

"SL FACES THE REAGAN YEARS"  
11/24/80

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
I. <u>A Period of Opportunities and Dangers</u>	3
II. <u>Reaganism: Beating the War Drums</u>	6
Evolution of the Polish Crisis	7
The Russian Question and the 1st	9
Once Again on Iran	11
III. <u>Reaganism: The Economy and Labor</u>	13
For Workers' Action to Bring Reagan Down!	14
Recruiting Against the Popular Front	16
IV. <u>Organization and Recruitment</u>	20
Assimilate the Youth!	21
The Center	22
V. <u>The U.S. Left Moves Right</u>	24
Maoism	24
Socialist Workers Party	24
Marcyites	26
Communist Party	26
Centrism	26
VI. <u>Internal Problems and the Threat of Repression</u>	28
May 3: A Policy of Caution	30
Detroit: A Failure of Will	31
Fighting Repression	33

## I. A Period of Opportunities and Dangers

In late 1980 the sixth National Conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. adopted a main resolution noting the accelerating anti-Soviet war drive backed by all wings of the bourgeoisie. After a decade of "rightward drift" in the absence of significant social struggle (except the 1977-78 miners strike), we observed that "the present political climate is marked by a rightist mood." Reagan's election meant a turn further to the right on all political and social questions. But now that the Reagan administration's drastic programs have started to take effect, that mood is beginning to crack. And it is tending to crack along class lines.

The half million workers who marched in Washington September 19 showed that what has long been true for blacks is now becoming true for broad layers of working people: they know they have an enemy in the White House.

Despite widespread but passive anti-Sovietism, a polarization is taking place. The extreme right-wing U.S. governmental regime has a narrow base which is becoming even narrower.

Reagan understands his mission as a return to the days of the "American Century." Pushing a foreign policy that leads straight to war, he has trouble with his European allies. He has trouble in the "colonies." And he will have trouble at home. Reagan has systematically attacked nearly every sector of the American population, starting with blacks. He has even managed to alienate wide and articulate sections of the bourgeoisie with his apocalyptic/utopian scheme to finance World War III through cutbacks in welfare and school lunch programs.

Reagan has ended the politics of sectoralism which dominated the radical opposition in the late 1960s and 1970s, when each oppressed group was urged to organize on the basis of its own oppression and often had more venom stored up for a competitor "oppressed group" than for a government defeated in war and proven utterly corrupt. Now there is a government anybody can hate.

The objective possibility exists to bring Reagan down in sharp class struggle by the proletariat leading the oppressed. We remember that despite U.S. constitutional peculiarities, Nixon was dumped one jump ahead of a jail sentence and more significantly that LBJ was effectively brought down after the Tet offensive of 1968, when he was forced to go on TV and tell his "fellow Americans" he was through. It was the heroism of the Vietnamese that brought Johnson down. Our perspective is a fighting labor movement to do the same to Reagan.

Unlike in the 1960s, the SL is today larger, with a small implantation in the unions and a regular and increasingly well-received press. We are known as a stable far-left organization. And we are known for our program. The main manifestation of rightism in America is anti-Sovietism, and we are the defenders of October against imperialism. We are the group that hailed the Red Army in Afghanistan as Carter launched Cold War II. We said the defense of Cuba and the USSR begins in El Salvador. Now with the threat of counterrevolution in Poland we say: "Stop Solidarność, Polish Company Union for the CIA

and Bankers!" Our tendency internationally is heavily defined by the Russian question. And with Reagan's war offensive, now more than ever the Russian question is the American question.

As the entire radical milieu moved right under this anti-Soviet pressure, we stand out as the revolutionary Marxist militants of America as never before. Recently, without increasing our size, our profile and visibility have soared. We are known for standing for the ABCs of class struggle, for the militant labor traditions betrayed by the bureaucrats. From the Keith Anwar case to the PATCO strike, our defense of the picket line sets us off from the reformists and labor tops. The bureaucrats act as if "illegal" strikes and secondary boycotts are unthinkable. With the victory of business unionism after the rise of the CIO, the class traitors hacked away at the traditions of common struggle. They brought with them a corrupted vocabulary of class treachery: the "informational picket line," "stopping the clock," "apache strategy." But workers' solidarity across craft lines is inherent in the logic of class struggle. The labor movement used to profess belief in secondary boycotts. They knew that picket lines mean "don't cross," that an injury to one is an injury to all and that the only "illegal" strike is one that loses. Faced with a viciously anti-labor government, these slogans have never had more urgency and more appeal.

We are known for labor-centered anti-fascist mobilizations in Detroit and San Francisco that have shown how the strategy and tactics of class struggle can stop the race-terrorists, now larger and bolder than at any time since the 1920s.

The May 3 El Salvador protest registered how far right the left had moved. We stood alone against popular frontism as the only tendency voicing the anti-imperialist militancy that had been the common coin of a sizable left wing of American radicalism during the Vietnam War. The SL organized around a line of clear-cut and communist class struggle under the banners of the Anti-Imperialist Contingent: "Military Victory to the Leftist Insurgents! U.S./OAS Hands Off Central America! Defense of Cuba/USSR Begins in El Salvador!"

Our call for military victory to the leftist insurgents in opposition to the liberal line of "political solution" gave us a sharp cutting edge and our slogans, recognizing El Salvador as a hot spot of the Cold War, drew the line on an international basis. Our defense of the USSR against imperialism, and our class opposition to popular frontism in El Salvador and at home, distinguished us from our contemporary opponents and from the "anti-imperialist contingents" of the past.

We stuck out on May 3. Our colorful banners and communist slogans were caught in an Associated Press photo and flashed around the world.

Standing out also brings us to the attention of the government. The basis for rapid growth for our tendency can also mark us as a prime target for state repression by a frustrated right-wing regime. As we come into focus in the cross-hairs of the agencies of state

repression, our Trotskyist line on the Russian question and our opposition to counterrevolutionary Solidarność will earn for us the wrath of imperialism and its social-democratic and rad-lib reflections.

After a period in which the working class, blacks and other minorities have taken a quiet beating, the instability of the Reagan "consensus" opens up a prospect of struggle. We are entering a period of considerable opportunity and considerable danger. It is this combination which challenges our small fighting propaganda group struggling to meet the tasks of a vanguard nucleus in the changed climate of the Reagan years.

## II. Reaganism: Beating the War Drums

Building on the anti-Soviet groundwork laid by Carter, the Reagan administration is mounting a straight-line drive toward war with the USSR. The most massive arms build-up in post-WWII U.S. history (2-3 times that of the Vietnam War in real terms) is aimed first and foremost at a nuclear first strike on the USSR. Dumping the plans for a mobile MX missile system, Reagan gives up even the pretense of "defensive" weaponry.

The administration is seeking to forge a global anti-Soviet war axis. NATO countries are pressured to increase their arsenals. The open declaration of a U.S.-China military cooperation pact was carefully prepared through three administrations and baptized with the blood of the Vietnamese (who taught the Chinese the "bloody lesson" that Deng had promised the Vietnamese).

Reagan attributes the loss of U.S. power to a liberal failure of nerve. He thinks all that's required to reverse it is to "stand up to the Russians" and write a blank check for the Pentagon. To combat "Vietnam syndrome," the administration seeks a "cheap" demonstration of renewed U.S. power in the global battle against Communism. The provocative demonstrations will not be limited to shooting down the Sukhois of the unappetizing Qaddafi. There are more immediate targets--in the "American lake" (Central America and Cuba) and, through America's South African proxy, in Angola and Namibia, as the apartheid butchers increasingly take their rightful place in the "free world" as the U.S. government shifts over from "human rights" hypocrisy to ever more overt Cold Warriorism. And let's not forget the continual Israeli provocations in the Near East. Any one of these "demonstrations" could be the beginning of World War III.

The American bourgeoisie has displayed a special blood-lust over Afghanistan, gloating that this is the first time U.S.-supplied weapons have been used to kill not just Russian-armed or "Russian-inspired" insurgents, but actual Russian soldiers. Afghanistan, where a Russian-backed left-nationalist/modernizing regime confronted a reactionary insurgency fueled by superstition and backwardness and symbolized by bloody attacks on anyone trying to teach girls to read, became a hot spot of the Cold War. When the Soviet Union intervened militarily to support its ally against the CIA-equipped rebel tribesmen, we raised the slogan: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend social gains of October Revolution to Afghan Peoples!"

Every significant aspect of international politics is now conditioned by the Russian question. In the sporadic protest activism ignited over El Salvador, we have been the only current to raise the Russian question while the popular-frontists sought desperately to evade the central international questions. The recent spate of bourgeois war-mongering against El Salvador/Nicaragua/Cuba underlines our insistence that "Defense of the USSR/Cuba Begins in El Salvador." But not only there.

It is in Poland that Reagan sees the best possibility to realize his revanchist appetites toward the Soviet Union by rolling back the social and economic gains of the post-war transformation of Eastern Europe carried out as a "cold" process by the Russian army in the

wake of the defeat of Nazi Germany. The Polish crisis is seen as well as a choice opportunity for the U.S. ruling class to finally slough off the effects of "Vietnam syndrome" with an aggressive propaganda campaign to refurbish the discredited slogans of the Cold War ("free trade unions") and enlist the American people in an anti-Communist crusade. The participation of the U.S. labor tops, who work hand-in-glove with the CIA from Chile to Portugal, lends "working-class" cover to this effort to galvanize popular support for the sinister plans of imperialism.

### Evolution of the Polish Crisis

With its first Congress this September, Solidarność consolidated on a counterrevolutionary program. In the face of this threat we protested: "Stop Solidarity's Counterrevolution! No Capitalist Restoration in Eastern Europe!" And we warned that "the creation of a 'democratic' Poland subservient to Reagan/Haig on the Western border of the USSR would bring much closer the dreadful prospect of anti-Soviet nuclear holocaust" (WV No. 289, 25 September 1981).

In Poland the crisis of revolutionary leadership is registered in the disastrous circumstance that finds the bulk of the working class embarking on a counterrevolutionary course behind the clericalist/nationalist/pro-imperialist Solidarność. At bottom this agonizing situation is one of the great crimes of Stalinism. As we wrote in the introduction to our Poland pamphlet:

"Certainly it is not our job to apologize for the Stalinist rulers who have disorganized the Polish economy, capitulated to the church and smallholding peasantry, lorded it over the working class with bureaucratic privileges which mimic the inequities of capitalist society, alienated the intelligentsia and youth, fostered nationalism and every kind of backward ideology, not least anti-Semitism, and turned 'Communism' into a curse word.... But it is very much our job to seek to rally the working class in Poland and internationally behind the defense of the historically progressive socialized property in Poland, all the more so since the discredited Stalinists manifestly cannot. The call for 'communist unity against imperialism through political revolution,' first raised by the Spartacist tendency at the time of the Sino-Soviet split, acquires even greater urgency as the Polish crisis underlines the need for revolutionary unity of the Polish and Russian workers to defeat U.S. imperialism's bloody designs for bringing Poland into the 'free world' as a club against the USSR, military/industrial powerhouse of the deformed workers states."

Our line, consistent throughout the changing Polish situation, is defense of the gains of October and organization of workers political revolution against the counterrevolutionary Stalinist regimes. Without proletarian political revolution the collectivized property and planned economy of the deformed workers states will never be safe against capitalist restoration.

From the beginning of the confrontation between Solidarność and the Polish Stalinist government we saw that it was a situation which (if not frozen by restoration of bureaucratic order by the Russian army) had to go either in the direction of political revolution or toward counterrevolution under the dominance of clerical Polish nationalism, inspired and abetted by imperialism. In the absence of a Trotskyist vanguard in Poland and given the influence of the Catholic clergy and Pilsudskite reactionaries, we were far from sanguine about the probable outcome. Nevertheless there was a possibility for the precipitation of a genuine socialist vanguard and the potential for the independent mobilization of the Polish proletariat against the Stalinist usurpers and in defense of the collectivized property of Poland and the Soviet Union against imperialism. So with appropriate warning we equivocally supported the Gdansk agreement of August 1980, but we knew there was not much time left:

"Insofar as the settlement enhances the Polish workers' power to struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, revolutionaries can support the strike and its outcome. But only a blind man could fail to see the gross influence of the Catholic church and also pro-Western sentiments among the striking workers. If the settlement strengthens the working class organizationally, it also strengthens the forces of reaction. Poland stands today on a razor's edge."

--"Polish Workers Move,"  
WV No. 263, 5 September 1980

By the spring of 1981, Solidarność had enrolled the bulk of the Polish working class, including a significant portion of the Stalinist party, as well as numerous non-proletarian elements. In the apparently fluid situation we stressed the imperialist provocations over Poland, explaining that Reagan/Haig "want full-scale Russian intervention.... They want to provoke a bloodbath in Poland so that they can use the battle cry of 'Russian aggression' to push forward on all fronts in their drive toward World War III" ("Whose Poland?", WV No. 279, 24 April 1981). We said that in this circumstance a Russian military intervention "would in the best case freeze that political differentiation necessary for the only progressive solution to the Polish crisis: workers political revolution."

By the end of the summer of near chaos and economic collapse, the clerical nationalist program of Solidarność, always implicit, came to the fore. Solidarność' first Congress issued the call for "free trade unions," the notorious battle cry of Cold War anti-Communism, throughout Eastern Europe, entering the Cold War on the imperialist side. We noted that an estimated 15 percent of the Polish working class has held aloof from Solidarność despite what must be great pressure. When the union opened its office at Albert Shanker's "State Department socialist" headquarters in New York, we threw up a spirited demonstration against the threat of bloody counterrevolution.

With the question of Russian intervention posed, we asked in WV: "What do revolutionaries do when the Marxist program stands counterposed to the overwhelming bulk of the working class, a situation we

of course urgently seek to avoid?" We answered that our task is to defend the program at all costs. While expressing no confidence in the Kremlin, we wrote: "If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it [counter-revolution], we will support this. And we take responsibility in advance for this..." ("Stop Solidarity's Counterrevolution!", WV No. 289, 25 September 1981).

Trotskyist organizations have historically tended to go off the political rails in two directions. The main pressure is from social democracy and petty-bourgeois intellectual opinion, toward Stalinophobic Shachtmanism; in the presence of mass Stalinist parties, there is pressure toward liquidationism of the Marcyite or Pabloite variety. Both tendencies abandon the perspective of struggle for the conscious factor in history.

Liquidation in the direction of third-campism will refuse to offer support to the Kremlin's tanks if Russia intervenes. Liquidation in the direction of Marcyite Stalinophilia will call upon the Kremlin to invade, thus expressing political confidence in the Stalinists. Trotskyists do not see the Kremlin as the saviors of Poland: "In principle the Kremlin Stalinists are perfectly capable of selling Poland to the German bankers if they think they can preserve their own domestic power base." However militarily stupid and politically criminal, the "Finlandization" of Poland is not unthinkable for the Stalinists.

At the methodological heart of our programmatic line on Poland is the Trotskyist analysis of the contradictory nature of Stalinism and the primacy of the vanguard. It is not mere accident that in the classic fight over the Russian question in the American Trotskyist party in 1939-40, the defense of the USSR and defense of dialectical materialism against petty-bourgeois pragmatists were intertwined.

Poland is a litmus test for the party's rightists. In this section, impulses to flinch tended to be posed as excessive worry about world reaction to a Russian invasion, with the implication that it might not be worth the popularity cost. This view elevates the strengthening of anti-Soviet moods in American petty-bourgeois radical circles to the same plane as the historic defeat which restoration of capitalism in Poland would be for the international working class. In any event, the class struggle in each country has its own dynamic. British workers will not come to love Thatcher because of Poland. In fact, while our Poland line will send our immediate opponents into Stalinophobic spasms and isolate us somewhat in the U.S., there is no reason to assume its universal unpopularity. Particularly in countries with a mass Stalinist base and a traditional antagonism to the church among advanced workers (Italy and France in particular), our line may give us some dramatic opportunities for intervention.

#### The Russian Question and the 1st

The Polish crisis draws the political lines in sharp relief. The social democrats who long ago enlisted for front-line duty in the



trenches of the Cold War naturally champion the cause of Solidarność. So the Polish issue is much hotter in Western Europe than here, not only because of obvious geographic considerations but because of the presence of mass social-democratic parties and the intellectual currents which circle around them.

It is surprising, then, that the iSt has had so little overt internal trouble over this question in Europe. The underled German section tended to exhibit wooden polarization between Shachtmanism and Marcyism...with no clear Trotskyist pole. A confused discussion at the section's Emergency National Conference in September 1981 took place in the context of a frightened leadership which vacillated between opportunism and sectarianism and often lacks even a rudimentary concept of tactics. Where problems around Poland have shown up elsewhere in Europe, they have been rather more obscure.

The Australian section's dumping of Soviet defensism in a failed attempt to get a propaganda bloc with the third-camp organization set off alarm bells in the international center. When we pushed it, we found something that presented itself as an anti-leadership clique but turned out to be a deep-going abandonment of Trotskyism on the Russian question (which in the case of some went back to a secret difference with the 1978 WV headline, "Shcharansky Is Guilty As Hell!"). Steady political erosion had gone unnoticed, or, when noticed, unfought. An iSt delegation went in to do battle, and found a pre-existing base of support in a section of the Melbourne branch and its leadership. A hard faction was formed on the Russian question and soon became a substantial majority in the SL/ANZ. In the face of this, virtually the entire (mainly non-native) Editorial Board of Australasian Spartacist defected. Only the timely intervention of the International Secretariat enabled these neo-Shachtmanites to be fought effectively and forced to depart as generally burnt out individuals rather than leading the section itself out of the iSt.

Anti-Americanism abroad is not anti-imperialism. The renewed Cold War has produced a growing nationalist-pacifist response in Europe. The Western European "peace" movements reflect the renewed inter-imperialist rivalries and the special brand of anti-Sovietism championed by the social democrats. In this context it is particularly important for any iSt section to raise the Russian question with particular attention to its own ruling class. As the SL/Britain put it in its national conference document: "We must at all times seek a cutting edge in our Soviet defensist propaganda against our own bourgeoisie--the main enemy is at home."

Anti-American propaganda elsewhere is pretty cheap. To say, "the defense of the USSR begins in El Salvador" in an American demonstration has an impact. To say it in Australia is easy, and can be a way of avoiding the sharpest possible angle against social-democratic patriotism. In Australia the defense of the Soviet Union begins in Alice Springs. In Germany it begins with Berlin and the revolutionary reunification of Germany. In Europe in general it begins at the Vistula.

It was our efforts to turn the Australian comrades toward opposition to imperialist targets closer to home--the CIA base at Alice Springs, the Indian Ocean (Diego Garcia and sooner rather than later Sri Lanka's Trincomalee naval base), Vietnam--that touched off the Australian fight. In seeking to de-Americanize that section's Soviet-defensist propaganda, we were guided in part by the effort to see the question through the eyes of our new sympathizing section in Sri Lanka. This was one very concrete instance where the extension of our tendency to the colonial world contributes to the generation of an internationalist program.

The Russian question will be the key to revolutionary regroupments in Europe. The social democrats are on the rise, typified by Mitterrand's electoral victory in France, Papandreou's in Greece and the growth of the Benn forces in the British Labour Party. The social democratization of the Communist parties, under the banner of "Eurocommunism," parallels this growth. The European United Secretariat (Usec) has tailed these developments from the outset, in their uncritical appetites toward anti-Communist Soviet "dissidents" (Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, Plyushch) and the "theoretical" cover for these appetites as expressed particularly in Mandel's resolution, "On Socialist Democracy." The former impressionistic centrism of the Usec, associated especially with the May-June 1968 period and its aftermath, has been steadily in retreat under the pressures of anti-Sovietism. Having fulsomely embraced the popular-front "Union of the Left" in France as the greatest thing since Fidel Castro (and now with their enthusiasm for Mitterrand and Benn), the Usec has become a less-and-less-left tail on social democracy. The line shift from equivocation to outright anti-Sovietism on Afghanistan was certainly dictated by Usec appetites for outright liquidation into the social-democratic parties, a "tactic" which is being debated in virtually every European section.

The largely aborted struggle of the British Usec's former Communist Faction, now fused with the SL/B, centered on Afghanistan, Iran and communist opposition to the pacifist, pro-imperialist disarmament "movement." Future programmatic struggles and regroupments will be required for the iSt to pose an effective challenge to the Usec's "Fourth International" pretensions.

### Once Again on Iran

The iSt slogan of "Down with the Shah! Down with the Mullahs!" in Iran has been powerfully vindicated. In this country the pro-mullah Iranian students (as well as cynical American leftists), who claimed support to Khomeini was a smart "tactic," have retreated in horror now that they got what they called for and found it to be an endless succession of mass executions of their co-thinkers and relatives. Our perspective for workers revolution in Iran, based on independent proletarian mobilization against the shah and the mullah-led anti-communist, anti-woman, anti-minority "movement," noted some striking similarities between absolutist Iran and czarist Russia ("combined and uneven development," "the prison house of peoples," etc.). All those who out of the most corrupt opportunism allowed the

mullahs to consolidate power unopposed as the alternative to the widely despised shah share responsibility for the present bloodbath. In the sequel, the successful sales of our material in Farsi testify to a real if diffuse receptivity to our propaganda in the Iranian left milieu abroad.

### III. Reaganism: The Economy and Labor

The fingers poised over firing buttons of multi-million-dollar hardware belong to the dope-smoking high-school dropouts of the volunteer army. But what has the U.S. bourgeoisie really frightened is Reagan's plans to "finance" a \$1.5 trillion war budget by trimming domestic social programs while lowering taxes. This program is so obviously absurd that Wall Street has been shuddering toward panic ever since it was realized that Reagan seemed more or less serious about it.

Reagan is heading for war without seriously trying to put the country on war footing: no one's son will be drafted, no one will have to sacrifice, no one will have to die. On the economic front, this is the Republican version of the "guns and butter" policy of Johnson and Nixon in Vietnam, a policy which in large measure caused the inflationary spiral of the past decade. By way of contrast, in both World War II and the Korean War the government took the necessary measures of price control, heavy taxation, maximum mobilization. The U.S. accordingly emerged relatively financially sound.

The problem for the U.S. bourgeoisie is, at bottom, political. From Wall Street to Main Street, the majority of Americans show no sign of willingness to pay for Reagan's war. Perhaps more telling, Reagan and his band of fanatics do not demand hard sacrifices for fear of explicit popular rejection.

Thus for the capitalists, the war objective is incompatible with their economic objectives. These are: (1) to reverse the collapse in the growth of industrial productivity following the 1974-75 world slump, and (2) to reduce the inflation rate, which had topped 20 percent a year in the winter/spring of 1980. Reagan's economic policies cannot work, even on their own terms. He has opted to seek military superiority at the price of inflation and overall industrial obsolescence. Despite unprecedented cuts in key social programs, the Reagan budget remains highly inflationary. This is attested to on Wall Street, not only by the stated opinions of its most intelligent spokesmen but more significantly by the exceptionally high interest rates.

The U.S. has entered a recession, now officially declared by Reagan. There is some indication that the administration, desiring to dampen inflation, welcomes this. In the longer term, the impact of military build-up (combined with cuts in nominal tax rates) is likely to produce inflationary stagnation, with extreme unevenness between sectors and regions. Certain industries (armaments, oil drilling) will be or already are booming. Others (auto, housing construction) will stay at near-depression levels.

Not surprisingly, liberal Democrats and Republican "gypsy moths" are regrouping around the common-sense proposition that "Reaganomics" is ruining the economy and will cause severe social dislocation. But with all wings of the bourgeoisie committed to anti-Soviet military build-up, there is no significant "peace movement" as there is in Western Europe. Mainstream Democrats and labor leaders are still trying to push their own version of guns and butter.

The AFL-CIO opposes the social spending cuts but supports the military build-up. They simply propose to finance both priorities by wildly inflationary spending tempered with wage controls, i.e., the policies of the last year of the Carter administration in spades.

The question of the Soviet Union is posed not only by Reagan's direct military threats, but also because the developing class-collaborationist anti-Reagan mood has an explicit or implicit anti-Soviet thrust as well. The defense of the USSR is the cutting edge of our propaganda against popular-frontist opposition to Reagan. It is what distinguishes us from the reformists and centrists who focus on the budget cuts alone, implicitly accepting the need for anti-Soviet military build-up, if only at a lower level. The international class line draws the class line at home.

### For Workers' Action to Bring Reagan Down!

The PATCO strike was the first major confrontation between Reagan and the labor movement. More important than this marginal craft union itself was the effect of Reagan's union-busting on labor consciousness. Our basic demand, "Labor: Shut Down the Airports!", presented the strategy to win the strike and exposed the sabotage of the bureaucrats who made not one concrete gesture to shut down the scab operations at the airports in support of the air controllers. Instead, the bureaucrats launched an empty "don't fly" campaign as an alibi, and the reformists applauded politely. But as we said in WV: "Any union president worth his salt would have taken the first plane home to pull his union out the day the strike began" ("Bureaucrats and Boycotts," WV No. 288, 11 September 1981).

The September 19 "Solidarity Day" demonstration, the largest workers demonstration in U.S. history, was called by a brittle and frightened AFL-CIO bureaucracy in an intended effort to breathe some life into the ailing Democratic Party. But efforts by the labor tops (who clearly named the demonstration in honor of the counter-revolutionary Solidarność) to hold an anti-Soviet pro-Democratic Party rally were not successful.

The 500,000 workers who showed up in Washington came to protest Reaganite union-busting and social reaction. There was a near total absence of overt anti-communist sentiment and we found real openness to leftists. Indicative of this was the sale of over 8,000 copies of Workers Vanguard that day, the highest one-day sales total in our history.

Attendance at the march would have been much higher except for the sabotage of the labor bureaucracy. Missing were hundreds of thousands of heavy industrial workers, largely black and urban, from the big Midwestern industrial plants. Fearing this militant, volatile and powerful layer of the labor movement, the bureaucrats were half-hearted about mobilizing these workers, providing only token numbers of buses and trains to carry them to Washington.

Intervening in this circumstance where we could, we attempted unsuccessfully to mobilize the workers to force the unions to pro-

vide more buses. However, as we noted in WV, a centrally-organized communist propaganda group of several thousand rooted in the unions would have organized several hundred thousand such workers to come to Washington on our buses, carrying our placards, "Fight for Workers Rights! Build a Workers Party! Smash Reagan!" thereby making ourselves felt as a force in our own right in the labor movement.

Thus, September 19 poses very sharply a number of tasks for the SL. Our massive sales at "Solidarity Day" along with greater difficulty we have recently experienced in selling our paper on campuses may indicate a return to a more class-differentiated radicalism in which workers are more open to revolutionary politics and students less so, reflecting a section of the petty bourgeoisie being pulled behind Reagan. In any event we have a number of contacts, including circles in locations where we do not have local committees within striking distance. These contacts should be followed up with a perspective of setting up WV readers' clubs as transitional organizations for recruitment.

In areas such as Detroit and the Bay Area where we have substantial numbers of contacts in the plants and/or a significant subscription base among industrial workers, WV readers' clubs can serve as a useful tool for education and recruitment.

More important, we must reverse the trend toward diminished industrialization particularly in the Midwest. Our proposed attempt to strengthen the leadership of our Midwest branches is the vital first step toward accomplishing this task.

We need to reindustrialize in order to change our pattern of concentration which is now tilted far too heavily toward light industry. It is necessary to strive to create the norm for communist organizations--fractions concentrated in the strategic heavy industries and in unions central to the political life of their cities. In developing industrial fractions, branches should, while concentrating on strategic industries, strive for a pattern of diversification in important unionized companies. This will protect the branch's financial base in periods of economic contraction. And it will put the party in touch with wider sectors of the proletariat and labor movement and enhance the party's ability to intersect a labor upsurge in any given region.

In developing a program of reindustrialization, our ability to recruit should not be overlooked. Implantation efforts will be central, but September 19 and experiences in Detroit and elsewhere show our industrial base may and must be broadened and deepened through successful recruitment. Thus it is essential that our work in the labor movement be very closely tied in with other party activities--for example, educational and electoral work. In this context, the failure of our Detroit organization to center its recent election campaign on activities in the major plants in the city was a serious and costly error.

Recently augmented SYL recruitment will provide fresh recruits for implantation only if the youth, with party assistance, is able

to assimilate the new recruits. Conversely, experience in party trade-union fractions can assist in transforming SYLers into party cadre capable of playing a responsible role in the organization.

A plan of reindustrialization and expansion of trade-union work requires the recreation of an effective Trade Union Commission in the center. Without central supervision, experience shows that costly errors are made and lessons often painfully learned in one fraction or region are lost to other fractions or locals, resulting in a repetition of the error. In particular, our trade-union experience of the West Coast has not been made available to other fractions in the party to the extent that it should. Our trade-union work in the coming period will be trade-union work in the Reagan years. The American working class, hobbled by its craven union bureaucracy, is far from smashed. Even the sobering prospect of "the PATCO treatment," backed up by the recollection of demoralizing retreats of the past several years, cannot inevitably postpone a "fightback" by the powerful American working class. September 19, which showed at least an openness toward pro-union socialists, and the dramatic increase of the sales of our literature more generally over the recent months testify to the political motion at the base of the unions and especially among black workers.

#### Recruiting Against the Popular Front

When Reagan took office we projected a resurgence of pro-Democratic Party popular-frontism. Yet September 19 shows that despite the urgings of the reformists and centrists the labor bureaucracy has been unable to accomplish this shift yet. Carter and his party remain discredited. Moreover, to compete with Reagan the Democratic Party has shifted far to the right. Further, the Democratic Party and its labor-faker supporters are every bit as anti-Soviet as Reagan, making it impossible for them to mount a credible opposition.

This is their point of vulnerability and our political opening. Reagan's austerity drive, his union-busting, his program of social reaction and racism are integral to his preparations for a third world war aimed at the USSR.

The American labor bureaucracy is brittle. Since the end of the McCarthy period its main tactic has been to suppress outbursts of class militancy. Given its close ties with the Democratic Party, the labor bureaucracy cannot easily play the role of a safety valve to relieve the pressures of class struggle. At present there is an enormous political vacuum in the labor movement between ourselves and the mainline bureaucracy and its social-democratic hangers-on. The New Left turn toward the working class, initiated in the early 1970s, has dissipated. The Maoists have disappeared as an effective force and the other ostensibly revolutionary organizations have simply become social-democratic appendages to or satellites of the labor tops.

Presently no wing of the union bureaucracy offers a credible alternative even on the level of economic militancy. Arnold Miller

is a dirty word in the coalfields. The Sadlowski forces in steel have been defeated in their main base, Balanoff's District 31. The Machinists' Winpisinger, "labor party" rhetoric and all, was very visible in the breaking of the PATCO strike. Thus in an upsurge there is a good chance that polarization within the bureaucracy to produce a less discredited wing may be too little and too late to place itself directly at the head of motion from the base. Tactically this situation can provide dramatic openings for our socialist agitation, which are necessarily of brief duration before other, more massive forces quench such opportunities.

Where we have been able to maintain our fractions we have in a number of instances found there is considerable support for our politics. This support has mainly been passive, expressed in voting for candidates who stand for union offices, running on our program. Some of these electoral campaigns have succeeded, giving the party friends who have gained valuable experience and augmented authority in the workers movement.

While extremely valuable, such victories have had their price. The pressures of trade-union politics are strong on revolutionaries operating in this milieu and it is no accident that a number of West Coast trade unionists, incompletely assimilated to Bolshevik politics, succumbed to milieu pressures and have broken from our organization. In the majority of these cases we have been able to recoup our losses, but these defections from our program have set back our work.

Further, limited electoral successes have disoriented several of our fractions. We aim to build communist fractions in the labor movement in order to implant our program in and give leadership to the working class. The task of our fraction in the labor movement is programmatic--to win the broadest support for the SL's program and to recruit militants to the SL.

However, in some fractions we have seen the growth of a sort of parliamentary cretinism in the trade-union arena, whereby the aim of the fractions becomes transformed into contesting for offices in union elections. Behind this perspective lurks a literary, social-democratic conception of politics--namely, that victory of the class-struggle forces in the labor movement is a piecemeal, gradual, cold process--a contention of ideas to be decided at the union ballot box.

Such a perspective can only isolate us from and earn the contempt of the revolutionary-minded workers who the fractions must find and recruit to the party. In many instances, e.g., the United Auto Workers, the union bureaucracy is conjuncturally so discredited, yet so entrenched, that proletarian revolution seems like a far more likely event than ousting the sellout union tops and installing a class-struggle leadership in power. This is particularly the case in Detroit where our union work is intimately linked to black work and the struggle to mobilize labor to crush Klan/Nazi terror. Given the weight of the UAW in that city, the fake lefts have capitulated



to a perspective that everything must go through the UAW leadership and consequently that the job of the "left" is to force the UAW to the left. Parallel attitudes are shared by the British centrists and reformists towards the British Labour Party.

Our fractions must be alert to tactical openings and boldly seize the initiative for militant class-struggle action when opportunities that permit the wide mobilization of the workers are present. The intervention of our friends in transit in New York and their efforts to stage a protest over a horrendous industrial accident is a good example.

While it is necessary to know when to be bold, it is also necessary to be cautious. We do not want to keep our comrades submerged for a prolonged period in a milieu that is deeply conservatizing and depoliticizing, but a factory is not a campus. A trade-union demonstration is not a PAM May 3rd. In the period prior to the New York City Labor Day demonstration, comrades had difficulty in making this distinction. The point was underlined by a proposal which would have put a key fraction into a direct confrontation with a powerful, entrenched bureaucracy. Such problems naturally arise with the creation of new fractions and will be resolved through political struggle, processes of natural selection and attrition.

To reiterate, trade-union work in the coming period will be trade-union work in the Reagan years. September 19 showed the promise of much greater working-class receptivity to our politics, centered on our call for "Workers' action to bring Reagan down!" However, as noted elsewhere in this document, our bourgeois opponents are not idle, but instead are preparing to suppress and repress the workers movement. In this regard, the single most important protection we have is our links to and the firm rooting of our organization in the labor movement.

Against the reformists and centrists, we base our trade-union work on the revolutionary program of Trotskyism:

"...the independence of the trade unions in the class sense, and the relations to the bourgeois state, can, in the present conditions, be assured only by a completely revolutionary leadership, that is, the leadership of the Fourth International. This leadership, naturally, must and can be rational and assure the unions the maximum of democracy conceivable under the present concrete conditions, but without the political leadership of the Fourth International the independence of the trade unions is impossible."

--"Trade Unions in the Epoch of  
Imperialist Decay"

The American unions today are a prime example of what Trotsky described as characteristic of the epoch of imperialist decay. Our struggle against the labor bureaucracy's functioning as agents of the capitalist state demands our vigorous opposition to the AFL-CIO's

role as an adjunct of CIA/State Department imperialist policy from Latin America to Poland. The fight for labor's political independence from the state leads straight to our position, unique on the left, of opposing use of the capitalist courts against the union by "dissidents," "democracy" demagogues, disgruntled groups of black or women workers, etc. This fight is central to our program for the unions, from agitation for concrete union solidarity against Taft-Hartley and other union-busting laws to our propaganda for a workers party/workers government.

If the pressure building up at the base among those targeted by Reagan is not expressed in industrial militancy, it will be expressed elsewhere: in the growth of fascistic currents on the "fringe," in sharp polarizations among the petty bourgeoisie, in desperate ghetto explosions. If the union bureaucracy appears immobile at present, the social fabric remains rent with contradiction, from the top, where the bourgeoisie is far from united, to the bottom, where the black sub-proletariat and the aged will be literally starving and freezing this winter. In this context a socialist propaganda group posing a labor-led struggle against capitalist economic crisis, racial oppression and imperialist war should have a powerful appeal.

#### IV. Organization and Recruitment

The recruitment drive carried out over our intervention into the El Salvador protests brought over 40 new members to the SL/SYL in a month. It was the largest single burst of individual recruitment since 1972.

A continued high rate of recruitment does not depend on the issue of El Salvador. The bottom line for the drive was the "three whales" of contemporary Bolshevism. (1) "Build Picket Lines, Don't Cross Them," a reaffirmation of the elementary principles of trade unionism, acquires added force at a time when many workers, conscious of the anti-strike intransigence of the bosses and government, are hesitant to strike in isolation but well aware of the boost a class-struggle victory for any group of workers would be to their own needs. (2) Our high political profile derives principally from our insistence that revolutionary opposition to Reagan reaction is inseparable from the Russian question: "Defend Cuba and the USSR!" (and now, "Smash Solidarność Counterrevolution!"). (3) A program to bring the power of the labor movement to bear to stop the rising line of race terror--"Smash Klan/Nazi Terror Through Labor/Black Defense!"--confronts the bourgeoisie's anti-communist drive at its fringe and indicates the strategy to successfully interdict the fascists from the major northern industrial centers.

The success of the recruitment campaign this past spring was due not only to the SL's increased political visibility, but also to the changed objective situation. The 1979 recruitment drive was relatively unsuccessful mainly because of the youth leadership's passivity. But anti-Reaganism focused on the El Salvador issue ignited a broad political activism, which was not the case with our opposition to Khomeini and our opposition to the U.S.-backed Chinese invasion of Vietnam, the main bases for the drive of two years ago.

As noted elsewhere, campus-oriented work during this year's sub drive was rather harder than previously. The student population seems in its mass to be politically quietist, careerist and, in large measure, conservative to reactionary in their outlook. This does not mean we will not recruit students, though work at "backwater" campuses will have to be undertaken cautiously. It does mean that we expect a good proportion of our new recruits in this period to be young workers. The recent indications of openness toward our politics among workers and blacks must be consolidated into new contacts and recruits through energetic local work, systematic regional trail-blazing and the effort to organize WV readers' circles among workers, thereby utilizing our fine press as a "collective organizer" in the best Leninist sense.

Working people, particularly blacks, feel pushed to the wall by Reagan's attacks and the economic crisis. We are in a period of Reagan reaction, but this is certainly not the 1950s, when the economy was fat, U.S. imperialism was the hegemonic world power and American leftists and union militants targeted by the witchhunt felt hopelessly isolated, irrelevant and defeated in advance. The present situation is characterized above all by instability. The Reagan "consensus" is under attack from all sides; the economy is in real

trouble; the situation of minorities and the poor is desperate and explosive; fear of nuclear war is vivid and widespread. The discredited Democrats are singularly unsuited just now to play FDR and the ossified union bureaucracy is intimately associated with the bi-partisan war drive.

This gives our line for labor-led struggle to defend the workers and oppressed--"For Workers' Action to Bring Reagan Down!"--a powerful appeal. It remains an open question how many individuals will feel goaded into raising their own "profile" in a period of Reagan reaction by hooking up with a small party of internationalist communists. A lot depends on cracking the no-struggle "strategy" of the union tops and winning even some defensive victories--something our small propaganda league can't do much to bring about. But in this situation of polarization, we will win at least "a few good communists" (in particular, good black communists) and in any case a pool of supporters who will look to us for leadership when they do go into action.

### Assimilate the Youth!

The recruitment drive has given us a real youth group, one with a higher rate of turnover certainly, but one that genuinely serves as a training ground for young revolutionists. In the previous period of membership stagnation, recruitment to the Spartacus Youth League (SYL) was generally linear, lengthy and literary. The results were, on the one hand, the layer of "clones" whose excessively literary values, egotism, cliquism and bloodless sense of politics were corrosive and, on the other, a level of political commitment and sophistication among youth members not greatly different from the level of the party membership. Now for the first time in a while we have a "generation gap."

If we do not transform the layers of new recruits into layers of young Trotskyists, we'll lose them. Young comrades unable to see the connection between the issues which brought them around us and the long-haul Marxist aims of the group they joined will leave as easily as they entered.

Indeed, the recruitment of youth attracted to our "far-left" politics but essentially innocent of Marxism means that among new members we frequently encounter impulses toward an alien and counterposed political line, one which corresponds to the Narodnik current historically. Impatience, spontaneism and a penchant for self-gratifying verbal extremism may be understandable diseases of youth but their political incarnation is counterposed to the program of scientific socialism. It is our political responsibility to educate our members in the politics of the organization they joined, not least because the party as a whole can and will be victimized for the irresponsible statements of its newest candidate member.

Comrades are urged to study in particular "FBI Targets the Spartacist League," WV No. 151, 1 April 1977, for a discussion of what our line is and what it is emphatically not:

"...A revolutionary conjuncture in the U.S. will be defined by the fact of dual power. Most probably it will pose the choice between the democratic soviets of the working class and a tottering bonapartist dictatorship headed by a militarist...unencumbered by the trappings of a Congress.

"On the basis of historical probability in the future, the FBI wants us to plead guilty to 'advocacy' to 'overthrow the government' today. We are not able to. It is simply self-serving nonsense for the FBI to imply that the SL is planning a secret putsch against the U.S. government. Any organization that fits the FBI's conspiratorial definition would have to be a group of suicidal psychopaths."

Comrades are also referred to our last "Watersuit" article (WV No. 286, 31 July 1981) for some discussion of the difference between cretinist legalism and the crucial struggle for legality. The one is a program of trust in the ruling class; the other is in some ways its direct opposite--the recognition that the democratic rights of communists in America are fragile and precious.

The youth organization must organize a full discussion throughout the SYL membership on these questions. In general, the training of our new members had better include plenty of formal party education--in class series, public and internal; through the party and youth press; in active opponents' work; when necessary through internal bulletins and branch debates. But much of the best training for young comrades comes through fractions--participation in the systematic, sustained work necessary to give the party a real presence in the labor movement or among students. The supervision of fraction work by the party or youth exec in accordance with Leninist organizational principles constitutes a vital and integral part of the work of every branch.

### The Center

Maintaining the party's financial stability depends in good part on continued recruitment. Thus far, our finances have held at a reasonably high level despite attrition in union implantation, due in part to the rise (in real terms) in the sustaining pledge schedule resulting from inflation pushing people into higher SP brackets (as it pushes them into higher tax brackets). This means our membership cannot live on their wages unless we cut our SPs once again. Our regular financial existence has come to depend on necessarily irregular windfalls.

Our new headquarters, necessitated by the sale of our earlier premises, has been a mixed blessing. We enjoy a clean, comfortable building with continuing care taken to make it as secure and safe as possible. But it has absorbed a great deal of time and money and promises to continue to do so.

The press has been a source of real satisfaction. The very successful special summer sales drive (9,565 copies of WV No. 287 sold

in North America in four weeks) was initiated because of the appropriateness of the issue to the line and work of the party, especially in the context of the PATCO strike.

The work of the Central Office has seen fuller utilization of alternate-CC-level cadres under the direction of the National Organizational Secretary. The youth leadership has become more stable and more responsible at the top. An overdue reshuffling of the circulation department should result in broadening the skills of the circ comrades and more orderly functioning.

## V. The U.S. Left Moves Right

After a decade of quiescence, the petty-bourgeois left had moved a long way even from the primitive radical impulses of the New Left. Opportunism seemed to pay poor dividends--so the opportunists offered to sell out at lower and lower prices. With the rising line of anti-Sovietism and the onset of the Reagan years, this drift to the right has dramatically accelerated. Across the board our opponents, by various increments and quantum leaps, have so shifted to the right that by remaining politically stable we have become the very visible left opposition to pro-Democratic popular frontism in America.

The U.S. political terrain has become more "traditional" with the effective disappearance of Maoism, the increasing irrelevance of the SWP, the splintering of the Shachtmanoids and the end of a definable black movement. The Russian question draws the lines clearly. There is the "State Department socialist" complex, the Stalinist orbit, and us.

### Maoism

With the developing Washington-Peking axis and the decline of détente, Maoist anti-Sovietism pushed its adherents toward the right wing of the American political spectrum. Especially since the 1975-76 Angola war, where China lined up with the U.S. and South Africa, and then the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, the Maoists have suffered from an "antagonistic contradiction" between their opportunist appetite for a bloc with bourgeois liberalism and their anti-Soviet hawkishness.

They have responded by retreating into sectarian irrelevance (Progressive Labor), engaging in self-destructive frenzy (the Avakianites), liquidating themselves out of demoralization (Klonsky's CPML, whose Call declared itself "ultraleft" and gave up the ghost). Some simply abandon Maoism for an eclectic brand of Stalinism (PL, CWP, CLP, "The Trend" and even the Guardian, which reverted to type as a fellow-travelling journal for "Third World" Stalinists). Times are particularly hard for those that identified with the presumed "radical" character of Mao's "cultural revolution" and embraced the "Gang of Four." They are now Stalinists without a country or, what may be worse, Stalinists with Albania for a "socialist fatherland."

It can be presumed however that the Communist Workers Party of Jerry Tung has been growing particularly in the South. In an effort to avoid political isolation the CWP is leaving the "Gang of Four" for an eclectic Stalinist reformism, in which their line is at times indistinguishable from that of the CP. The CWP has now declared that "the Soviet Union is a socialist country" and that "the struggle for détente" is "one major struggle for world peace" (Workers Viewpoint, 25 May 1981).

### Socialist Workers Party

For many years our major opponent, the reformist SWP is becoming increasingly politically irrelevant. After perpetually finding a "new radicalization" wherever they looked, sometime around August they belatedly noticed the Reagan election and seem to be finding it some-

The "Watersuit" showed both the full flowering of the SWP's parliamentarist/legalist appetites and a surprising absence of basic technical/administrative competence and thought. Politically, they maintained the muckraking spirit of Watergate as an effort to prove that Bambi rules the capitalist jungle. They seem truly to believe that leftists, blacks and union militants can get a fair deal in capitalist court. This trust, we observed, "places them somewhere to the right of your average socially concerned black minister on the question of the state." Both the government and the SWP put the now moribund Mandelites of the Internationalist Tendency on trial for "terrorism." The SWP slandered I Ter Hedda Garza as an FBI fink on the front page of the Militant.

As we wrote in WV: "For the SWP, the trial is the finale of a long period of rightward-moving reformism.... Both the government's efforts to justify its surveillance of the SWP with charges of 'terrorism' and the SWP's attempts to show itself the very model of a tame electoralist party spell danger for the left" ("Reformism on Trial," WV No. 286, 31 July 1981).

At its last national convention the SWP completed its divorce in leadership and organization from the earlier party, for example from the SWP of the period of centrist degeneration under Dobbs/Kerry. The latest "age purge" removing from leadership those in the SWP cadre older than Barnes (a previous such purge having created an "emeritus" status to take care of all those much older than Barnes) leaves the clique around Barnes exclusively firmly in control of an idiosyncratic, bureaucratic, social-democratic and shrinking party whose internal difficulties have been a subject of comment in the Guardian and elsewhere.

Two rather interpenetrated oppositional currents comprised at a minimum 10 percent of the membership at the time of the last national convention (this will doubtless not be a chronic condition, as the norms of the SWP--codified in the 1965 organizational resolution--specify that the life of oppositionists in the SWP is to be nasty, brutish and above all short). One current, backed by a number of SWPers with experience as reformists in the unions, objects to the SWP's policy of putting members into trade unions for brief stints during which they are supposed to electioneer for the SWP and proselytize for everything from the Iranian mullahs to "socialist Grenada" before making any effort to develop even minimal credentials on the job or in the union. The other opposition line (expressed by both the Weinstein and Breitman "tendencies"), despite ritual genuflections in the direction of more "orthodoxy" on Sandinista Nicaragua and more lip-service to the "Fourth International," mainly finds Barnesite enthusing over Castro hard to square with Barnesite anti-Sovietism, posing the sensible question: if Russia's so very, very bad and Cuba's so very, very good, how come they agree on everything?

The problem for the SWP is that given their social-democratic thrust, those they encounter must wonder why the U.S. needs two such parties. And indeed Michael Harrington's DSOC is the one that is growing. Perhaps the SWP's present tailspin (they seem to be losing



members at a rate of about 200 per national convention) is the result of intimations of irrelevance. After all, it is a strange "peaceful, legal" party indeed which hails Khomeini's blood frenzy and wants a new "International" with the Sandinistas and Fidel.

### Marcyites

Workers World/YAWF are a hyper-liquidationist Stalinist cult from which we have never recruited. After years of small-time front-group organizing and cheerleading for assorted "Third World" nationalists and Stalinists (and marked by a penchant for street-fighting), they managed to displace the SWP as the left brokers for the Democrats in the May 3 anti-Reagan march. This perceived opportunity moved the Marcyites far to the right in a short period of time.

Championing the liberal line of "political solution" in El Salvador, Marcy himself argued in Workers World against the victory of the leftist insurgents, thus openly proclaiming himself for counter-revolution. To further prove his loyalty to the liberals, Marcy had PAM goons physically draw the line against the revolutionaries on May 3.

### Communist Party

Although the CP rarely operates openly in any milieu, we now come up against them more than ever before. Only in the Bay Area have we had consistent political combat with them in the unions. Our ANCAN demonstration had significant effect on them.

Although they are much larger than we are, we outflank the CP on two key issues: the Russian question and anti-fascist work. Their big problem in this pre-war period is that they must play down the Russian question in order to better participate alongside the anti-Soviet liberals in "more butter, less guns" mobilizations against Reagan. Our powerful line on Poland should have an impact on those in and around the CP who want to defend the Soviet bloc from Solidarność-style counterrevolution and are willing to recognize the role of Stalinist economic mismanagement and bureaucratism, conciliation of backward ideology and heavy-handed repression in pushing the bulk of the Polish people into the arms of imperialism.

The CP youth group has been successful in recruiting black and Latin youth. But with an anti-fascist strategy centering on appeals to the Reagan government to "ban the Klan," the CP should be vulnerable to our revolutionary criticism and some of the youth around them can be drawn toward us.

### Centrism

Our new prominence on the far left of the American political terrain puts us in a position to recruit leftward-moving elements to revolutionary politics without the obstacle of significant centrist opponents. In the previous decade we sterilized such groupings (CSL, RSL, Vargaites, "Weiss CRSPies") before they could grow beyond the

size of minuscule sects. In the case of the virulently unstable Healyite Workers League, we were able to assist them on their trajectory all the way out of the left.

Most of these groupings were composed of left-overs who went workerist. They bought tickets to ride the coattails of the likes of the miners' Arnold Miller and Steelworkers' Ed Sadlowski and ridiculed the "sectarian" SL for missing out. But the ticket was to political oblivion.

Thus for a number of years we have been in the enviable position of having no significant national group between us and the SWP claiming the mantle of Trotskyism. While it is a truism that a labor upsurge would likely benefit the reformist forces before the revolutionaries, an upsurge in which we are the only credible force to the left of the reformists could result in dramatic growth for our party.

But there are those who have also noticed this empty ideological space. In particular, the Sollenbergerite Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) is making a bid to fill it.

Due in good part to our Detroit leadership's policy of "destroying by ignoring" the RWL, this parochial Ann Arbor cult was allowed to grow into a major local competitor. From their Ann Arbor base, they extended themselves to Detroit, where at our principal industrial location they now have a larger fraction than we do. Recently the Sollenbergerites made a bid for national status with the launching of a press and the fusion with the Bay Area Socialist League (Democratic Centralist) brokered by the British Workers Socialist League and its "Trotskyist International Liaison Committee."

About a year and a half ago, the national leadership became fully aware of Detroit's willful ignoring of the Sollenberger group and began to orchestrate a campaign against them, including major polemics in the party and youth press. But our branch, continuing to respond with a mixture of complacency and defensiveness, acted like it thought the RWL was too slippery to contend with. The local shied away from political combat with these centrists, whose method was to take the SL line (and recently our typefaces, headlines and photos) and blunt the cutting political edge. The RWL consciously seeks to present itself as a "toothless" version of the SL, which in practice means political cowardice, popular frontism and outright scabbing. On the Russian question they are a species of left social democrats in practice and methodology. It is evidence to the political weakness of the Detroit branch that they felt incapable of handling a group that says picket lines mean cross and that called the 1979 anti-Klan rally a "fraud."

## VI. Internal Problems and the Threat of Repression

When we saw the Reagan years coming we knew we were going to have problems:

"We're expecting a rotten time with Reagan and the social climate in the country. So you're going to see political dives. I've mentioned a couple on the part of the so-called left. We're going to see some other stuff too, mainly a loss of nerve and a loss of will.... So we don't particularly welcome the coming political period. But we're going to use it to temper our cadre, and to find out who the nervous nellys are. There's something else. It's not all bleak. We're entering a strategically defensive period. But there are going to be opportunities. Every section of the oppressed is going to get it. We want to be cautious, but we don't want to have a policy of caution."

--"Facing the Reagan Years,"  
WV No. 273, 30 January 1981

Our heightened profile, Soviet defensism, international extension, increased weight on the U.S. left, and the fact that we make political trouble way out of proportion to our real weight and authority, mark us as a prime target for Reaganite reaction. And it is clear that the Reagan administration is in the process of a series of "unleashing" activities for the secret police.

Particularly with our aggressive campaign against counterrevolutionary threats in Poland, the SL/U.S. is marked as "Russia lovers" in an increasingly anti-Soviet period. The enemies of U.S. Cold War policies are branded according to the new coded vocabulary as "international terrorists" and Kremlin "surrogates" spreading KGB "disinformation." The code for us seems to be changing accordingly. Increasingly now the international bourgeois media refers to the SL as "pro-Soviet." Our banner in the recent British anti-nuclear demonstration was said by the Wall Street Journal (28 October 1981) to belong to "The Trotskyite" "pro-Soviet" group. And two major European papers characterized us with the same phrase: "American-founded pro-Soviet Spartacist group." No less a bourgeois force than the Wall Street Journal (29 September 1981) in a lead editorial described our anti-Solidarność picket as the sort of "dirty business" that must be stopped, ending with an unmistakable threat:

"...the American labor movement...remains a free and independent force pitting its weight against state power both in the U.S. and abroad. Its efforts on behalf of political freedom are thus significant. Anyone seeking to delegitimize its performance in this realm should be aware of just how serious an attack he is launching."

Being threatened by the Wall Street Journal is rather different than being threatened by the Marcyites for example.

Heading into the Reagan years a number of cadre quit, a reflection both of the "conjuncture" and of the aging process (the latter being at bottom a lack of energy and a tendency for personal

difficulties to become keener and more keenly felt). Some were prominent union oppositionists uneasily aware of their personal "high profile" in a period of virulent bourgeois anti-Sovietism. As well, those to whom politics seemed an interesting game necessarily find it to be a game for higher stakes now.

Under these pressures, our last conference document noted a flurry of "menshevism, cliquism and semi-opposition." In the unions and elsewhere, soft and unassimilated elements wielded their deviations, eccentricities and worse to beat a path to the door. The Riker case is an object lesson in maintaining good party order against those who "seek to justify their weaknesses into a political program."

With the Green incident in mind as well the S.F. local exec on 13 February observed: "We note that the Reagan election and the resulting fear has caused a variety of latent deadbeats, dilettantes and rotten elements throughout the organization to erupt like so many pimples and exit from the party and revolutionary politics by committing indefensible acts." The findings of the San Francisco local investigation returned again to the theme of "facing the Reagan years":

"Riker clearly equates 'sacrifices' with SPs which he then places outside the realm of party discipline.... In a sense, sacrifices are a function of the existing level of class struggle, but not in the way that Riker means it. To Riker, more class struggle equals more sacrifice and less class struggle equals less sacrifice. It is true that in periods of heightened class struggle comrades can be fired, thrown in jail, beat up or worse, but our opportunities for recruitment will be much greater. The results of the work and the sacrifices will be tangible. It can be harder to pay a pledge or stay at a grueling factory job when the returns are not immediately evident. That is why in stagnant periods all but the most conscious and committed communists drop away and growth is slow. Riker's theory of right-wing period equals less sacrifice is counterposed to the proposition that if serious long-term work is not undertaken in slow periods, the party will not exist that is capable of leading the working class to victory when it does begin to move. Anyway, a generalized right-wing mood in the country does not necessarily define the period as stagnant. Witness the campus polarization around El Salvador last spring, our successful recruitment drive, and the over 300,000 strong labor 'Solidarity Day March' on September 19. A striking aspect of Riker's view of the period is its narrow, national character. If Riker's financial 'precedent' became the norm, we would soon be unable to finance the work that is critical to reforging the Fourth International."

--"Report on the Expulsion of  
F. Riker from the SL/U.S."  
by Parker, November 1981  
(Internal Information Bulletin  
No. 35, November 1981)

### May 3: A Policy of Caution

The May 3 El Salvador protest of 80,000 in Washington, D.C. was the first big opportunity of the period of anti-Reagan activities. For many young comrades, it was the first big demonstration they had ever seen. Our Anti-Imperialist Contingent was a political success, a propaganda coup but a tactical debacle of command, one based ultimately on a political failure. What happened was accurately reported by an AP dispatch:

"At one point PAM marshals linked arms for a stretch of about 200 yards on the road leading to the main parking lot to keep Spartacist organizers out of their crowd, and some sharp words and a little elbowing ensued before the Spartacists gave up...."

--Oakland Tribune, 4 May 1981

We had planned to take advantage of the opportunities presented to us by the attractiveness of our line for military victory to El Salvador leftists. The plan laid out by the center was to divert a section of the march to the AIC rally. We knew it meant a confrontation with the Marcyite organizers and most likely some minimal pushing and shoving. But our May 3 field leadership aborted the plan in an effort to avoid a confrontation with YAWF. It was a failure of political nerve. The view of the May 3 command was that a confrontation would hurt us; in fact the opposite was the case--the failure to confront PAM hurt us. We allowed ourselves to be boxed in. Having taken the political offensive with our slogans, we failed utterly to follow through in the projected confrontation.

What was revealed on May 3 was that an element of the central leadership did not shift gears in the field from the mainly defensive routine, developed in a period of little opportunity, to meet a conjuncture of considerable opportunity. May 3 was the culmination of this policy of caution. An April 18 El Salvador protest in New York City, which was clearly wide open but which we treated as if it were a hard, hostile, counterposed milieu, was a forerunner. And it extended beyond May 3 when the NYC local leadership tried to hold an "underground" educational weekend. The consistent projection of worst-case analysis, the "Fortress Spartacist" mentality, is considerably less costly in a period like the late 1970s, when there was not much to gain.

The failure to take the offensive in such situations is a refusal to fight for leadership. At bottom, this conservatism could indicate some internalization of our opponents' view of us as "movement pariahs," an isolated and despised sect that does not seek to influence events but only to raise its banners in its own wind. Immediately after May 3, an expanded Political Bureau meeting on the subject showed that a broad layer of cadres understood the causes and magnitude of the failure and were prepared to prevent its repetition. The tapes of this powerful discussion became a recruiting tool in the post-May 3 recruitment drive.

Detroit: A Failure of Will

If May 3 was a failure of nerve, Detroit has been a failure of will. It is our most serious long-standing problem. We have taken losses there and the centrist-talking Sollenberger cult, smelling blood, has grown in the Detroit/Ann Arbor area like a cancer in weak political tissue.

After our successful anti-Klan rally in November 1979, the Detroit leadership failed to follow up and reap the political benefit. Simple fear was certainly part of the reason. But there was more. The local leadership was revealed as a tyranny of insecurity which had replaced political fights with corrosive personalism. The leadership was reconstituted but problems remained. A loss of communist cutting edge was followed by increasing collapse of revolutionary will. The branch became an intermittent action group rather than a political concentration of the SL.

A process of political renewal was begun by a majority of the branch, who waged a faction fight against those in the local who had given up and, believing the party irrelevant at best, had gone into revolt against the party program where it meant trying to take the lead in a fight for sitdowns against layoffs/plant closings. The faction declaration stated:

"We are comrades who want to fight for the party and its program. Faced with the programmatic implications of the paths we were traveling, we have rallied to the party's defense....

"The Detroit local is a sick branch. The vacuum of leadership has permitted an assault on our program, traditions and organization methods to take place step-by-step in the manner of classical menshevism. This opportunist revision of our program, most explicitly demonstrated by Jo K.'s capitulation to the labor bureaucracy, converges with a groundswell of anti-party cliquism, sabotage and incessant, 'anti-bureaucratic' grievance-mongering. No more! As Cannonists, we are forging a collective leadership grounded in revolutionary optimism."

--"We're Looking for a Few Good Communists," 8 April 1981 (Internal Information Bulletin No. 34, May 1981)

The inner collapse of the Detroit branch cut directly against the objective opportunities for increased black recruitment. Our chance to forge ahead is there, especially now when there is virtually no black leadership, no more talk about "another civil rights movement" and black workers are looking more to their unions as instruments of struggle against Reagan reaction.

Blacks continue to have the fewest illusions about the "American way of life" and are being thrust into the front lines of the struggle to bring down Reagan. The fight against the fascists is a key to this. As we wrote in WV (2<sup>nd</sup> January 1981): "Many blacks see

the connection between the rise of fascist terror across the country and the occupation of the White House by a certified right-winger." We have shown that labor can be mobilized to beat back the fascists. In San Francisco, where we initiated the successful ANCAN rally with the support of 22 Bay Area unions, the Nazis have not shown their face since. We should not be too modest about this.

In the depressed Midwest the fascists have been able to raise their banner provocatively recently as small bands of leftists in losing battles confront the KKK/Nazis, who are backed up by the cops. In a major industrial center, like Detroit, we long to see a dozen spindly punks in brown shirts taught a lesson they will not forget by thousands of workers.

Detroit is the local that almost went under, but all the Midwest locals are underled. We attempted a round of transfers to strengthen the region, stripping New York of middle-level cadre for the purpose, but in general it didn't work. Chicago never became a full regional center. Ann Arbor still needs to turn the tide of RWL growth at our expense. Cleveland remained undersized as well as underled. And the New York local has been damaged and disoriented ever since.

So once again we need to strengthen the branches, keeping in mind the injunction that "the random rotation of any amount of pegs to fill a larger number of holes will never result in the filling of all the holes" ("For a Class-Struggle Workers Party!"). Some transfers into Cleveland, sorely needed to bring the branch size up to a workable minimum, are already in the works. But with this exception, the current transfer "package" involves leading cadre for very specific purposes. From the Bay Area and Chicago we get key pieces for a strong, aggressive Detroit branch. By weakening an important Bay Area union fraction, we can free up the present Los Angeles organizer for Chicago. Other leading elements are going into Chicago and Vancouver. The present Chicago chairman will take over the New York local organizership, which has been a chronic drain on the national center. In sum it is a shift of leadership away from the West Coast --unfortunately, since the Bay Area is where we have our most real work and influence.

Detroit remains the heart of the black proletariat, a key spot on our political map and potentially a probable hot spot of black recruitment. Certainly we are not surrendering it to the RWL. We are nationally in an enviable position, without a serious centrist opponent, and we intend to keep it that way.

Throughout the organization, however, there has been an underestimation of the threat posed by nascent centrist competitors like the RWL, a complacency based on success in eliminating such elements a decade or so ago. But life does not stand still. There is a small niche on the left for a "nice" neo-SL, one which sounds principled until principle and program are sharply on the line. If allowed to take hold and grow, such groups can then shield us off from important elements and developments, poisoning the atmosphere and under-

cutting our work. Such formations must be dealt with, like it or not. It is too easy to rest on laurels (generally other comrades' laurels, at that) won in previous political combat against other groups, rather than fighting with possibly plausible people who are sometimes quite as smart and/or literate as we are. In the case of the Sollenbergerite RWL, which is centrally a conscious anti-Spartacist League, we are risking being sterilized in an important area and being confronted by a centrist competitor nationally if we fail to combat them.

### Fighting Repression

We can expect no buffer in the left milieu to stand between us and state repression. We have faced a series of attempted exclusions from demonstrations and meetings including frequent use of the police: in Chicago by the CP, in Washington by the Marcyites, in New York by CISPES et al., everywhere they can by the SWP. The reformists and centrists are more than willing to act as cops for the bourgeoisie when it comes to the Spartacist League. Their violence is but an echo of that being generated by the government.

At the May 30 El Salvador demonstration in Chicago, the CP, in league with the cops and FBI, excluded our contingent and set us up for possible attack by the notoriously brutal Chicago police, who staged a massive show of state force. Again in San Francisco at the September 27 protest against Duarte, the cops brutally beat demonstrators and, in the pages of the Examiner, claimed the SL (and the Avakianites) were troublemakers who had caused the violence.

Until corrected, the Chicago local ran a campaign against the CP's provocation which centered on democratic complaining rather than taking the political offensive against the CP, driven to invoke the cops by its popular-front politics. Whereas whining about our democratic rights will not impede gangster attacks against us, we found that we earned respect that cascaded nationally for having taught the Marcyite bully boys a lesson in workers democracy on June 6 when they were repelled in trying to smash our NYC protest against their May 3 tactics.

We are resolved not to be quiet targets for state repression. When college newspapers started regularly calling us "terrorists" and violent putschists, when we were slandered as arsonists at Wayne State, when major newspapers started taking a highly selective interest in us, we intensified our counteroffensive. As well as carefully documenting and protesting falsehoods in the press, we undertook direct court actions. We brought our energy and resources to bear to make certain we are not nameless, faceless nobodies who can be blown away in the dead of night. When we have been labeled in ways that set us up for government or night-riding attack, we have responded with all the resources--moral, legal, financial and political--that we can muster.

Our campaign around the initiation of a legal case against Secret Service seizure of CWA convention delegate and SL supporter



Jane Margolis wrested a formal apology from the government and a \$3,500 federal check which Margolis turned over to her union. And while it is difficult to imagine the present Reagan regime handing such an apology to communists, the case can prove very valuable for the future.

When California attorney general Deukmejian issued an official report on "Organized Crime in California, 1979 (Part II--Terrorism)" naming us as purported left-wing criminal terrorists, we brought suit. Claiming our right to organize the party of the working class, we did not sue against the attorney general's list as such (a course which would have found us defending the Hell's Angels and various right-wing nut groups), but sued to get our name removed. This case, urgently necessary for our own protection against those who would hang a target around our neck, should strike a chord in California and elsewhere among left-liberals, libertarians, unionists and blacks and others who feel threatened by Reagan reaction and the rise of new McCarthy-style witchhunters.

On all these important counteroffensives, there has been resistance, reflecting defeatism and a distressing lack of tactical sense. With all proportions guarded, if we learned any single lesson from the brutal repression of the CP in the 1950s it is this: better to fight. Even in a period much more simply defensive than this one, it should be obvious that you fare better when you try to pick your battleground when you can, instead of waiting while your enemies attack you on what they perceive to be your weakest ground.

The partial dispersal in a previous transfer "package" of forces from the center centrally involved in defense and legal/Partisan Defense Committee work is clearly a matter of concern in such a period as this. Routinism and an underestimation of the time factor in politics, and the resulting sluggishness in mounting a political and financial campaign as part of any important legal campaign, can be tolerated least of all in defense work.

Electoral work is seen in this country as the epitome of legal political activism and has therefore a legitimizing effect for the organization. This additional consideration must be taken into account in those instances where electoral intervention is objectively called for (hot, class/race-related issues and minimal petition work for ballot status), but where the local's response is to not run.

To become preoccupied with trying to predict in advance the particular forms of harassment and persecution the government has in store for us would be to miss the point. The point is to render ourselves less vulnerable, to refuse to be set-ups for provocation or frame-up. That we are being subjected to a campaign of systematic media slander is obvious; an increase in attempted agent penetration is surely inevitable; it is certainly in order to wonder about a sudden rash of firings in New York. Bourgeois democracy, even if narrow and brittle, does mean that the state in mounting attacks on its critics and opponents will pay a certain price,

depending for example on the transparency of the injustice and the level of witchhunting hysteria. It is our job to make it as difficult and costly as possible for our enemies as they try to figure out how to escalate and orchestrate repression against us.

If this is a good time for radicalized youth, blacks and workers to join, it is a good time for the scared, the wavering, the psychologically retired to quit. Revolutionary leadership is tested also in periods of repression. Trotsky stressed in Lessons of October that passing such tests in turn generates possibly fatal conservative responses in more tumultuous times. But the experience of the Bolshevik Party also shows that a working cadre that preserves itself and functions under fairly severe conditions of repression is a tough cadre.

We are not yet even a small party. We are a working propaganda group with a regular press and a small implantation in the unions, seeking to grow. Our perspective is to build the vanguard nucleus which can grow through quantum leaps to the point that we can, when the bourgeoisie is deeply split and demoralized, come forward as America's last, best hope to lead our class to victory.

--Draft by Editorial Commission  
established by the PB  
24 November 1981