

9/11/78

To: All IS Members
From: National Secretaries Office

Enclosed in this mailing are several important documents.

The first is a report on the SWP conference and our attitude toward them as an organization. It should be read by all members. The SWP is making a turn toward the working class and are thus quite interested in us. They would like to gain influence over us and eventually either absorb us or rip us off. They will be sniffing around our organization and it is important that every member understand our attitude toward them.

Also in this mailing are flyers announcing the publication of a new book on the miners strike, by Kim Moody and Jim Woodward. The book is excellent and should be read by everyone. It provides an analysis and the arguments for many of the proposals that are being discussed in the pre-convention discussion. Branches should consider organizing study groups or one on one educationals around the book. The book should also be pushed aggressively with both industrial contacts and friends on the left.

Also included in this mailing is a document by the EE for a monthly political magazine. This is a document for the convention and should be kept.

Convention plans are moving along. All documents will be to the branches by the end of the month. Next week the document on National Liberation Struggles will be out. The American Scene document will follow shortly afterwards.

A detailed report on the convention conception and plans will be out to the branches next week. It will include: place, costs, delegate ratio, tentative agenda as well as a timetable for when the documents will be out and a schedule for pre-convention discussion.

The last item in this mailing is a letter on the NOW convention from the Women's Commission. We are asking that at least one woman from the following branches attend: NY, NJ, Pitts, Cleve, Detroit, Gary.

In struggle,

Gay

IS PUBLICATION

Proposal:

The IS will begin publishing a monthly magazine of news analysis, political strategy and socialist education following the 1978 Convention. The average issue will 20-24 pages and will contain the following outline table of contents:

Survey: 1-2 pages of news analysis of key national and international events of that month.

NOTE: Three major articles are flexible; could be three domestic, one of each, etc.

Major domestic politics article: 3-4 pages, examples are Roots of the Tax Revolt, the Politics of Energy, Significance of the 1978 Primaries, the Rise of the New Right, the Impact of the Bakke Decision, Black Organizations at the Crossroads, etc.

Major Labor Article: 3-4 pages, to cover in depth with analysis and strategy how we see a major event in the labor movement for that month. Examples might be: Significance of the UAW local elections, Where is the Fight Back Movement Now, etc.

Major International article or second domestic politics article: 3-4 pages.

Educational piece of socialist theory or program: 5-6 pages. Similar to but more indepth as socialist View of national liberation movements, women's liberation, black liberation, theory of exploitation, the revolutionary party, the labor party, causes of inflation, etc.

Cultural piece or review: 1-2 pages.

Labor notes: 1-2 pages of an expanded version of what's now in WP, allowing for major labor events to be reported on.

The style of the magazine will be lively, interesting and readable. There will be a liberal use of pictures, charts, graphs, quote blocks, and cartoons. Layout will be attractive. We will explore the use of color on some pages. On occasion the magazine will focus on one issue if indepth coverage beyond one major article is warranted. Examples include Affirmative Action, The Miners, etc.

We will invite non-members to contribute pieces of relevance to the magazine. At times we will open the pages of the magazine to a debate on an important issue, say The Democratic Party.

Staff and Production:

The magazine will be edited by Kim and Marilyn. This team would lend the political authority to ensure that the organization will take the publication seriously, as well as give the combination of talents to ensure efficient and effective use of the resources. The Editorial Board will be the EC plus possible others. Sun will produce the magazine. Staff decisions will be made in consultation with staff members. Political leaders outside of Detroit will be regular contributors of major articles, and will be expected to take responsibility for the magazine in their respective branches.

Motivation:

Publications are not abstractions. No one form of a revolutionary publication is good for any and all time. What form and frequency it does take must be decided based on the level of struggle, the perspectives, and the internal needs of the organization. This proposal attempts to honestly take stock of these facts and

the problems the IS faces, and to develop a publication that overall best fits these needs, including the best use of the political resources of the group. Based on this assessment, a magazine is the best format overall for the IS today.

The magazine will be written in a lively, readable form. Serious analytical articles and educational pieces do not have to be academic, boring and generally unapproachable to all but the super-intellectual. Every effort will be made to make the publication popular and the ideas accessible to our membership and periphery.

It will combine surveys (presented as a series of short articles) with longer, topical analysis articles of political questions of general interest to our membership and those on the left and in industry that we work with.

The magazine should be called Workers' Power, as to make clear its role, and to provide an easy transition back to a newspaper when the needs and perspectives of the group call for such a change.

The magazine will play a major role in fulfilling three major political tasks the IS faces today: (1) the development of a politically sophisticated and trained cadre, able to discuss with confidence revolutionary politics. We have a serious, committed cadre, but due to the past perspectives and the press of our work, especially the industrial work, this cadre is very weak in its knowledge and ability to argue, discuss and generally be confident in our basic politics. As we embark on a task of working with the left, as well as sophisticated political workers, we must change this if we are to be able to effectively carry out our current perspectives toward the healthy industrialized left, and down the road, a policy of regroupment.

(2) To recruit from the left, as well, we need an organization of politically sophisticated members, as well as a publication that carries our politics and explains the social forces behind major events and provides serious political strategies as answers to the problems facing the working class in America in the late 70's. The publication must be capable of arguing our politics on the questions of stalinism, social democracy, the Democratic Party, women's liberation, the national question, etc., if we are to build a political periphery and recruit from the healthy left during this period.

(3) To politically win the more sophisticated workers and influence them in our direction, we need a publication that explains our ideas in a popular and lively way, but is a revolutionary paper, espousing revolutionary politics. While we do not expect to recruit heavily from our industrial work in this period, that does not relieve the organization and the fractions from attempting to win those we work with, especially the workers who consider themselves to be radicals and/or socialists, to our politics or to move them closer. The magazine is designed to play a major role in this process as well.

EC
August '78

To: Women Comrades
From: Women's Commission
Re: NOW Convention

September 10, 1978

Since the hugely successful July 9 ERA march, the I.S. has been forced to take another look at the National Organization for Women.

Although NOW remains a predominantly white, middle class organization, the attack against women is forcing its leadership to take action. The July 9 march was one result.

The march was proposed by the New Jersey chapter of NOW, and the national leadership had to be forced --kicking and screaming all the way--to follow through. But regardless of its limitations, NOW is the only women's organization strong enough to call for a successful national demonstration.

Even though the demonstration was not built aggressively by the national officers of NOW, chapters across the country mobilized tens of thousands of women to go. In addition, there is a new cooperation between the trade union leadership and the leadership of the middle-class women's movement. This opens up opportunities for us inside the unions.

Despite all the problems of NOW, it is the only visible national organization fighting for women. As a result, women who want to get active, look to NOW. NOW grew phenomenally after the International Women's Year Convention in Houston last fall, going from 55,000 to 88,000 members. The same thing happened after July 9, so their membership undoubtedly approaches 100,000 today.

We can be proud of the work we did to build the July 9 march. We estimate that about 80% of our women members from the mid-west and east coast were part of the march. In addition, we built the march in our union work in Gary, Pittsburgh, and Detroit and through our gay and abortion work in Pittsburgh and New York.

However, it is clear that we did not do nearly enough. Part of the reason for this is that we were caught unaware. We did not realize until too late that the march was not only going to be enormous, but that it was going to attract a new layer of women.

We cannot afford to be left behind again. As a new women's movement emerges, we want to be in the leadership. We want to help to shape that movement.

It is clear that NOW has the ability to call the shots. Whether they will use the strength that they have or not is another question. But we must find out more about NOW. The Women's Commission is currently discussing what our relationship to NOW should be.

NOW is holding its convention on October 7, 8, and 9 (Sat., Sun., and half of Mon.) in Washington, D.C. There will be much discussion of strategy on the ERA. Although we have not been a part of NOW, we do not want to miss this convention because it will help to shape the struggle for the ERA over the next year. The Women's Commission will be requesting that a representative from each branch from Gary on east go to the NOW Convention. Our primary job there will be to learn more about NOW and meet people, but we will also be able to participate in important workshop discussions on the ERA and the labor movement.

Comrades who are being asked to go have already been approached. Anyone else who is interested, should call Elissa immediately.

Unfortunately, this is going to be expensive. We will be able to provide housing, but it costs to attend and to join NOW. There is quite a bit of paper work which must be done immediately. All those attending must PROVE that they are members of NOW. Call your local chapter and make arrangements to join IMMEDIATELY. Be sure that you have proof: a membership card, a cancelled check or a formal letter. Do not go to the Convention if you are not a member. Membership is \$6.00 unemployed and poor, \$25.00 others. In addition, you must register for the convention. The cost is \$35.00 to attend. Either ask your local chapter for a form, or send the following information to: 1978 National NOW Conference, PO Box 7813, Washington, D.C. 20044.

Send your Name, Address, City, State, Zip, Phone. Say that you are sending in for an individual registration to the convention, enclosed is \$35.00. Say that you do not need housing or childcare. The Convention is being held at the Washington Hilton.

SWP Report

In early August we were invited to the SWP Active Workers and Socialist Educational Conference at Oberlin.

We decided to accept the invitation and send a few comrades to the Oberlin conference.

This report is based on what we learned there.

For many years we've had no particular interest in the SWP. They had no orientation toward the industrial working class and their activities in the women's and anti-war movements had combined sectarianism with opportunism.

This year they have begun actually sending people into industry. Three years ago they announced a "turn" to the working class. We didn't take it seriously since it wasn't accompanied by any kind of industrialization campaign.

In early August they had 283 people in industrial jobs out of a membership of 1700 including the YSA.

Most of the people going into industry seem to be in their early 20's without a great deal of political experience although some of their more experienced cadres have also gotten jobs. The turn into industry has depleted the YSA.

Oberlin

The Oberlin Conference drew about 1,200 people. We think they were almost all SWP members.

The conference was overwhelmingly young (early 20's), white (the SWP is 12% minorities including 6 1/2% Black), and middle class.

Many people had just gone into industry and were either just off probation or still on probation. Others were planning to go into industry very soon.

The theme of the speeches and classes was to motivate people to go into industry. There was very little serious analysis of the labor movement and where it's going. It was still talking to outsiders about the labor movement not talking to industrial militants about a strategy for labor.

Jack Barnes, the SWP National Secretary, gave the major political speech of the conference on "Building an International Party of Workers".

His theme was that we had entered a new period when many workers were open to socialist ideas. He talked about the need to build a "class struggle left wing" in the labor movement. But not about how it would be done beyond socialists getting jobs in industry.

He described this as a "preparatory period" in which socialists could begin to enter the labor movement and acquire respect and influence.

He said the SWP would be able to build up substantial Militant

sales and subscriptions from industrial workers. He also said they would be recruiting industrial workers but gave no timetable or targets.

Barnes stated that it was their goal to get "the overwhelming majority" of SWP members into industry. This theme was repeated often at the conference.

Andrew Pulley gave a major speech on steel. It was on a very low political level.

Much of it was nothing but anecdotes to show that workers are willing to take militant action and/or talk about socialist politics.

He talked about the Right to Ratify campaign but had no real analysis of its significance or potential. He described the Weber reverse discrimination suit but gave no one any ideas on how to bring it into the union.

The atmosphere at Oberlin was very upbeat. There's obviously a lot of enthusiasm for the turn into industry.

There's real pressure on SWP members to get industrial jobs. The older people who are already attached to white collar careers will probably stay where they are. Likewise the central SWP leadership and staff. Most of their other members will probably at least try to get into industry.

SWP Labor Work.

In early August the SWP had approximately 135 members in the USW, 54 in rail, 51 in the UAW, 40 in IBT, and 3 in the UMW. These are their priority unions and industries.

Since the SWP is only now seriously entering industry the people who are getting jobs have no industrial or union experience.

Only their rail fraction has a leadership with political experience and respect in the union.

Nevertheless their members are being sent into industry with pre-conceived ideas of what to do or not do.

A heavy, sometimes primary, emphasis is put on selling the Militant, "talking socialism" with workmates, pushing SWP political campaigns, and other "party building" activities.

They also expect their members to continue to play an active role organizations and movements (NOW, Bakke) and involve people from work in them.

The SWP is least clear on what they will do in the unions. We found a great deal of uncertainty and even different ideas among people at Oberlin.

The most coherent view expressed by their leadership and particularly by Frank Lovel, their most authoritative spokesman on union politics, is that they will build, or jump in on, single issue campaigns - particularly those focusing on union democracy. Thus they

see the Right to Ratify campaign as ideal.

They have laid out three goals for the class struggle left wing they talk about: Union democracy, union solidarity, and independent political action.

They view union democracy as by far the most important issue. Barnes said the fight for a class struggle left wing focuses on union democracy.

The SWP leaders feel union democracy is the issue connecting struggles in different industries and the one that most readily leads to socialist ideas.

Their attitude on caucuses varies widely within their own organization. Some have a position similar to ours while others believe all caucuses are simply manifestations of power struggles devoid of politics.

The leadership gives a very low priority to building ongoing union caucuses or organizations. They tend to think this is premature. However whenever something real gets started they are likely to jump into it.

Their perspectives are filled with contradictions. On the one hand they believe they can propagandize directly about socialism, sell the Militant and recruit to the party. On the other hand they don't believe the level of militancy within the working class is high enough to sustain their playing leadership roles in shop floor struggles and consequently instruct their members not to run for office except in special circumstances.

Steel

The SWP regards its steel fraction as its most developed national fraction. Until very recently building it had the top priority.

They are continuing to send people in and are planning new branches in Gary, the Mesabi Iron Ranges, and Birmingham.

Although they have 135 people in steel many are in small shops. They are only beginning to realize the importance of concentrating their members in the bigger, more important work locations.

The Baltimore Sparrows Point Plant seems to be the only major steel center they have people and we don't.

Their priorities now are the Right to Ratify campaign and the Weber case. They don't seem to have much idea what they are going to do on these issues beyond writing articles in the Militant and talking to people at work. Since we were excluded from the steel and other fraction meetings this impression is based on the public sessions and our conversations with SWP leaders.

They asked us to explore the possibility of joint work on the Weber case. They said they were trying to decide whether any real campaign could be built around it.

Rail

We didn't meet anyone from the SWP Rail fraction at Oberlin. Our information on their rail work comes mainly from the "Report to the Party Rail Conference" by Ed Heisler in the Party Organizer of Feb. '78(we were encouraged to buy copies of the Party Organizer, International Internal Discussion Bulletin and Internal Information Bulletin at Oberlin).

SWP members helped to lead the Right to Vote Committee in the United Transportation Union for many years. The Committee fought for membership ratification of contracts. Before their turn this was their token blue collar trade union work.

Last year they helped get out a newsletter called "Railroadworkers Fightback Newsletter". The newsletter featured a "Call to All Railroad Workers to Defend Our Unions" signed by a number of local union officers.

They called for the right to strike, the right to vote on contracts, and open bargaining. They also proposed joint meetings of union locals and officers to discuss the carriers' attack on the rail unions and how to fight back.

From our point of view this is the SWP's most advanced trade union work. But there is no sign that their other fractions have any similar plans or ideas.

IBT

The SWP National Committee meeting held immediately before the Oberlin Conference decided to make the Teamsters a priority,

We were told that they planned to work both in the TDU and PROD.

SWP members have come to TDU meetings and the recent Majority Contract Coalition meeting. They told us they had been favorably impressed by TDU.

We pressed their leaders on whether they would build TDU in areas where it didn't already exist. They weren't prepared to answer.

UAW

There seems to be very little leadership or direction to SWP auto work.

The only accomplishment they talked about was getting a Toledo local to send a bus to the ERA demonstration in Washington.

Their national auto fraction convenor works at Lynch Road but pulled out of the United Coalition just before the elections because he said it wasn't political enough.

UMW

They have just gotten their third person into the UMW. They have a branch in Wheeling and seem to be planning to move more people in

Regroupment

The SWP has a policy of Trotskyist regroupment both internationally and in this country.

They believe that they already are the revolutionary party and that all that is necessary is for them to grow through recruitment and through fusions. They even foresee the possibility of doing work in a social democratic party at some time in the future but this doesn't change their basic view.

Internationally they are having some success in re-uniting the Fourth International.

The three Fourth International groups in Canada merged about six months ago and the three groups in Colombia have just merged.

There are unity discussions going on among the more than half a dozen Trotskyist groups in Peru. If they can pull off a unity they may be able to play an important role in a revolutionary situation there.

There will be a world congress of the Fourth International next year and some of the many groups which have split from it in past years may rejoin.

The SWP takes the whole question of the Fourth International enormously seriously. One of the things they questioned us about was our attitude toward the Fourth International. We indicated that we thought the question of creating an International had to wait on the development of genuine mass revolutionary parties.

In this country there only unification has been with the Revolutionary Marxist Committee - a small split from the RSL many of whom were originally in the IS. They are very pleased with the merger.

We were invited to the Oberlin Conference along with the Socialist Labor Party, the ISO, NAM, and the Sojourner Truth Organization.

They are interested in us because of our successful trade union work and trade union cadres.

In the long term they would no doubt like to draw the IS under influence to the point where unity would become inevitable. They probably feel that once their in industry there superior numbers in the working class will make this possible.

They also want to recruit anyone they can out of the IS right now. They have been sniffing around the edges of the group for several months.

In addition to inviting the IS to send a delegation to Oberlin they tried to get several individual members to come.

At Oberlin the SWP leadership didn't talk to us about about unity. At one point we were told explicitly that they weren't proposing unity talks.

But the mere fact that we were there was enough to start some

of their members talking in those terms. Joe Samargia, the President of an iron ore steel workers local, was told by some of their members that they had proposed that we merge with them.

We did discuss with the SWP leaders we met at Oberlin the possibility co-operation or joint work in the unions. They also asked us to help on the forthcoming tour of Drake Koka, a Black South African trade unionist, and with the Hector Maroquin defense campaign.

We will do everything we can on the Koka tour and have endorsed Maroquin's right to political asylum.

Gay will be contacting Larry Siegle their National Organizational Secretary to set up discussion on trade union perspectives and the possibilities for co-operation with members of their Political Committee.

Assessment of SWP

Although the SWP's turn to industry is quite genuine, we believe that they will face difficulties for which they are completely unprepared.

These difficulties will only partly be due to their inexperience, to their lack of knowledge about the working class and the unions, or even to the heavily middle-class atmosphere of the SWP.

Fundamentally, we believe, the SWP faces a basic political problem in this turn. The SWP is, above all, a Trotskyist sect--a large sect, to be sure, but a sect nonetheless.

The SWP believes itself to be the revolutionary party in America. They are not imbeciles, of course; they know they are not now the vanguard party of the working class. But they believe they will become this by a process of straightforward growth: that is, workers (and other left groups) will join the SWP, and eventually the party will be large enough to lead a revolution.

Totally absent is the notion of a party emerging out of the struggles of the class, the idea that the SWP will be transformed in the process, etc. It is already the party. It only has to be bigger.

This, the world-view which characterizes a sect, is shared from top to bottom in the SWP.

It leads to much of the SWP's behavior and perspectives. For example, there is no sense in the SWP of loyalty ~~towards~~ towards a rank and file movement, no belief in the necessity of creating class-struggle formations.

Their single-issue approach (which can often be tactically correct) does not originate from tactical considerations. It comes from their view of themselves: we build a broad movement around a single issue, for example union democracy. Any workers who want to go beyond this--for example, who think about a link between the union reform movement and the fight for social gains--these workers ought to join the SWP.

Often, we think, this will lead the SWP to counterpose building itself to building a rank and file movement--and to us that is the kiss of death to doing either.

Thus we have the SWP's general hostility to building caucuses, with criticisms that sound ultra-left (they are out-group vehicles for opportunists, etc.) while at the same time their consistent practice has been to tail left bureaucrats uncritically. This is because,

without a conception of a working class in a process of creating a new tradition, the SWP ends up making judgements based on "program"; thus, Sadlowski's stated positions could be "more left wing" than a shop=floor movement, and that would be ~~xxxxix~~ decisive. Thus, PROCD and TDU don't look very different if you ignore the question of struggle, of process.

The "single-issue for the mass movement/full program for the party" view has consistently been accompanied by attempting to capture these mass movements organizationally. But the labor movement is not the same as the anti-war movement. It is not amorphous, it has its cadres, its traditions. And most of all it already has its organizational forms.

The questions that, in one form or another, have been the primary substance of debate for the IS for several years (the relationship of party and class, of revolutionaries to the rank and file movement, of the movement to the bureaucracy, of the advanced workers to the base, etc. etc.)--these are questions on which the SWP is inexperienced, and more important, questions on which, because of the politics, they are generally disoriented.

Just as they completely ignored the industrial working class for years (because it wasn't the right period), so now they tend to have a wholly exaggerated view of the changes in the class.

Some of these exaggerations are simply of the gee-whiz variety ("we just last week at work, one of the guys said that the whole system was rotten and everyone agreed") that comes when middle-class kids discover, to their surprise, that workers are smart and even think about the world.

But some of the exaggerated view is far more serious, being developed by the top SWP leadership. They are only a hair-breadth away from the classic Trotskyist-sectarian view; the ever-revolutionary workers are straining desperately at the leash, held back only by the betrayals of their leaders. This is the famous "crisis of leadership" theory, and the solution, of course, is the appearance of the party with its objectively correct program.

The SWP leadership does not quite go this far. But they believe that the class is open to revolutionary ideas to a degree that seems totally unreal to us. At the same time, they downplay economic struggles; they fail to tie their ideas on union democracy to the need for militancy against an employers' offensive.

Instead they expect to find a large, growing audience for The Militant in the shops (a paper we see as totally unsuitable), and they expect workers to be brought, in significant numbers, to Bakke and ERA-type events.

Most bizarre of all, to us, is the continuing electoral fetishism of the SWP, the vast time and effort expended in getting candidates on the ballot, to the direct detriment of other, on-going, work. (For example, the Detroit SWP practically ceased all other activity when the time came to collect signatures to place their candidates on the ballot)

This extreme emphasis has two explanations; first, it has served, especially in slow periods, as the common activity and focus of the organization as a whole; it has kept people busy and motivated.

Second--and more serious--it too stems from a political self-conception of being the socialist alternative in the US. Getting the

"party's" name known to the masses--millions of people--is seen as an important, immediate goal. Thus the SWP is probably the only left group that views the existence of the Socialist Labor Party (its rival on the ballot as the "socialist party") as a serious problem.

All of these ways of functioning--the counterposing of party-building to the rank and file movement, the single-issue strategy, the electoral fetishism--all will come under increasing strain as the SWP members in industry have to deal with their situations, xx are influenced by the class around them. How can you tell people about ERA and Bakke in the shops without also leading on the shop-floor struggles as they arise? The class will view such people as bull-shit artists and will stop listening to anything they say.

These pressures will intensify the more rooted their people become in industry (though many will be wiped out by the next recession). How the SWP responds is open to question.

It is possible, and we hope it happens, that the pressure of the class will be felt in the SWP as a healthy sign, an end to isolation. It is possible that the leadership will attempt to continue and deepen the turn, will try to make the SWP into a workers' organization.

As of now, we do not expect this to happen. The leadership's conception of the SWP is hard, sophisticated, and established. All their political training, their whole tradition is involved. And the leadership has tremendous political authority in the SWP--not merely "Cannonist" organizational control, but genuine political authority. As of now, we think they would be likely to resist, successfully, the class pressures, rather than deal with them. For example, they would insist that the Militant be sold in the shops rather than re-thinking its role.

In sum, we view the SWP's turn as only a first step, and we are dubious about their ability to make the political changes necessary to go further.

It is these fundamental political questions on what to do in America, not the Russian question or Cannonism that separate us--and for the foreseeable future will continue to separate us.

For the present, we hope to co-operate with them where possible. This depends on their willingness to treat us as political equals, respecting our organizational integrity. That means dealing with the elected leadership of the IS, not trying to go around it.

Any organizational or trade-union collaboration with the SWP should be discussed and cleared with the EC in advance.

