

SPECIAL BULLETIN NUMBER ONE

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Note on British I.S. Report.

The document that follows this is a report by Barbara and Cal on Britain and the ISGB. It is essentially their impressions on a visit they made there recently and although not everyone would agree on all the judgements they make on the basis of some of these impressions, it is certainly not the sort of document to which there should be a reply.

However not all the points which are claimed to be "facts" in this report are true and one paragraph of this report must be forcefully corrected. In the last full paragraph on page three, there are a series of quotes purporting to be taken from the national chairman and national secretary and said to represent "charges raised" against the ISGB. These quotes are nothing short of a fabrication. For comrades should understand that if it was our view that the ISGB was "centrist" (that is not revolutionary) we would not be making the strenuous efforts we have already and will continue to make to maintain fraternal relations with the British comrades.

This particular paragraph can best be described as mischevious and at worst is a conscious attempt to harm our valuable relations with the ISGB. We hope that this will be the last occasion in this factional struggle when such tactics are used by either side.

Executive Committee.

REPORT ON BRITAIN AND THE ISGB

Cal W., Barbara W. 13 November, 1976.

The next months will be very important for the ISGB, and important for our international tendency as well. The ISGB has decided to begin the process of forming the Socialist Workers Party and if successful, the IS can become the first genuine revolutionary party in a generation.

The background to the decision is this:

The past two years have been very difficult ones for the British working class, and consequently for the revolutionary left. When the labor government came to power in 1974, the IS expected there would be a 'honeymoon period,' that is a period in which trade union leaders and rank and file activists would want "to give Labor a chance." Nevertheless, the IS was certain that "the presence of the labor government will aid the revolutionary left in the long run." In the short term, they predicted that revolutionaries would have to be prepared to be "isolated within the movement." (ISJ #74)

The problem was that the 'honeymoon period' lasted far longer than the left, including the ISGB expected.. In fact, it lasted nearly two full years. The British crisis, inherited from the Tories, persisted and deepened. Support for Labor lingered, however, and the government was successful with its "social contract," its efforts to hold back wages, reduce the level of industrial conflict, etc. One statistic shows this more clearly than anything else: strikes in Britain were taking place this past summer at a lower rate than at any time in the past 25 years.

The 'isolation' of the left, therefore, lasted longer and did far more damage than the IS had expected. There was a steady shift to the right in trade union politics, led by the Labor Party and the leadership of the TUC. The Communist Party followed closely behind the trade union leaders, and the revolutionary left was largely dragged along in the wake. Today, for example, most of the Trotskyist left is to be found inside the Labor Party.

The left declined. The Workers Revolutionary Party (formerly SWP and in this country the Workers League), has been reduced to a tiny sect. The International Marxist Group, (IMG 4th International) which had 900 members in 1974, has fewer than 300 --- and is in the Labor Party. The crisis within the CP has become increasingly acute. Regularly leading members publically resign (usually, but not always to the right) including Jimmy Reid, the well known leader of the Clydeside shipyard occupations. The circulation of the Morning Star has fallen so fast that there are now proposals inside the CP to retreat to a weekly newspaper.

The IS attempted to stand firm against this rightward drift - its policy was "steer left" despite the fact this policy would, for a while, increase the isolation of its members in the class. There was a cost - several hundred members were lost, including several former national leaders. Rightist tendencies developed in the IS, most notably in Birmingham, in the relations there between the IS engineers and the 'Broad Left' (CP and left Labor). A group was expelled.

In this period, the factory branches in particular suffered. Struggle on the shop floor, the precondition of the factory branch, all but dried up. Given the objective conditions, there was very little that revolutionaries could do to reverse the situation, especially a small organization of 2500 or so members. Nevertheless, industrial activity was maintained as best as it could be, as a glance at Socialist Worker in the period easily shows.

Fortunately, the 'honeymoon' period is now finished. And, despite the past two years setbacks, the IS was able to maintain its organization, its politics and so on. Now it stands virtually alone on the revolutionary left, twice the size of the rest put together. It is also in a position to take advantage of the new Labor crisis - in particular its inability to fight employment, its unwillingness to resist the racist movement and its across the board attacks on the working class.

In the past year, the IS has launched several very important campaigns. In the Right to Work campaign, it proved that it alone was prepared to act on unemployment, even when this meant going full steam against the stream. In addition, it alone was willing to stand up to the racists, and the growing fascist movement. It has a policy of physically driving the fascists from the streets, attempting to stop racist demonstrations, and of denying the fascists 'free speech.'

In these campaigns the IS has found itself more and more acting like a party, that is, taking initiatives and spending the greatest part of its energies in actions. At the same time, more and more, it is seen by others as a party. The CP must now regularly denounce the IS in its paper, something that never happened in 1973, even when the IS was bigger. The fact is, that unlike 1973, the IS, while still numerically smaller, is now clearly in the same league as the CP - unfortunately however in the fourth division, as Cliff says.

The Labor Party has even been forced to take notice. Former Prime Minister Harold Wilson denounced the IS recently on national television. He told David Frost that "there was no need to worry about the geriatrics in the Communist Party, it was the IS you had to worry about."

So the decision to move toward the Socialist Workers Party and the decision to run candidates in the recent bi-elections was taken in this context - the crisis in the Labor government, the initiatives of the IS, and the fact that it openly competes with the CP.

The IS stood candidates in Walsall (near Birmingham) and Newcastle,

two districts marked by scandals in the Labor Party, and where the National Front had announced its intention to run. In Walsall, where the IS ran Jimmy McCallum, an unemployed engineer from Glasgow, they received 574 votes (as compared to the 465 for the Communist Party in the last general election). In Newcastle, the IS got only 184, although this was 2% of the vote, and a higher number than the National Front.

The politics of the campaign were these: 1) Fight for the Right to Work - Stop the Cuts 2) Fight Racism - no to immigration controls 3) Free abortion and 4) Build the Socialist Alternative. Thirty new members were recruited in each city, and the IS received a great deal of national publicity. Now, with Labor having been beaten in two bi-elections, the chance of a general election increases, and in that event there is the possibility that the IS will run 60 to 70 "Socialist Worker" candidates, thereby qualifying for national TV time.

The IS is continuing its Right to Work campaign and on November 6th in Manchester it held a national rank and file conference, designed to carry on and build the fight against unemployment in the trade union movement. Some 770 delegates attended, far more than expected, delegated by more than 400 trade union bodies.

There are, of course, problems ahead. Still the prospects seem very good. Clearly the months ahead will mark the beginning of a new upsurge in the movement, and the IS is in the best position to take advantage. It is not unrealistic to think, given the present rate of growth (more than 100 new members a month) that the IS will overtake the CP in the next three years or so. The IS is already more active, takes more initiatives. In fighting racism the CP uses the slogan "one Race, the Human Race," and will not fight the fascists in the streets. The IS is known in the Black and Asian communities. It is the only socialist organization to take up the defence of the Blacks charged in the Notting Hill riots - a police attack on a London Black community festival.

If the ISGB can bypass the CP, it will be a very important development, for it will be the first time in an industrial nation, that a revolutionary organization has passed the CP. In Britain, of course, the CP is very small compared with Italy or France. Still, this would leave an open road before the IS, in a period of very severe crisis.

Obviously, we were very impressed with the situation in the ISGB - with the work of the group, its paper, its new members. We visited half a dozen branches 'campaigned' in Walsall, and took part in an anti-fascist demonstration. We also made it a point to investigate the charges raised by ISUS EC members (GW & JG) that the ISGB was in a "political crisis," specifically that it 1) "had abandoned factory and industrial agitation" 2) "was developing a theory of white collar vanguardism" and 3) "was drifting towards centrism." We believe these charges were, and are totally false. We have seen it for ourselves. It is not, however, necessary to visit Britain to know this. Socialist Worker is more than a sufficient refutation

There is no question that there have been difficulties in the past, and

that the trade union work suffered. Nevertheless, the ISGB still has factory branches; it still has rank and file newspapers, including the revived Collier; and it now has more members in the engineering industry than ever before, more members in the Transport and General Workers Union. Recent recruitment has been more than 50% blue collar, although the ISGB still is very active in the white collar unions. (on November 17th, there will be the first significant trade union demonstration against the Labor government and the cuts, organized by the public employee unions.).

Finally, the composition of the IS is approximately as follows: 1100 manual (blue collar) workers; 1300 white collar workers; 300 unemployed (of which 250 are manual worker unemployed); 300 students. There are 70 - 80 Black members, with many more new recruits. There is a functioning Black caucus and a full time Black organizer. The ISGB puts out a Black newspaper, Flame; and Chingari, an Asian newspaper which is put out in four languages. (During the by-election campaigns, Socialist Workers Party literature was put out in four languages as well.) The proportion of women in the ISGB is low, only 22%. The women are active in the anti-abortion movement, and important strike activities such as the Trico strike; Women's Voice, is the IS women's newspaper. The IS is also taking steps to set up a youth movement, the Socialist Workers Youth Movement, and has put out a youth paper Fight

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE ISGB

This document was presented to the Central Committee as a discussion document; it is published here as many of the points will be of interest to members.

The improvement of our international work over the last year has brought to light a number of problems that now need to be dealt with. This document attempts to deal with them.

I take for granted the perspectives drawn up last December and the ones presented to conference--ie that we are faced, for a number of years, with a situation in which formations that are not fully Marxist dominate the revolutionary left in most countries where the struggle is most developed (eg the Maoist or semi-Maoist formations dominate in Argentina, Chile, compete with the Maoists in Portugal.)

We have to find ways of collaborating with these formations, while at the same time subjecting their positions to a relentless criticism in front of both their leaders and members. Our failure to do this, as much as we are able, can only contribute to creating conditions for massive defeats for the class in these countries at some point in the future.

So far, to be honest, most of our international work has been chiefly reconnaissance activity--finding out exactly what weird ideas significant groups in other countries have etc. eg for years we discussed with LO and AO without finding out what they were really like. INdeed it is only over the last 18 months that we have learnt anything appreciable about these organisations. The same was true of the PRP, only the time span was shorter--also with Revolution! etc.

In only a few countries, chiefly in the English speaking world, have we moved from "exploration" to "colonisation".

Finally, only over the last year have we moved to the point of engaging in debate the large organisations with different politics from us that exist in other countries (notably PRP, AO).

The last year shows us that it is much more difficult than we initially thought to influence organisations that have established traditions and leaderships. Leaderships that were friendly to us when we smiled and said nothing get upset when we start to speak our mind (eg the frostiness from AO, the fact that Revolution! are somehow never in when our comrades call, the near-hostility from PRP.).

In the very important case of Portugal we have found ourselves in an even worse situation than Trotsky found himself with the POUM leadership in the 1930s at least they bothered to read and reply to his criticisms of POUM policy.

The danger is that the problems have arisen over the last year will lead to a drop off in enthusiasm for our international work.

This is a danger (a) because there are going to be many more eruptions on a similar scale to Chile and Portugal (eg Rhodesia, South Africa, Spain, possibly Italy, possibly, in 3-4 years at some point Brazil, Iran, etc).

(b) because even short of these major eruptions, very important crises can confront the revolutionary left in particular countries in which our politics should be able to intervene--eg the crisis of the Italian revolutionary left since the election, the turmoil among the revolutionary left in Spain over the nature of the current 'liberalisation', the question of trade union unity etc, the confusion in France faced with a period of downturn etc.

One particular form that weariness with attempts at political intervention internationally takes, is what I will call 'rank and fileism at the international level' the belief that our job at the moment is to build rank and file links between workers internationally, especially within the multinationals.

This is to substitute a trade unionist approach for the political intervention that alone can help build the revolutionary parties that are needed; what is more, it is a utopian project given the balance of forces vis-a-vis the revolutionary left in all countries at the moment. eg Our comrades in British Leyland can not even establish viable links between Birmingham and Oxford, let alone between Birmingham and Milan.

Any talk of solidarity within international combines is at the present time 99 per cent propaganda eg we make propaganda about conditions in Spanish Massey Ferguson factories in Coventry; we cannot build on going organisational structures of any real value to either Spanish or Coventry workers.

To think otherwise is to mislead workers. eg in Spain about our own ability to aid their struggles, and is a misdirection of resources that should be directed to attempts at political intervention in other countries; we are a million miles from being the Comintern and should not even dream of being the RILU as well.

Our main tasks must be to sharpen our intervention in the political and theoretical debates inside the big organisations in other countries, and to encourage the development of groups that accept our politics and orientation (without however, ever mistakenly, tending to proclaim them as 'the party' in that country).

To that extent our perspective is to build an international tendency. That does not mean that such a tendency exists now, but that this is the task we set ourselves.

This tendency will only be built by debate and polemic with the other international tendencies (AO, Rouge, PRP etc) and by a continuing discussion on the success or otherwise of those groups that share our own theoretical positions.

The key thing here is the written word, the propagation of our ideas, polemics over developments within other groups internationally etc. eg Cliff's pamphlet and articles over Portugal have been important on communicating with revolutionaries in other countries that

our 'line' on that country: the IS debate with AO did, whatever its impact on our own members (usually unread), did make clear to members of a number of other groups abroad how we differed from AO on global issues.

But these polemics cannot just be occasional and accidental things, forgotten the moment the organisation as a whole loses interest in big international issues.

Eg as well as the things mentioned, we should have been polemicising (and publishing in order to polemicise) over the question of the Democratic Proletaria programme in Italy over the question of 'democratic demands' and the trade union question in Spain.

In the past it has been argued that the place for articles on these questions is IS Journal or the internal bulletin.

But the IS Journal is aimed mainly at workers in this country, naturally the editor is loath to put in too much material that does not deal with problems raised by workers here (hence the lack of enthusiasm by the members for the IS-AO debate issue); no doubt there would be the same lack of enthusiasm if the journal contained several different contributions on the election programme of the Italian left even though that question is important internationally (eg in Spain as well as Italy). The articles we are concerned with need to appear, but IS Journal is often not the place for them.

What I believe we probably need now is a modest, low print run, cheaply produced international discussion bulletin. This should be controlled and edited by us, but we should print as well as our own material, articles from the press of other groups ideally complete with our own comments on these articles, replies, etc as well as resumes of conferences to which we send delegates, etc.

It should aim to present a picture of the development of the left internationally as seen from our perspective.

The aim would not be a mass circulation journal competing as a 'super-theoretical' journal with ISJ, but a very modest effort designed to communicate with those individuals internationally who are interested in our ideas. Around such a bulletin an international tendency can start to coalesce.

b) the second key thing we have to step up is the publication of our material in other languages ideally through legal publishers operating in those countries. Here we are still very slow. In Germany, France, Italy, Spain or Portugal you will find all the trendy third worldish Maoist or Mandelista rubbish under the sun on sale in every town of any size, but you have to look with a microscope to find the odd publication with vaguely our ideas.

c) The foreign language journals have played a role in getting at least some of our ideas into print. We need to maintain the production of foreign language journals (at low cost and in short runs) until we have proven other means of getting our ideas across in languages other than English, but at the same time we have to

recognise that articles in books published locally or in periodicals so published, are better than haphazard distribution of journals printed in Britain.

d) Finally there is no substitute in many cases to personal correspondence. If our task today is in some ways closer to the First International than to the Third, it is worth remembering that much of Marx's work for the International consisted in such correspondence.

For us, it cannot be a low priority job, to be sacrificed to the needs of the moment, but must have high priority on a regular basis. International 'contact work' requires even more patience and conscientiousness than does the normal local variety.

None of these tasks can be done unless they are seen as the political priority of the international department. To do half of them adequately would take most of any full time's time.

Crudely, they will not be done if the international department is meant to handle everything from immigrant work to making flags for demonstrations. Nor will they be done if other departments insist on raiding the international department for resources on the grounds that they are 'more urgent.'

Our perspective for international work involves a fair time span for it to begin to show tangible successes. But it will never show these successes unless we put the resources in now.

This applies to financial resources as much as any other. Since the international fund has been run down because money has been raised for other purposes this means the international department must be allocated a regular budget.

Central Committee
September 1976

We reprint this British document with some points emphasised, but with little comment, to aid our members in understanding the official position of the ISGB towards its international work. It is instructive to note that despite the fact that there is no mention of the USA, the IS Central Committee has committed one of its leading members to be here for one month during the discussion period around the positions of the minority fraction.

GW

To the National Committee
ISUS

7 October 1976

Dear Comrades

Your decision to write a 9 page 'reply' to a short letter to our Canadian comrades containing 'a couple of thoughts' about their decision to reject 'industrialization' is a measure of the importance you give the argument. However, while the speed with which you leap to your own defense does our argument credit, it was not aimed at you.

Industrialization in Canada and Australia

As you are aware, we have been arguing against our comrades in these countries adopting your approach to rooting revolutionaries in the working class. To summarise briefly:

- 1 Over the last ten years both countries have experienced a high level of strikes against Government actions by significant sections of the class.
- 2 Both countries have right-wing social democratic (Labour Party type) parties with overwhelming working class support, and small but industrially based Communist Parties.
- 3 A significant expansion of trade union organization has occurred in both countries over the past ten years, primarily among white collar and public sector workers, a high proportion of whom are women.
- 4 Class consciousness has been maintained at a high level over the years, reinforced by an educational system that--on British lines--deprives the vast majority of workers from any access to education over the ages of 16 or 18. 'Higher' education is therefore seen by most manual workers as equivalent to 'privilege'.
- 5 Building an organization of revolutionaries is not a mechanical process: there are no fixed recipes that can be imposed from one situation to another, only a few modest guidelines.
- 6 In a non-revolutionary situation, the revolutionary group has two main tasks: 1) To sustain and develop the political commitment of a (hopefully) increasing number of individuals who operate on a wide range of levels; 2) To continually shape that commitment towards whatever movement of the class are taking place.
- 7 The greatest danger the revolutionary group faces is of substitutionism: pushing expectations ahead of possibilities, wanting the class to deliver and when it doesn't, imagining that the group has degenerated into a sect that increasingly can only talk to itself because no one else believes it.
- 8 Finally, we argue that your attempts to persuade our comrades in Canada and Australia to imitate your industrialization policy are irresponsible;
 - a Because the US experience is largely unlike that of points 1 to 4 above;
 - b Because while your organization is undoubtedly the best in the US, we are not convinced that any group with a mere 300 members and weekly sales of just 3,000 papers (and all that these figures imply for penetration into the working class) is justified in arguing from the 'success of its own experience'. Indeed with an organization ten times your size, we are still correctly reticent about laying down the line to comrades 50 miles away, let alone 5,000. And if we are not the centre of a Comintern or anything remotely like it, then we are more than certain that you are not.

Our main concern is raising the argument concerning industrialization has not been, therefore, to pour cold water on what you have accomplished over the past five years. We have rather been concerned to question your advice to others. Blanket advice that you repeat in your document without one

single reference to the level or form of class struggles in the countries to which it is directed. Advice that you repeat without answering a single one of the specific points made in the Canadian comrades' "Industrial Policy Evaluation" document, on which our letter was a brief comment.

Your defense of Industrialization

Since you have, however, presented your conclusions in terms of detailed defense of your own record, we will take the opportunity to make a few observations.

Firstly, we believe it is a profound mistake to dismiss white collar and public sector workers as "those social layers whose life is closest to that of petit bourgeois intellectuals". Workers in the 'Government' section of industry in the United States have consistently come out near the top of the strike league in the 1970's. This is a direct reflection of an international pattern of 'proletarianization' of the growing number of white collar and public sector workers. Instead of dismissing this movement out of hand, we believe revolutionaries should be paying close attention to it. Hospital and municipal workers in particular, because of the significant proportion of black and women workers among them, have, in our opinion, an important part to play in developing revolutionary roots in the working class. And since in both the US and Britain, the public sector is being squeezed tight during the course of the present recession, it is all the more important that our revolutionary politics are made available.

Secondly, we believe the assumption behind the document that your non industrialized members and branches are 'backward', or at the least, second-class, is highly dangerous. Writing off half your membership because of what they are, however much you pretend to the contrary, leads to de-politicization of the entire membership. You can argue politically with members about what they say and do, but you can only frustrate potentially good comrades by dismissing them for their weakness in not working in a 'priority' industry. In the twenty-five years of our existence we have learnt that you have to count members in the hundreds and thousands before the national leadership can begin to forget that every individual revolutionary, warts and all, is a 'priority'. And even then a local branch or district which counts its members between 2 and 200 must still seek to maintain that feeling of concern.

We also reject 'prioritization'. Firstly because what it really means is 'de-prioritizing' 95% of the working class, and its struggles. We believe this encourages a passive response to significant movements of the class from which small-scale recruitment could otherwise have been made. In the United States, however, such a policy is even more dangerous than in Britain. For in Britain there are usually negotiations on pay and conditions at least once a year. But in the United States, with much longer contracts, there can be a three year interval between upsurges of economic militancy, and putting our eggs all in one basket on such a timescale has attached a very high risk of demoralization.

The concept is also, as presented in the document, highly mechanical. You write, "Our perspective of industrializing members in specific, limited areas is part of our strategic conception of building a rank and file movement in the trade unions, 'class struggle unionism'." Aside from the general criticism that we touched on in our last letter (namely that building a revolutionary organization requires flair, art and modesty, not a technical manual in the worst degenerated "Trotskyist" tradition), are you seriously

suggesting that a group of 300 members can sit down and plot the course of American history? Not just in general ('rising struggle against the bureaucracy' etc) but also in sufficient detail to point to 3 or 4 specific industries and unions where you believe you can have a strategic impact?

All revolutionary groups have to decide priorities. IS branches in Britain decide to work around one factory and not around another. But the criteria is always based in the here and now: do we have any members, contacts etc? How close are the comrades available to sell papers, etc? Do we have local members in the same union? The criteria are always oriented towards immediate growth - of our membership, paper sales and periphery. The notion of moving cardboard cut-outs, non-existent class forces, across the stage of history is closer to toy Bolshevism and discredited programmatic sects than it is to our joint tradition.

To repeat, these observations are not intended as a judgement on the progress you've made over the past five years. We are not concerned with the past and justifications of one course of action or another. What we are concerned about is the future, Both of the Canadian and Australian comrades and of yourselves.

In this last context, your own future, we were very worried indeed by your EC document, Campaign to build a political periphery. At a certain level it concedes some of the problems we touched on in our last letter - 'the extremely small number of political supporters we can count on', what you describe as the 'weaknesses' of your perspective, basically its lack of politics and the resulting 'depoliticization of the organization'. But having taken these as your starting point your approach them with the strategy of the Grand Old Duke of York. Both in tone and in timescale you risk arriving exactly back where you started. And whereas the Old Duke had no losses, the consequences of your exercise are bound to lead to demoralization and a strengthening of the conservative element within ISUS.

Look at the tone of your document. Throughout the whole thing you repeatedly set yourselves one target! 'building a revolutionary party'. Only now, are we in ISGB, for the very first time, arguing that party-building/ 'building a revolutionary party' is a strategic target. Why? Because it is only now, with a proven organization, an established working class cadre, and a political situation that is highly favorable to the launching of a party, that it becomes a part of a strategy that we can hope to implement. Your organization with ten times fewer members than ours in a continent with four times the population of Britain, can surely not seriously pose 'party building' as an immediate target! But that is certainly the style and tone of your document. And such deliberate confusion of a modest perspective for recruiting to ISUS with dressed-up notion of 'party building' can only result in raising expectations that will sooner or later be dashed.

The timescale you set yourselves in the document is, however, even more incomprehensible to us. It suggests that you just simply do not understand that in a non-revolutionary situation the process of building up a tiny group of revolutionaries and its periphery is counted in years rather than in months.

In ISGB we have always recognised the importance of our periphery. Three years hard agitation amongst students from 1965-1968 created the periphery that was open to be recruited in 1968. Between two and three years hard work oriented on manual workers from 1970 to 1972/3 created the periphery that we recruited in our last big recruitment drive. And the two years hard slog we

have just emerged from, together with the shift in the national political situation, and our Right to Work and Anti Racism campaigns, have established the periphery that we are now recruiting. A periphery that involved between 10,000 and 15,000 workers in donating money to our last legal Defense appeal that involved 100,000 workers in contributing to the Right to Work Campaign, and involved tens of thousands of black workers in our Anti Racism Campaign. Our whole experience suggests that the job of building a periphery, of winning credibility and acceptance for your political ideas among layers of workers who agree with you but aren't yet ready to join, is a job taking years not months. Nor, as you ludicrously suggest, just two months (from 'September 19 to November 19!').

We realize why you present a short term 'periphery campaign' in this way. To do otherwise would cut right across your prioritization policy. A real political periphery doesn't work where you decide it should; it is built up over years in a whole number of different workplace situations. A real periphery doesn't understand that it should be employed in Teamsters and not in rubber, or that it's a second-class periphery because it is a student or a teacher. A real periphery presentd a tiny revolutionary group with continuing real problems about integration and workplace activity that don't fit neatly into some pre-determined strategy.

In your case the logic of setting a two months timetable to the 'periphery' campaign indicates your continued adherence to a schematic, mechanical strategy that, we fear, will not sustain your membership during the coming period.

We hope that the small signs that you are grappling towards the problems caused by this industrialization-prioritization-party-building strategy will become signs of your moving in the right direction. What counts in building a tiny revolutionary group is your political relationship to the individuals around you, not false optimism and pretended industrial muscle. We sincerely hope that you follow the logic of your recognition of this truth and re-examine the rest of your strategy along the lines referred to in this and our last letter.

Yours fraternally

Central Committee
ISGB

ONCE AGAIN ON OUR STRATEGY AND THE BRITISH CRITICISMS

Dear Comrades:

December 1st.

Our initial reaction to your reply, dated 10/7, was that we should simply print it in our bulletin board and send it out to our membership with only a brief comment. However, since first seeing your letter, the situation has escalated - largely at your initiative. CW and BW have recently returned from Britain only to begin organizing in the membership on a perspective drawn from and implied in your criticisms. Matters became even clearer, when we received still another letter informing us that you planned to send a member of your central committee, Steve Jeffries, to the U.S. in January. While we do not believe for a moment that either the American comrades who hold your views or Steve will succeed in changing the ISUS strategy for establishing the basis of a workers organization, we do believe that the issues must be clarified. Although we feel that most of your criticisms were answered in our reply to your first letter, we shall answer the specifics of your second letter and then comment on what we believe the consequences of your criticisms and implied perspective would be for the ISUS.

First, the question of white collar and public sector workers. You observe that public employees are high in "the strike league", have A HIGH PROPORTION OF WOMEN AND BLACK WORKERS, and are feeling the squeeze of the present crisis. All of these things are true, but too superficial to base a perspective on. As we pointed out in our last reply, those public employees who are organized are poorly organized. Except for the blue collar sections of public employment, the unions representing them are weak. The American left, ourselves included, have a good deal of experience in these unions. A variety of approaches have been made to public and service sector workers - from inside and outside the work place and the unions. None of these have produced significant gains for any left group. Nor has any of this activity over the past several years helped strengthened those unions, created a visible opposition in those unions, or in any visible way prepared public employees to fight the current squeeze. Indeed, the most remarkable thing about the squeeze on public workers, aside from its intensity, is the lack of an organized response. In New York, the hardest squeezed and best organized public workers in the U.S. have surrendered without a fight. The leader of the strongest Teachers union in the country, the United Federation of Teachers in N.Y., recently said that they might as well give up collective bargaining altogether since they couldn't win anything anyway. The air of defeat among N.Y. public workers is pea soup thick.

This, of course doesn't mean there has been no motion at all, there won't be more. There is motion among public workers. Indeed, there is motion among virtually every section of the working class. And we can be certain that as the crisis continues to unfold in various forms there will be even more motion. And that brings us to one of your most serious differences with us: the question of priorities. The fact, that a few hundred revolutionaries are faced with the job of building - over time - a revolutionary party in a country the size of the U.S. means, among other things, that you cannot possibly respond to every bit of visible motion in the working class. Leaving aside the question of industrialization for the moment, it is apparent to any one who has attempted to relate to working class struggles in the U.S. that the very size of the class precludes intervening in every important struggle - at least until you have an organization with many thousands of members. This is true whether you propose to intervene from the inside, the outside or both - as we usually do. Indeed, not only would it be impossible to chase the many different actions and signs of motion, but the scale of things here is such, that often a single struggle requires concentration of resources.

For example, the contract struggle of workers in the freight section of the trucking industry covered about 450,000 workers. In order to work around and intervene in this struggle we have to concentrate the major part of the resources of the entire IS. The actual number of people who worked directly inside that struggle was quite small. The number of members who did various kinds of work around or outside the Teamsters contract fight was much larger and was important in achieving the results we did. (Of course, we could not have done any of that "outside" work if we have not had workers in the industry).

Suppose we had had no priorities, but had decided to work around that Teamsters contract fight simply because we could see it was important. The fact is, we would have had to have put as much or more resources into it to get anywhere. The fact is, we could have been tied up in that to the extent that we would not have been able to simultaneously intervene in the miners strike or other events of that significance.

The simple facts of life for a revolutionary organization that numbers its members in the hundreds is that it never could follow your advise and simply respond to whatever comes up. Unless the response was so superficial as to be useless. If we do not set priorities they would be set for us - at random. Any group in the U.S. that fails to have conscious priorities will fall into unconscious ones. We believe, in fact, that even yourselves, from your own description of your history have had both conscious and unconscious priorities; for example, teachers (unconscious) and engineers (conscious).

Your actual objection, then is not really to priorities, but to the particular one's we have chosen. You say that in being so bold as to choose 3 or 4 priority industries we are second guessing history, locking ourselves into the three year contract pattern, and moving non-existent class forces across the stage of history. All of this is nonsense. For the most part, our priorities were chosen, first and foremost, on the most basic strategic notion of Marxist method: that it is the industrial proletariat that will be the core of the revolutionary working class. We do not deny at all that the public and service sectors are being proletarianized. But we have never let this fact blind us that the central role of the industrial proletariat to the development of a working class movement here in the U.S. Many "new left" groups made just the choice you recommend. The couple that still even exist have little to show for it.

Within the strategic notion of the centrality of the industrial working class we generally looked to the largest industrial unions. These are the unions which carry the best traditions of working class struggle - regardless of the character of their present leadership. These are the sectors in which the working class has the greatest self-confidence and the greatest ability to win gains and resist attacks. There was no need to outguess history or fabricate events for us to understand what are the important sections of the American working class.

You are equally mistaken about the notion that we are locked into three year contract periods or that our resources are tied up between contracts when they could be jumping around after other sections of the class. First of all, neither industrialization nor the priorities we chose were based on the idea that it was through contract fights that we would sink our roots, or that wages was the issue on which we would organize workers. The contract fights, of course, offer us an opportunity to act on a national scale which is not usually there. But, our work is not dependent on those contract fights. The majority of our work has been and will continue to be at the

local union and shop floor level for some time. Of course, the strength of the union bureaucracies meant we always saw the need for national opposition groups, but we did not believe these could replace or even come about without considerable motion at the local level. We do not have any mechanical formulas about which must come first or the complicated relationship between the two. In any case, in terms of participating in and leading struggles, building a political periphery, and recruiting workers, our perspective is as much based on our ongoing local work as on contract fights or national formations.

The factional critics of our prioritization of work have made much about the relative lack of success of the Coalition for a Good Contract in the auto industry. Looking at the failure of CGC to produce a movement or recruit for the IS they say our auto work is a sham and failure. Naturally, the failure of CGC to take off like TDC was a disappointment, but it was not the signal that our auto work had collapsed. Our work in the auto industry has always been based primarily on our shop floor and local union work. Like all work in the working class, this work has its ups and downs. Some local situations are going well, others are not. The idea that CGC set us back, or that our work is worse off today than in the past is false. Our network of contacts and collaborators is larger and our ability to hold political events, such as meetings around South Africa, is greater than before.

Strangely enough, the new minority faction also sees things like South Africa meetings as counterposed to our economic and trade union work. What they refuse to understand is that our ability to bring people to political events of various sorts is a result of the roots we have established and the many past struggles we have gone through. These short sighted critics look at the work in some of the plants and say, this or that group has fallen apart, things are a disaster, this or that campaign produced no great results, etc. Then when the comrades in those plants are able to bring their fellow workers to an IS meeting, they are astounded, or they say that we should not waste time on local union work but just bring people to meetings on South Africa. They fail to understand the relationship between the two kinds of work.

We have always understood that actions, struggles and organizations in the plants and unions will come and go. But our ability to play a consistent role in the various struggles, to fight at the side of our fellow workers, to show them we are not just playing at revolution, these products of prioritization are what allow us to build a real political periphery in the U.S.

We have said before and will repeat as often as need be: the ability of revolutionaries to win a periphery and gain influence among the workers from outside the work place and union has been enormously limited in the U.S. due to the history of this country, the lack of radical politics in the working class, and the distrust most workers have had with a left based in the middle class and ignorant of its problems and feelings. The ISUS has never rejected the possibility of outside political work when and where we felt it would bear fruit. But the fact is that in most cases, outside work is only effective where we have had some people on the inside. Indeed, without experienced people on the inside it is impossible to produce literature and a newspaper that is even usable from the outside.

To put it bluntly, the comrades would have to be extremely short sighted not to understand that the success of TDU and our role in building it have multiplied our ability to bring politics to Teamsters and Teamsters to politics a hundred fold. A little over a year ago, non-industrialized rank and file Teamsters did not attend IS meetings. Today they do. Its that simple.

The paragraphs which deal with our periphery campaign and party-building generally are sheer nonsense. We don't pretend to be a party, nor do we plan to declare the party while we are a small group. It should be obvious, however, that we think revolutionary politics is about building a revolutionary party. It should also be obvious that when we speak of party-building we are talking about building the IS so that later we may arrive at the point where we can proclaim the party as you plan to this coming year. Party-building refers to the work we do to build a periphery and recruit to the IS, as distinct from work we do to build something like TDU or shop floor work. We do not hold party-building and mass work to be isolated from each other, but they are worthy of distinct names.

As for the idea that periphery building is a two month job, we can only agree with you. Periphery building is a job that never ends. But conducting a campaign to emphasize work that has gone neglected is a matter of months, not years. As you well know, organizations such as ours must "bend the stick" from time to time to correct the effects of various turns. Our periphery campaign is such a bending of the stick, and not an exercise in marching up and down hills like the Grand Old Duke of York.

There will be a discussion in the ISUS of the criticisms and implied perspectives you propose. We must tell you frankly what we think an attempt to actually apply them to this country would result in. We can't imagine you would go so far as to propose to de-industrialize those who are already making their living this way and actually doing political work. But you do propose to de-prioritize our functioning, and in fact to change our method of functioning from primarily inside to primarily outside intervention. This is presumed to free the organization for more "political" forms of work.

First, in practice, the de-prioritization of our work would simply mean replacing work where we have the best roots and contacts and, therefore chances of success, with work where we have no roots and little chance of success. We would turn from areas where we have expertise and sources of information to areas where we don't. We would turn from being directly involved in working class struggle to commenting on it and propagandizing about it.

Comrades, we believe that such a turn could only lead us backward, from a small group with some roots in the class and a growing worker periphery to a commentary group with no such roots. The history of the American left is strewn with the wreckage of groups that have followed that course. The plant gates of America abound with radical newspapers presenting analyses and proposals for the workers to think about and act on. In proportion to which the groups actually have roots, their papers are usefull to them - if not to the workers. In so far as the groups have few or no roots the papers are abstract, lifeless, and of no use to the groups or the workers. Inevitably, the groups that choose this route end up in one of two graves. Either, they end up sucking after some union officials as a way to the class, or more commonly, they end up as pathetic sectarians.

We do not believe, comrades, that you are sectarians or opportunists. But, we believe you have leapt to false conclusions on the basis of little information and superficial analysis. The truth is we don't really believe the perspective you propose could be carried out here without simply spelling the end of our organization and of the IS tendency in the U.S. in any recognizable form.

Fraternally, Executive Committee (ISUS).

NOTE...The ISGB letter to which this is a reply is dated early October. We did not receive it until last month when Cal and Barbara returned from UK