

Tb the AFT Fraction of August 30, 1974

**PARTIAL REPORT ON AFT CONVENTION AND QUESTIONS FACING OUR FRACTION
(Jan, SF)**

WHAT SHOULD A FRACTION BE FOR?

We held a national fraction on the Friday and Saturday preceding the AFT convention, and also met three times during the convention in Toronto. We meet today, and we will probably meet again this week. Despite our frequent references to state and local work as our most important work, our national fraction, this year as last, concentrated almost exclusively on our functioning at the National Convention.

This leaves undiscussed, year after year, such questions as: what should be the role of an IS'er in a small local? A small college local? If the IS teacher is the only IS'er in town, should he/she concentrate on AFT or on other IS-building? Should all IS'ers who are, or can be, AFT members, automatically assume that AFT should be their arena? (Some have already decided "no" - on what basis do we recommend people decide?) When an IS'er, through organizing, being recruited, or being part of a successful rank and file caucus, enters the leadership of their local, what politics should they advance?

(The politics and strategy of large-city large-local rank-and-file work, seen as more central to our perspective, has been discussed much more.)

We concentrate too much of our very scarce annual time together on discussing minute tactical questions and trying to predict the twists and turns of our friends. We should discuss our year-round concrete work. We should start this year and plan discussions for the future. I suggest as an order of importance:

- 1) New York City (Assert, Another View) - report and perspectives
- 2) New York State (GRC) - report and perspectives. I would like to request a written report and evaluation, perspectives etc. on NYSUT/GRC within three months. To my knowledge, no such report/perspective exists.
- 3) Isolated college teachers - we have about seven, maybe more. We haven't dealt with this and people may be wasting their time.
- 4) California (Network) - more important than #3, in my opinion, but less urgent because written reports/perspectives already exist as a starting point, and also because these comrades have the support of a group for discussion at home.
- 5) Larger-city locals of public-school teachers (Detroit, San Francisco)(Oakland) less urgent although central to our perspectives, because these people at least have the guidance of general IS labor perspectives

THE CONVENTION

The election was seen as the major event of the convention. Although everyone knew Shanker would win, it was seen as a historic moment. We see it as a turning point in the bureaucratic consolidation of power in the union, and the beginning of a long period of erosion of democracy and militancy by the leadership. The Selden voters saw themselves as making a valiant, principled stand against Shankerism. The Shanker supporters were proud and excited at the removal of the final roadblocks between

AFT fraction - 2

them and a strong, competent union.

Our posture as IS (see perspective passed ahead of time) was "Neither Selden nor Shanker - Abstain now, Build an Alternative." We concentrated the bulk of delegates' time on committee work and floor fights around resolutions embodying our politics; non-delegates mostly sold IS literature and passed out leaflets.

The caucus picture is confusing. From California, we had three delegates (and two non-delegates) and several friends from Network, who generally supported our positions. These people were in United Action Caucus, opposing the Selden endorsement, and not joining Coalition for a Democratic Union, abstaining from the campaign. The first night of convention we fought against UAC endorsement of Selden, but lost (as expected); UAC joined CDU but we did not.

From New York State we had ~~three~~ two delegates (and one non-delegate) and a larger number of friends, some delegates from upstate locals, some non-delegates from New York City. Although much work was done on other issues, the New York friends generally did not support our position on the elections. Thus our comrades joined UAC but not CLU, and abstained; our friends generally did not join UAC, but did join CDU and vote Selden. (In GRC, our comrades lost on this question; GRC joined CDU - though not UAC - and generally voted Selden.)

From other locations we had five delegates, only one of whom had a friend from his local that agreed with our positions. Our scattered people mainly functioned (at our group meetings, in UAC, on the floor) as individuals, that is, they contributed to IS functioning ~~but~~.

We had prepared well with resolutions. These covered mass action, labor party, CLUW and the UFW. There were also several important constitutional and by-law amendments on which we intervened actively, along with others largely from UAC. These include proportional representation, against a dues increase, and against unit rule. Within the limits imposed by Shanker's ability to control most committee and floor decision-making, we made a good impact and helped get a lot of issues across.

As the IS, we sold perhaps 75 Toward Teacher Power pamphlets, about 45 CLUW pamphlets, perhaps 50 copies of Workers' Power, for a total of around \$125 sold. Much of the literature (\$70 worth) was sold to Toronto contacts (non-AFT) and at the Forum. We had not anticipated how hard it would be to sell TTP; we had expected to sell 100-200 copies. This reflects the closed, hostile atmosphere of the convention.

We should seriously consider an IS literature table in the future. It costs around \$60, so we would break even if we sold about \$150 worth, quite possible if we had a table. More important, a table would be a gathering place for our friends.

AFT fraction - 3

We were so busy with the convention that only one who went to meet with the Toronto contacts was our non-teacher. I felt this was slightly misplaced emphasis, as this is a good time for building the IS. However, everyone was involved with prior commitments. Perhaps we should plan for such possibilities in the future. Luckily, several of these people were interested enough to come to the Forum.

The Forum was arranged through some Toronto Trotskyists; the speaker on the Ontario statewide strike was excellent, attendance was good (about 50-60) considering conflicts with other events, and people seemed enthusiastic. This "AFT Socialist Forum" was a good idea and should be continued. The fraction had voted preference for using the name "IS Teachers' Forum," but the softer name did no harm as it was quite obvious to all who attended who we were.

UNITED ACTION CAUCUS

The UAC leaders were very anxious to get the Selden endorsement through smoothly. At the Sunday meeting they were vicious, literally trying to prevent anyone speaking against. We managed to get two speakers. After Steve spoke, a UAC leader delivered a personal attack on him - too angry to be aware of the effect this could have on the audience. The whole plan of a one-hour UAC meeting on such an important decision was ludicrous.

Once the UAC was safely in the CLU, they could be nicer at the subsequent meetings. We raised some politics; resolutions to arrange floor-fights around, platform points for the election program, etc. They generally have no objection to strengthening their "1936-Soviet-Constitution" type paper program.

The only real opening for a fight would have been to try to take leadership. If we are staying in UAC, this would have made sense. We did nothing of the sort. The last meeting, Thursday night, we sat there while elections to the steering committee were held - essentially playing no role at all, seldom even voting. This was probably the low point of our functioning. The people from Washington DC, especially Grant, followed the logic of being in UAC: they supported Selden but mainly publicized the UAC program, they ran for positions on the steering committee, and it appears they will carry the logic a step further and give up their oppositional stance in their local, since their president, Simons, is a UAC leader.

Since we cannot stomach the idea of running for leadership, and since the people we hoped to relate to are crumbling into the leadership, and since we meet nobody new through UAC anymore, we should get out of UAC. The Selden campaign is a low spot - from here they can only get worse.

We could still cooperate with UAC members, and others, without being voice-dues-and-vote members of UAC. Most of the positive things we accomplished did not depend on being in UAC.

What would we do at conventions if we left UAC?

- 1) Hold daily group meetings of our friends, as we did. We did not find these people in UAC this year, nor will we next year. Our most useful and valuable friends, those with whom we intervene at conventions, will mainly be those we brought from home or from state conventions. Examination of the signatures on our "Abstain" leaflet shows that most of the non-IS'ers were Network people or others from state and local work.
- 2) Act as the IS; sell WP, sell literature, hold a Socialist Forum, perhaps have a literature table. Any loose radicals will find us, especially in years to come as the IS will be growing and getting better known.
- 3) Intervene in committees and on the floor, as we did, with friends.
- 4) Issue leaflets signed with names of delegates who agree with us, as we did. These attract people to us.
- 5) Send a couple of observers to the various caucus meetings to talk to independent-minded types who may drift in, and to find out what ~~some~~ strategy various groups are planning so we can cooperate where appropriate.
- 6) In the long run, when we have more members and friends, start our own rank and file grouping. Even now we are preparing for that by our various activities. Before starting a new caucus, we do not have to remain in UAC up to the last minute.

FRACTION FUNCTIONING

In some ways we did well, as outlined above. Another good area was in arranging WP articles for the convention issue, and getting a report into the post-convention issue.

As I see it, these were two main problems.

1) Lack of communication within the fraction - it was often hard to keep track of details. We need a definite floor leader and a definite non-floor leader. There was too much wrangling at meetings (both group and fraction) about details that a floor or nonfloor leader should decide, such as parliamentary strategy, who distributes what when, etc. There are factual omissions in this report, partly because no one IS'er could get the whole picture of our activities.

2) Lack of a clear political thrust - several of us sort of lost track of what we were trying to accomplish, reducing our effectiveness. For example, I had trouble being any use in group meetings or UAC meetings because I didn't understand the subsidiary details of our line. Since we were in UAC, I felt we should be running for office; my instincts were wrong because I hadn't internalized the position properly. I feel that's because it was not a clear-cut position.

AFT fraction - 5

3) A minor point - the Grassroots mimeo problem. If Grassroots is going to insist on the right to decide what does and doesn't get run off on their equipment, we need to know this ahead of time. (This only occurred with one leaflet this time, but we had not known in advance that it was a problem.)

4) Another minor point - although of course non-delegates are primarily responsible for leafletting and literature, delegates will have to be willing to join in leafletting ~~xxx~~ efforts for five or ten minutes as sessions break up. Too many people flood past too fast for three or four to handle it.

Also, non-delegates should be rotated so each can observe at least one floor session to get the flavor of ~~frx~~ the convention.

DID OUR PERSPECTIVE WORK?

We had expected to work with others, primarily the group from Washington and Grassroots, despite our differences on Selden. Our three GRC people certainly worked with GRC, but this is based on year-round work. GRC needs our people as much as we need them.

The Washington people are not working with us on most issues, as I saw it, except in the sense that our concerns overlapped with UAC's. (Randy is an exception.) Their politics are turning toward the bureaucracy.

In that sense, the plans didn't work. Staying in UAC while disagreeing with its major effort did not pave a road for us to its rank and file.

WHAT NEXT?

It is absolutely vital that we communicate with our friends during the year. Our friends expect us to initiate communications. We must choose somebody who actually will be a clearing-house. Multiple copies of newsletters we are involved in should be sent to someone who will send them out to everyone, comrades and friends. Any gossip/information any of us get about politics on the national level should also be shared with friends.

As next summer approaches, we should check around and find out who is coming to convention; share plans around resolutions; and make hotel reservations in a bloc.

What IS'er has time to do this? Perhaps one of our isolated college teachers? We also need a fraction communications center. Again, if we agree that isolated college AFT work is relatively less important than other work, perhaps one of these people could take this on,

Cliff on Shuckman abstention - 8,000 votes
 grassroots - 70-100 members -

What are critical differences

- 1 - B.C. not an analysis of ~~mode~~ ^{relations} of production, but describing structure of the globe - some to term totalitarianism -
 - anti-democratic - like notion of open society -
 bourgeois + anti-communist - and anti-working class
- 2 - role of Stalinist parties - How we see Oct - Browder
 for the sake of
- 3 - development of capitalism + substitutes for workers control -

1 - UAC - various candidates - yes

2 - UAC - opposition caucus? -

3 - Intensified ~~effort~~ ^{est} support for other groups -

4 - Isolated from other lefts? -
 being too sectarian oppositionists -
 would support Selten have given credibility -

ind-radical + insurgency inside of UAC -

A bunch of radicals -
long what?