was, you could attack it from the trade union point of view. We could, and did, talk to repair yard militants, who understood nothing about socialist politics, and nothing about the Marxian Theory of the State, and explain to them in terms of what I would call the interests of the working class (and they had other names for), why labor ought to get off the War Labor Board.

At the same time (and in the newspaper), you could attack that question from the broader, more class conscious, more socialist (if you wish), more theoretical angle. And we did both. But, you see, that slogan, like the slogan of political action, has those protean possibilities.

As a matter of fact, the same thing is true (this is the point I was trying to make before) with regard to the question of double time, because you never got a response from anybody “We don’t want the money” – nobody argued that. The argument was the war! This is the thing Comrade W doesn’t understand in his abstract approach. How could you talk, or argue – not to speak of fight in an organized fashion – on this issue in this situation, without everybody thinking of the war. That was the only argument against it. There wasn’t any other.

Now, W, in giving that speech, is an excellent example of that honorable history of all of these revolutionary left-wing abstractionists who never could understand how to make contact with the trade union movement. In a sense, he represents a tendency far more massive and distinguished than what I'm talking about. That's the reason why most of the socialist movements have sterilized themselves; that is, this abstract approach.

He says, "What you want is a program that points to a strategy for the movement to raise it to a higher level." And he said "raise it to a higher level" three or four times. All right! What raises the struggle to a higher level? How do you know when you're raising the struggle to a higher level? After you've gotten through using that language – how do you know you're doing it? Because the textbook tells you that this slogan raises things to a higher level and the other program doesn't raise things to a higher level? How do you know when you're doing it?

And I tell you: you know when you're doing it, that is, raising the struggle to a higher level, only by one criterion. (Of course, if it's the dictatorship of the proletariat, you know in advance it's a higher level, because no one has set some higher level ...) But, otherwise if it's a borderline case, how do you know? And I tell you, it's the criterion I gave you! Which is the class struggle. That's what's so foreign to the sectarian abstractionists. They never really understand what the real role of the class struggle is, after all the Marxian textbooks that they read.

You know that the struggle has reached a higher level when the class starts moving in a struggle against those three forces. That's when they're at a higher level. And when those demands, like double time, are achieved, OK, then your problem changes. That is, then you have to raise the struggle to a still higher level. That's the answer to Comrade W, about this "higher level" business, which to him is a pure abstraction.

IV. Dual Unionism

In the first session, I started talking about the importance of the trade union question to the revolutionary socialist movement. And I was saying that revolutions haven't been defeated, socialists haven't lost or won, because of their analysis of Hegelianism, the Labor Theory of Value, or because of their views of the Application of Historical Materialism to the Epoch of Christianity, or questions of that order. Rather, because of their given relationship to the masses of people in critical times. And, recently, in looking at Lenin's **Left-Wing Communism**, I was reminded of the situation of which it was the outcome, and to what an extreme extent the background of that situation illustrates what I said.

Here's what I mean. If you ask yourself why the world isn't socialist today, and if you go back and try to put your finger on the crossroads in the recent history of Europe and the world where that was decided, there's no question, in my mind, where you would have to put your finger. And that is at the point after the success of the Russian Revolution, and at the end of the First World War when revolution was sweeping most of Europe, where the key was Germany and the German Revolution. It was the defeat of the German Revolution, at the end of 1918 and 1919, which was the link in the chain that meant the defeat of the European revolution, and the fact that the world moved in the direction of the development of fascism and of Stalinism and the problems of the socialist and revolutionary movements of the next several decades.

What was the problem? You can answer that in two ways. When I give lectures on the German Revolution, for example, I emphasize that the German Revolution was defeated, not by the power of the bourgeoisie; it was defeated by the Social Democracy. But even after you've proven that, as I think I can, you still haven't answered another question. You have shown that the Social Democracy played the role of the last-ditch defender of capitalism, but you have not answered the question: Why wasn't it possible for the revolutionary forces to beat this enemy? All you have shown is who the enemy is and what the enemy looks like. But why couldn't the revolutionists beat this enemy? Why could they, and did they, in Russia and not in Germany? It was not because Karl Liebknecht had a false position on Marxian economics (which he did, by the way). And it was not because Rosa Luxemburg had a wrong position on national self-determination for Poland. In fact, it isn't any of a number of political questions which the movement

has for other reasons spent a great deal of time on. Let me give you a tableau which has to do with the answer to that question.

There, at the end of the war in 1918, you had a German working class ready and eager for revolution and a socialist government. You had a revolutionary leadership in the Spartacus League, and you had another revolutionary leadership someplace else. You may not be aware of it, but at the end of the war, when the revolution (to overthrow the Kaiser's regime) was aborning, there were two sets of revolutionary leaderships – both planning a revolution! And neither got around to that revolution; the masses made it for them – themselves.

Those two leaderships were the Spartacus leadership, and the group called the Revolutionary Shop Stewards which was organizing revolutionary groups and a revolutionary movement in the factories. And the basic tragedy of the German Revolution, which meant its defeat, was that there was no relationship between these two forces. They not only never got together, but the Spartacists didn't have any conception that they had to get together! Luxemburg and Liebknecht had something of a conception, but the membership of the Spartacus League was wildly sectarian, to the point where Luxemburg and Liebknecht were voted down on some crucial points. And even they had no Marxist conception of the role of the trade unions. I have mentioned previously that Luxemburg herself, who never had anything to do with the trade union movement, believed there was no room for an independent type of trade union, not controlled by a party. Her view of trade unions was wildly at variance with any Marxist concepts.

So there you had the Spartacus League, which you usually think of as the revolutionaries at that time, with no contacts in the factories! No contacts in the trade unions! And what do we mean by the trade unions? Not the bureaucracy; they were the counter-revolution (we're talking about a revolutionary situation). I mean the Revolutionary Shop Stewards who were organizing the revolution, in cells, on the shop floors, and had organized themselves in a Berlin-wide network, independent of the trade union apparatus, independent of the Independent Party. And the Spartacists had no relationship to them, had no influence among them, had no connections with them. At this point, therefore, the fate of the German Revolution was decided.

It took two or three years before the early Communist Party of Germany even straightened itself out on the elementary question of what it should have a relationship with in trade union work.

This tableau has been repeated time and again in history. If you can see it at a crucial moment like this, that's because it had existed for decades in reality. And it continued to exist: the chasm between, on the one hand, the political revolutionaries who had the right line on the theory of the state, etc., and the masses in the trade unions who were being mobilized in a revolutionary direction.

This sectarian character of the Spartacist League membership, as a historical fact, has a very evident explanation too. The membership of the Spartacist League, a small organization of people, especially young people, who had reacted and revolted against support to the war, was very inexperienced. They were not old cadre of the Social Democratic movement who had been revolutionized. They were primarily new and inexperienced elements – which of course was not their fault! And the development of the Communist Party in Germany from these elements continued the problem for several years – up to the writing of **Left-Wing Communism**.

Left-Wing Communism was written by Lenin in anticipation of the Third World Congress of the Communist International in 1921, in anticipation of the fight which was to take place there between Lenin's line and that of the sectarian wing. In Germany, the latter was represented by one of the two Communist Parties that had been organized – the KAPD, Communist Workers Party of Germany – reflecting a continuation of the type of sectarian revolutionism which had gutted the Spartacist effort. And it was at the Third World Congress that Lenin came in, proclaiming, “I am the right wing of this Congress!” as against the infantile leftists of whom he writes in **Left-Wing Communism**.

I expect to get back to Lenin's **Left-Wing Communism** at the end of this talk. But the picture I wanted to give you was that, at this most crucial point, history was decided, not by any of the questions that you and I have been discussing and talking about for some time in the movement, but by the subject of this class. Now, let me pick up where I left off last time.

I told you last time that the subject I was discussing then – the question of progressive groups, of rank and file oppositions in the trade unions – merged into the subject for today, dual unionism. But I did not get to the point where they merged.

The transition comes when you ask yourself the following question: What happens when the oppositional work you are doing in a union, fighting

against a leadership, or fighting for a program, tends to brim over the bounds of the apparatus laid down by the trade union leadership itself?

There is, for example, a common misconception, especially among people with little or no experience in trade union work, that a rank and file group within a union is a group which simply runs candidates for office. However, let me ask this: If that were true, what is the group doing during the two years or so between elections? Now this is not a question that would bother anyone who has done any work in a real, live, rank and file group that wasn't invented by a resolution but that came out of the struggles of the workers. Because, such a person would know that a real rank and file group exists only as long as it is fighting all of the time, not just cropping up at elections.

What do these groups, the ones that actually crop up, do between elections? They must be doing something. It's perfectly true that there are some outstanding cases where the existence of some group is tied up with elections. For example, the case of the Typographical Union is so well-known that it may account for part of the false impression. In the Typographical Union, the party set-up is very largely an official electoral structure. But that's one of the reasons why, except at times, this structure is not exactly the same as the real struggle that is going on in the union. In any case, everyone knows the Typographical Union is a special case.

Now let's consider a real situation in a union – not one that some would-be revolutionary has invented because he thinks there ought to be a rank and file group and he goes ahead and invents it (which may be necessary, but not the characteristic situation). If this is a situation where this rank and file opposition has resulted from the real grievances and the real issues and the real need of the workers in that shop to fight, they are going to be fighting on those issues, whatever they are.

Permit me to take the same example I took last time – the Progressive Group in the shipyard workers union that Anne and I were in during the Second World War. In this case, there weren't any elections in the union. That union was under a receivership, so the top leadership wasn't elected; it was appointed by the International. There were, however, elections for shop steward, and that wasn't one of these cases where the election takes place every one or two years and that's it. Shop stewards came and went, for various reasons. So, the question of how to get elected shop steward, or how to get a good guy elected shop steward, was not a question that only came up at the time of the election. It came up as part of the continual work that went

on in the shop; that is, who was fighting grievances, and who was standing by the men on the floor when a problem came up. This was taking place in a “face-to-face group” (as the sociologists call it), where the workers worked in one department and knew one another.

At this point, you have the problem of opposition work which is partly electoral, but also has its day-to-day side. To make this more concrete, when I was working in that shipyard, I was in the sheet metal department and the shop steward was one of our comrades who had been elected simply because the men in the shop regarded him as the guy who would fight their grievances. After I’d been there about a year and a half, the company (in collusion with the union leadership) decided they would get rid of this comrade who was shop steward (Bob was his name), and they used the device of promoting him, without asking him, to a classification which was outside the bargaining unit, thereby making him ineligible to be shop steward. He said, “I refuse to accept it.” They said, “To hell with you. You’ve got to accept it.” At that point, the men in the shop got together by themselves to try to figure out what to do about it.

At this point, it was not a question of electing shop stewards, but of fighting this beef which came up about the shop steward. And the workers had to show what they were going to do. While Bob was shop steward, there was a continual series of hassles in the shop, where it was not just a question of his arguing with the foreman, or with the department manager, but of what extent he, and others, can mobilize worker support for him. These are some of the day-to-day problems which come up whenever you have an election, and these are the problems around which you want to organize your forces.

If anybody has the idea that a rank and file or progressive group can operate simply as an electoral group at a time when elections take place, he’s talking about a rank and file group which is a fake! Not a real one. Because it cannot really operate that way. It cannot really function, unless it’s fighting, in one way or another, or organizing its people in one way or another for the fight which goes on day after day in the shops!

Now, as that goes on, very often certain things start happening. For one thing, the question often comes up of the activities of the group. What is such a group going to do when and if it is going to stay within the bounds of the routine activity of the trade union structure? A very typical example was our shipyard union situation. It was the people in our progressive group who initiated the job actions that occurred in the yards. Is that inside the trade

union structure? Of course not! It's outside the trade union structure. Such an action, if a progressive group is associated with it, is an activity of the progressive group! It doesn't even have to be an activity decided at formal meetings of the group; often things don't happen that way. But it takes place – outside the trade union structure.

But this is by the best union men in the plant; they do it as better union men than the apparatus. And, for them, that is not only trade union activity, but far better trade union activity than the routine “trade union activity” of attending a meeting and raising your hand at somebody's motion.

So there are any number of examples of an actual struggle going on outside the trade union structure, but not outside the trade union movement.

Let me take as another example some of the opposition work carried on by the earlier Communist Party in the trade unions: the TUEL, which I discussed last time, was an opposition group within the unions.

At one point, the TUEL participated in a May Day demonstration. It participated, not as the union – the union wasn't taking part – but as the TUEL! That was outside the union; a section of the union was carrying on an activity which was outside the union. Is that outside the trade union movement? Not as far as any good trade unionist is concerned. And anyone who thinks that it is does exactly what the trade union bureaucracy does, and is accepting a purely bureaucratic point of view.

There are many cases where a more-or-less well-organized trade union opposition group goes off on its own for some particular activity. They're not going outside the trade union movement; they constitute part of the trade union movement! Just as much as the trade union bureaucracy does.

Let's continue this a little further. There have been a few cases (of course, when you get to this level, very few cases) where you have not simply a rank and file progressive group in a union, but where you have an inter-union opposition movement. The TUEL was such a case.

There's an interesting variation on this if you look at a couple of other countries, where the situation is different from that in the United States.

In England, for example, in big plants there is a structural difference that doesn't apply in the U.S. In such a plant, there are several different unions, and the shop stewards are not the shop stewards of any particular union, but

are elected for a whole section of the plant, representing workers in many different unions. So, the shop steward structure is inter-union; whereas, in this country that would be an extraordinary exception. In that case, you automatically have a structural situation where the shop stewards cut across union lines and therefore are not responsible to the administration of any one union. You can see the potentialities of such a situation.

In Germany in 1919, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards I referred to were the shop stewards of the union structure. And they had freed themselves, during the war, from their subordination to the top leadership – not organizationally, but politically! Theoretically, administratively, they were still subordinate to the top leadership. The organization of the shop stewards system, therefore, was a political break – not outside the trade union movement. The shop steward system in England is another part of the trade union movement; the TUEL was a part of the trade union movement.

Having gone through all that, however, we face the next question. Time and again there is a split from a union, which leads to another set of problems. This brings us to the subject of dual unionism.

First, we have to deal with a terminological question. The term “dual unionism” covers a lot of territory, and distinctions have to be made. Especially between two different types of “dual unionism” that have to be discussed completely separately.

The first and simpler one, which everyone is acquainted with, is simply a split in a union which leads to the organization of two trade unions, and the loss of trade union unity. Now, trade union unity is not the normal state of affairs, if you look at the world as a whole, although England would be an exception. There are damn few countries where there are not rival dual federations. This is true in France, where there are three or four rival federations; it was true in the U.S. when the AFL and CIO were fighting. The CIO was a dual union; it split from the AFL and became dual to it. Here we understand the term “dual union” to mean, simply, the existence of rival unions in the same field. Even now, within the AFL-CIO, there are all kinds of dual unions. There are three unions, for example, that organize laundry workers, one of which is the Laundry Workers Union. Two unions organize men’s clothing workers – the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the United Garment Workers; in fact, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers arose as a split from the United Garment Workers and for a long time was an independent union outside of the AFL altogether.

All over the trade union movement in this country there are dual unions, in this sense. So obviously we've got to make a distinction between that type of development and something else that's involved in dual unionism. It's that distinction that I want to try to make clear.

The cases I talked about, or like Debs' American Railway Union, all came out of mass struggles within those trade union movements themselves, which led to a split. They were not the outcome of some general attitude that you've got to have dual unions; they were the outcome of the actual struggles that took place.

The other kind of dual unionism is a horse of an entirely different color. Let's call it "leftist unionism." (It often is called "revolutionary unionism," but that is not completely satisfactory since these movements take place sometimes on the basis of "let's form a militant, class-struggle, progressive union instead of the old-type of simple trade union," not necessarily involving a "revolutionary" ideology.) The key thing is that the split takes place on the basis of some ideological aim about the nature of the union movement.

Now it is this that has given dual unionism its derogatory connotation. And it is this which is the more important side of the question. Because some conception of leftist unionism has been one of the great will-o'-the-wisps of the socialist and revolutionary movement. It has been one of the things which has gutted the development of one revolutionary movement after another.

The United States has a history of its own with regard to such developments. There are three outstanding cases from the socialist movement. The first case was, I think, DeLeon's Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance, and it naturally is no accident that this came out of the Socialist Labor Party – which had been the butt of the most unbridled attacks by Marx and Engels for its thorough sectarianism.

The Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance, at its height, had a few tens of thousands organized, and after the turn of the century had petered out to nothing. Of, course, at the turn of the century, the SLP also suffered a split when the Socialist Party was formed, leaving the most sectarian elements behind.

The second big example is quite different. And that was the IWW. Now the IWW was in part the result of a syndicalist conception of trade unionism.

But the IWW differs from a couple of other cases because of the fact that a lot of the practice and part of the steam of the IWW came out of a real need for the organization of the unorganized in fields that the AFL wasn't even in. So you had a combination of two things. And part of the many controversies about the IWW is that there were different strains and currents leading in this direction. One of them, the organization of the unorganized, especially the unskilled laborers, was counterposed to the AFL concept of merely organizing the labor aristocracy.

The organization of the unskilled – for a large part of labor history – has been specifically a task of the left wing of the trade union movement, without itself being ideologically revolutionary. This is a conception which, while it is perfectly accessible to the most elementary-minded worker, in practice has been the task of the left wing of the trade union movement. And in the IWW, you get the convergence of a period in American history and labor forces where this was acted out to its fullest extent. That is, the drive to organize unskilled workers came, not only from a wing of the movement which felt itself to be revolutionary, but was also tied up with a syndicalist and dual union conception of unionism.

Now, as we know in hindsight, those two things were not necessarily bound up logically. They weren't necessarily bound up in the later history of the trade union movement, because the mass organization of the unskilled became the task, in later years, of the CIO. The CIO, in order to carry out that task, had to split from the AFL; that is, it had to become an independent dual union of the first type that I discussed. As you know, it never did take on any of the characteristics of an ideological leftist dual union, of the second type.

The third example of tendentious dual unionism was the Communist Party's experiment with dual unionism which followed the TUEL. By 1928, the TUEL, primarily as a result of Stalinism and the Communist International, was turned into a systematic dual union federation. This began at the beginning of 1928. By 1929, it had changed its name to the Trade Union Unity League. So, the TUUL from 1929, until that line petered out in the Communist International in 1934, represented the third fairly large-scale effort at a leftist dual union federation. And the history of the TUUL from this point of view was as instructive as the history of the TUEL from the point of view I discussed last time. You can get a good rundown on the operations of the TUUL in Howe and Coser's **History of the Communist Party**. You can read about the mess the TUUL made in the fields in which it was involved – coal, the Shoemakers' Union, the Needle Trades Industrial Union (as against the ILGWU and the Amalgamated). The activities of the TUUL gave

rise to stories of heroic trade unionism in rank-and-file struggles, where blood ran and courage was high – for the greater glory of the Communist Party line, and which were undercut because the Communist Party was using, for its own political ends, those struggles – such as the Gastonia struggle, the Passaic strike (which was organized by the CP in a real situation of tremendous exploitation, by importing a Harvard law student, Albert Weisbord, to become leader of the strike), etc.

On the one hand, there were the tremendous forces of struggle, which the AFL never could and never did tap. On the other hand, these forces flowed into the political confines of the CP and were not so much betrayed as frittered away. The CP line was not a trade union line, or even a line that had the possibility of developing a mass movement of struggle; it was a political expedient for the Communist Party.

So, when you look at these three cases, they're quite different – in their motivations and in their consequences. One thing, however, is common to them: they show the futility, from the point of view of revolutionary socialism, of trying to substitute revolutionary unionism for the combination of a revolutionary party carrying on its political work, and a trade union movement representing the whole class on its elementary basis, where it is, and not on an advanced basis laid down by fiat.

The extreme form of this takes place when the revolutionary unions are substituted for the party; then you have syndicalism.

Dual unionism of this sort – ideological dual unionism – has been a failure. It has demonstrated, precisely where mass class-struggle movements were possible on an elementary trade union basis, that such an approach to trade unions cannot (a) build a revolutionary party and (b) build a revolutionary trade union movement, and leads, therefore, to the foundering of both.

At this point, there's another side of this question, another fantasy that has to be discussed. Not the fantasy that we're going to substitute "class struggle" unions for the class-collaborationist unions, but a more advanced fantasy.

In the period after the First World War, in the U.S., Germany, England, etc., one of the consequences of the impact of the Russian Revolution and of the revolutionary movements in Europe was a great enthusiasm about soviets, which it is hard for people to remember now. Not only among left-

revolutionary socialists, but even among much milder types. Here they saw a new and different form of worker organization. It wasn't a party, and it wasn't a union. The idea of workers' councils came to be counterposed to any other kind of organization.

You understand what the difficulty with that is. The soviets were the expression of a revolutionary crisis. The Russian or German soviets never came into existence in normal times, non-revolutionary times, and could not have. The arising of soviets, in fact, is one of the symptoms that a revolutionary crisis exists! The soviets arise when the existing organizations can't contain the struggle; the struggle overflows all other organizations. So that even in Germany, where there was a powerful trade union movement, that trade union movement was swamped with the development of a revolutionary crisis in Germany – but only with the development of a revolutionary crisis.

The soviet form of organization, precisely because it is so well adapted to a revolutionary crisis, cannot exist in normal times. The fantasy, then, is that this wonderful type of organization can be taken out of the context of a revolutionary crisis and inserted into a situation where no revolution is taking place and where the tasks of the revolutionary movement and the working class movement are more elementary.

That fantasy, however, like so many other wish-fulfillment hopes, isn't taken care of simply by such an explanation. In Germany, as the revolutionary crisis was passing, and when the Weimar Constitution was adopted, soviets were written into the constitution! The Social Democracy, especially its left wing, would say, "Well, sure, everybody's for soviets. So we're going to write them into the Weimar Constitution!" And they did. Now, how do you write soviets into a constitution? You do it by squeezing all real life out of the concept and leaving an empty shell. That's all you could do, even if you were very sincere about it. And, in a sense, anybody who entertains that fantasy, whether he writes it into a constitution or not, is going to arrive at the same result.

At this point, we've got to spend a little time on the idea of shop committees. "Shop committees" has 16 different meanings. Shop committees have always been one of the important tasks and objectives of revolutionaries in the trade union movement. That is, rank and file organizations of the workers, on the shop floor. These are within the trade union movement. So, on the one hand you have shop-floor committees within the trade union movement. On the other hand, a fantasy of something you may call workers

councils, or soviets, or “shop committees,” or any other name that you want to invent, for something which is abstracted from, extracted from, the context of the actual trade union movement in a normal situation. That is the fantasy.

The only conclusion I can give you, really, is Lenin’s. In the chapter on trade unions in **Left-Wing Communism:**

“When the revolutionary party of the proletariat, the highest form of proletarian class organization, began to take shape ... the trade unions inevitably began to reveal certain reactionary features, a certain craft narrow-mindedness, a certain tendency to be non-political, a certain inertness, etc. However, the development of the proletariat did not, and could not, proceed anywhere in the world otherwise than through the trade unions, through reciprocal action between them and the party of the working class.”

And that is what he is counterposing to that eternal fantasy, represented at that point by the KAPD and others, that there was some other road that did not lead through the trade unions.

On the next page, he begins this way:

“A certain ‘reactionism’ in the trade unions is inevitable under the dictatorship of the proletariat. [Here he’s talking about even after the revolution.] Not to understand this means a complete failure to understand the fundamental conditions of the transition from capitalism to socialism. It would be a grievous folly to fear this ‘reactionism’ or to try to evade or leap over it. For it would mean fearing that function of the proletarian vanguard which consists in training, educating, enlightening and drawing into the new life the most backward strata of the masses of the working class ...”

This idea became an important controversy later in Russia when the “trade union question” came up internally. Trotsky, in an attempt to solve the economic problems, proposed, in effect, the statification of the trade unions. Lenin opposed this. His opposition to Trotsky’s line at that time was of a piece with the argument that he’s making here with an entirely different political animal – namely, the sectarians of the KAPD, with regard to the role of the trade unions. He’s making the point that even after the revolution you have to consider the trade unions as fulfilling that function, let alone before the revolution.

“In countries more advanced than Russia, a certain reactionism in the trade unions has been, and was bound to be, manifested in a far greater measure than in our country. Our Mensheviks found support in the trade unions ... as a result of the latter’s

craft narrow-mindedness, craft selfishness and opportunism. The Mensheviks of the West have acquired a much firmer footing in the trade unions. There, the craft union, narrow-minded, case-hardened, covetous and petty- bourgeois 'labor aristocracy,' imperialist-minded and imperialist-corrupted, has developed into a much stronger section than in our country.

"We are waging a struggle against the 'labor aristocracy' in the name of the masses of the workers, and in order to win them over to our side ... It would be absurd to forget this most elementary and self-evident truth. Yet it is just this absurdity that the German 'Left' Communists perpetrate when, because of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the trade union top leadership, they jump to the conclusion that we must withdraw from the trade unions, refuse to work in them and create new and artificial forms of labor organization!"

Now that's what he's getting at, you see. These excellent revolutionists, disgusted with all the sins of the trade union bureaucracy, looked upon work in them only as a transitional effort toward the time when it would be possible to get out and form real "class struggle" types of artificial organizations. Which, of course, they had to dream up! And which remained in all cases simply a fantasy.

Lenin goes on:

"If you want to help 'the masses' and win the sympathy and support of 'the masses,' you should not fear difficulties, or pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution from the 'leaders' ... but must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found. [That is, in] the trade unions ...

"Millions of workers in Great Britain, France and Germany are for the first time passing from a complete lack of organization to the elementary, lowest, simplest, and (to those still thoroughly imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices) most easily comprehensible form of organization, namely, the trade unions.

"Yet the revolutionary, but imprudent, Left Communists stand by, crying out, 'the masses, the masses!' but refusing to work within the trade unions, on the pretext that they are 'reactionary,' and they invent a brand-new immaculate little 'Workers Union' which is guiltless of bourgeois-democratic prejudices and innocent of craft or narrow-minded craft union sins, a union which they claim will be (!) a broad organization." [Although, as Lenin goes on to point out, one which will demand support for the dictatorship of the proletariat and a recognition of soviet power.]

Now this is the lesson which Lenin, and at this point Trotsky on the Communist International, had to draw in order to transform the character of the Communist International. The Communist International and the early Communist Parties arose as cadres of very sincere, devoted revolutionaries who had no idea of how to build a revolutionary movement. They couldn't depend on the Bolsheviks to teach them; there weren't any instruments to do that teaching. It was in the course of the painful development of the Communist Parties and the Communist International that they thought out this essential question. It was not theory, like the Labor Theory of Value, or Hegelianism, but the fundamental question of how revolutionary socialists get to the point where they can carry their revolutionary ideas into and through the broadest possible organizations of the masses. How do you combine two things: (1) the most advanced political organization, even if it's small, and (2) the participation in struggle with the broadest possible organization of the masses in movement. Which brings us to the formula I gave you last time, and which I will end by repeating:

What you want to do is get moving, as a class, the broadest possible movement of the masses against the capitalists, the state, and therefore also the trade union bureaucracy itself. It's the conception of that combination which was fought out in three congresses of the Communist International.

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Discussion Period

Comrade W.: I want to ask you a question about the IWW. As you pointed out, there were two things going on simultaneously. There was an attempt to organize a whole section of workers the AFL had refused to organize, and, simultaneously, you had a kind of revolutionary dual unionism, syndicalism, etc. Now I wonder if we could artificially separate the two for a minute. What if the IWW had not been syndicalist and attempted to impose an ideological straitjacket on unions – what do you think of the choice to go outside the AFL at that point?

Hal: That's exactly the line taken by Debs. Debs started with the IWW. He organized the American Railway Union, which was a dual union but not a leftist dual union. Debs left the IWW precisely over this question. He was

enthusiastic for a movement outside the AFL; that didn't bother him. But as the IWW developed its more clearly syndicalist character, he left it.

There was a great opportunity there, and the fact that the IWW combined this opportunity with its syndicalist ideology, hindered them in taking advantage of the opportunity.

Comrade W: In other words, you think they were right to leave the AFL ...?

Hal: Let me put it this way. The fact that the IWW left the AFL doesn't bother me a bit. But if someone wants to argue that they could have done it inside the AFL, I would consider that. I would ask him to prove that to me; but I wouldn't try and prove it to you. The important thing for us to understand is that we, as revolutionary socialists, could have absolutely no objection, in a situation like that where there is a new movement being organized, to leaving the AFL. In fact, of course, much later the CIO had to leave the AFL in order to perform that very task of organizing unorganized workers. So, if somebody wants to prove the opposite to me, I would consider that the burden of proof was on him. Because time and again, experience has showed that any kind of breaking of real, new territory can most successfully be done outside the framework of an existing organization which has become fossilized. But not outside the trade union movement.

So, I wouldn't make an argument that the IWW had to leave the AFL. It seems to me that's so; but it certainly doesn't bother me. There's no reason why it should bother anybody.

I should mention, by the way, that there are other cases where there were fruitful splits from the AFL on a smaller scale. For example, there was the Progressive Miners Union, which was organized out of the Illinois coal fields, as a breakaway from Lewis' union, the UMW. And it was of the first type that I discussed above.

One final point. For explanatory reasons, I made a perfectly sharp distinction between the two types of dual union. Actually, the distinction is never that sharp, and I want to explain one shadowy aspect of it.

Consider any of a whole series of independent unions which had to split from the AFL, in order to carry out the struggle they were engaged in – without a leftist ideological motivation. Precisely because of the way they are organized – because they are a breakaway in the course of struggle – there is a tendency for these unions to take on a more radical coloration. And they

did. But not in the sense of a “revolutionary dual union.” Rather, simply in terms of the influence of radicalism in them.

What this illustrates is not an exception, but really underlines the point. Here you have breakaways which are natural consequences of the class struggle. And it is because they are being thrown off from the main body of labor by their own struggle, that they do bring more radical elements to the fore. There were socialists and Communists all over the place in the Progressive Miners Union without, however, it being a tool of the CP or anybody else.

So, this first course is a natural form of radicalization of the working class, without adopting ideological leftist unionism.