

INTRODUCTION

The document that follows is intended to provide general political guidance for our work over the next few months. It is an interim perspective, the E.C. did not intend it to be an exhaustive or elaborate outline of our direction and record in every area for an indefinite period. Indeed any tendency in that direction would begin to interfere with the process of convention discussion which will be initiated by the May NC.

However, it is important that comrades understand that this perspective should be seen in the context of a certain view on the experience of the recruitment campaign and the Teamster contract campaign. There were admitted weaknesses in the recruitment campaign, particularly in the area of recruitment in our priorities and it is certainly the case that our next campaign will have to focus on these much more clearly. But the campaign nonetheless represented a real step forward for us both in quantity and quality. The fact that we lost a larger number of new recruits than we should have speaks to our own failures and in no sense undermines the principle of open recruiting of workers. Completing the transformation of IS into a workers' organization will require more open recruitment in the future, not less.

Our own failures in holding new members were bound up with our decision to put every possible effort into the Teamster contract

campaigns. Other things suffered too because of this decision, indeed virtually every area of IS activity lost something because of our Teamster emphasis over the last few months. We believe that emphasis was correct despite the very real strain it has created, because without it we would not have established ourselves as a tendency in the working class movement, we would still be drifting in the twilight world inhabited by the various left sects. We have yet to turn our remarkable achievements in the Teamster work into concrete political gains, but there is absolutely no doubt that we will be reaping the benefits of this all-out effort for many years to come.

In the next period we will be taking part in the creation of a new national R&F movement in the Teamster union. We will be developing the work in the Coalition for a Good Contract (UAW) both in Detroit and across the country. In telephone the extension of UA and the Long Distance newspaper is overdue and will have to be dealt with. The same is true in terms of the creation of a serious steel fraction. The consolidation of our new branches, the holding of our Black Conference in May, the qualitative development of our international and educational work are also on the agenda over the next few months. It is as a political guideline for this important work that the EC has published this interim perspective.

Glenn Wolfe
National Secretary

I.S. INTERIM PERSPECTIVE

1) We need an interim perspective to take us through to the July convention for the simple reason that the perspective adopted for this period by the January NC has not been successful in some major respects. At that time we had expected to consolidate the gains of the recruitment campaign by ensuring that branches were all organized around functional fractions and that extra resources were devoted to education and training. In terms of expansion we saw the Teamster work as the key and decided that all the resources of the organization would be focused on this work and we would have a drive to recruit Teamsters.

2) It is in terms of education and Teamster recruitment that we have been largely unsuccessful and this lack of success has had an effect. Already half of the new members from the recruitment campaign have been lost and there will be more losses yet. Indeed, instead of keeping the turnover down to the one-third figure as we anticipated, we will probably end up with a figure closer to two-thirds. It is also the case that, given the low level of Teamster recruitment and the fact that this work was at the center of all our activity, we have not been able to fulfill our new year target of recruiting enough new members to cover our losses. In practice this means that in January we were talking of an organization of almost 400, whereas the reality now is that we are somewhat less than 350. While this is no great disaster, it still represents over 50% growth in less than a year, it is nonetheless worse than we expected and has consequences in terms of the expansion of the organization. After setting up two new branches in Indianapolis and Cincinnati on schedule, we have now had to delay several months the foundation of the Atlanta, Baltimore, and Buffalo branches.

3) The buck stops with the EC for the present weaknesses, particularly in the areas of training and integrating new members, for in areas of internal work there can be no excuse that certain elements are beyond our control. It is clear for example that we in no sense campaigned in the branches around these issues, nor did we provide enough physical help from the center. The cadre schools, for example which were agreed by the January NC never got off the ground because of the pressure on resources of the Teamster work. No matter what the pressure, that was a mistake, one that must now be rectified by immediately strengthening our education work. For a temporary period at least we have appointed a national education officer to prepare materials and assist the branches in this work. This has already resulted in the revision of the Basic Class Series and the creation of a new Intermediate Class Series. These classes must be available to the appropriate

members in every branch, but they are not the whole answer. To really change things around, there must be political discussion in the regular branch and fraction meetings, the new monthly educational bulletin and education column in WP will provide some of the basis for that. At the end of the day, however, we have to realize that most people learn their politics informally, in one-to-one discussion and argument. This is why we are putting considerable emphasis on operating the "buddy" system in the branches and bringing specific members to Detroit for individual cadre training.

4) The failure in Teamster recruitment is somewhat more complicated and there is no simple solution. Of course we can and will do more in terms of WP coverage, pamphlets, speaking tours, etc., to provide the necessary back-up for political work amongst Teamster contacts. It is also now necessary that the local Teamster fractions become much more open to non-members and begin to be a bridge into the IS for TDC activists. But that is not enough. We have to accept the fact that in this first major intervention in a mass workers' movement, we didn't get it right. Our inexperience in bringing revolutionary politics to workers showed up at both the local and national level. It is this political fact we must face and learn from in the next period. For even though the Teamsters union is one of the hardest of our priorities to recruit from, even though the UPS work (where recruitment will be easier) has not yet come to a head and will bring us real gains in the next few months, it cannot be denied that our Teamster work of the last few months has demonstrated that as revolutionary leaders of the working class we still have a lot to learn.

5) This is not the place to go into a detailed assessment of the TDC experience, that is the province of a different document. But it should be clearly understood that this initiative was successful beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Without the TDC, it is agreed by everyone, from Fitzsimmons to Business Week, there would have been no strike. TDC caused the first national trucking strike. Despite the sellout, it is abundantly clear that the cash part of the deal would have been much worse but for the pressure of TDC and it is not unreasonable to calculate that the net effect of the TDC in this area was to redistribute in excess of a billion dollars from the bosses to the working class. Most important of all, it is now certain that we can proceed to build a national rank and file opposition in the union which, from the day of its foundation, will be a real force for bringing the union back into the hands of the members. In short our politics have been demonstrated as correct in practice. In the real world of workers' struggle we have proved the validity of

our strategy and have learned how to lead. The impact of this on the way we are seen by workers and the way we see ourselves should not be underestimated. We can have confidence that in the struggles around other major contracts we will be actors rather than commentators, we will affect the outcome and develop a base for revolutionary politics in other key industries. The lessons of the Teamster work will have to be applied over the next few months not only to the contract campaigns but to the ordinary day-to-day agitation that we are committed to leading at the shop floor level.

6) It is important that we do not see our weaknesses in the Teamster work purely in terms of the conservatism of the industrialized members. These comrades will always (have always in revolutionary organizations) reflect in some way the pressures of a backward class; that is not our problem. We have to admit that we over-estimated the speed at which we could make the turn to agitation and the amount of political capital we could expect to create immediately from that turn. The fact is that only in the last few months of our Teamster work have we finally arrived at real agitation. Talk of workers learning through struggle, talk of proving our politics through action, can now be more than talk, it can actually happen. We can build a fighting workers' organization by leading specific struggles. We can now work out programs of agitation and activity for all our areas.

We have to broaden our caucuses and aim to lead wider struggles than in the past. The test of who to work with will not be based on their agreement to some key section of our political program, such as class struggle unionism. We should be working with anyone who will agree with us on a minimum agitational program around a contract or in the plant. Anyone who will work with us around a minimum program for turning the union into a fighting workers' organization. We are not interested in political purity, we are more than ready to dirty our hands, because the real world is not clean, and mass movements do not have unadulterated bolshevik politics at this point in time. That is the essence of the turn to agitation. But unless it also brings a much greater emphasis on the use of Workers' Power in those arenas, on political organizing as well as organizing around economic issues, the turn to agitation will be an empty shell.

7) The problem of relating revolutionary politics to the day-to-day struggle has not been solved yet. It hasn't been solved by our members in the plants or by Workers' Power. All too often our members separate the trade union work and their political work into separate compartments. All too often our coverage in Workers' Power is either on the level of strike reports or abstract politics. Our experience in the Teamster work has improved this situation, it is true, but the problem remains and must be consciously solved not just for one arena but for all our work. The EC, through its control of Workers' Power, will have to rectify this situation. The paper must be used to present a regular analysis of economic and political developments which makes the bridge between our agitation and our socialist program. The emphasis on the employer's offensive in the Teamster coverage was the beginning of this approach, but thus far the process is too haphazard to give the paper the overall identity it requires in this period. The EC cannot shirk its responsibilities any longer; it has to change its meeting day in order to become the political editorial board of the paper. Under no circumstances must this initiative be allowed to undermine the basic agitational nature of the paper, however, and that points to another change that must be instituted as soon as possible. We need another regular publication on top of WP. We need a political magazine that can carry longer analysis, draw together the news over a longer period than a week, make the explanation of key theoretical points, etc.

8) None of these developments is possible without a conscious effort by the leadership to maintain a higher level of political and economic analysis. The pressure of the last few months has meant that we have become politically lazy, our analysis has dropped behind the events of the real world. We have yet to update an economic analysis which makes the serious error of projecting a 20% plus inflation rate by the end of the year. Politically we have a

crisis perspective which, while right in the mid-run, no longer fits the consciousness of the class. Crucial developments in domestic politics or in the international movement go by with only the most cursory glance from us. In short, the turn to agitation has created an unnecessary depoliticization at every level in the organization. The EC has to lead by example in this area, it will make the first step when it starts allocating much more time for its meetings and preparations for the meetings.

9) The political tasks we face, as outlined particularly in the previous three sections, will result in a change of emphasis within the paper. The tasks will not be completed throughout the organization unless the paper carries these changes to every member and contact. In a very real sense the paper is the core of our interim perspective, since every bit as important as the content is the way it is used. The record at the moment is dismal, in terms of circulation, finance, feedback in the letters' column, etc. There will have to be a conscious drive in the next few months to change this. We will train our members through schools in the branches to use the paper in the struggle, to understand the primary role of the paper, and we will then campaign for greater sales, more subs, more letters, a fighting fund, WP forums, etc.

10) This is not an alternative to our major perspective around the contract round; it is both secondary and complementary. Indeed this initiative arises out of the lessons of the first part of that contract round. We now understand the importance of bringing the paper and the organization into the center of this work. This emphasis on the paper doesn't represent a recruitment drive, but it is a drive to create a new political periphery, for at the moment our periphery is weak and our future recruitment is therefore restricted. By the fall we have to be ready for another drive for membership. In the meantime we should commit ourselves to pushing up the circulation of WP by 50% which will be a considerable step forward, a step which will help recruitment and would mean that we achieved a solid membership of around 400 in the same period.

In conclusion it should be stressed that in a very real sense this interim perspective represents our attempt to complete the turn which was agreed at the last convention. The turn to agitation which was politically accepted by the organization has now become a reality and will be extended to all areas of work under the interim perspective. This perspective is a completion in another sense, in that the healthy changes we have made over the last year have had one unhealthy by-product which we didn't foresee with any real clarity, the tendency towards a decline in political discussion. There can be no real progress for us without political development at every level of the organization. The creation of the conditions which make that possible is an integral part of this perspective.

Executive Committee
April 16, 1976

For members only

