

Towards a Political Solution--
The Better Course for the I.S.

Draft Discussion Document

Discussion Document on I.S. Crisis
(Draft)

I. INTRODUCTION

A Faction Fight?

There are times when a revolutionary organization must go through a bitter, all-out, no-holds-barred faction-fight. Sometimes such a fight is worth it all in the long-run, even if it means that during the fight (and for some time after) the work of the organization is hampered, and nearly stops all together. Sometimes it's worth it even if it leads to a significant split in which the organization loses valuable people and resources and sees some of its hard-won gains go down the drain. And, let's be clear about it: all of this is usually what happens as a result of faction fights in small groups that have not yet built a massive membership and base in the working class. When a force in the organization (either an opposing faction or in the leadership) develops politics which are so at odds with the basic aims and strategy of the organization that they can't be carried out effectively, then one side has to decisively defeat, win over, or separate itself from the other on a politically principled basis. Such has been the case a number of times in the history of our movement, the most recent example in the I.S. occurring in 1973, when the RT faction chose to reject the very tradition and methods on which our politics are based, and went instead, for the politics of sectarianism. It was a nightmare. But we now generally agree that the outcome of that fight was beneficial to the I.S. in the long run.

Faction fights and splits usually are painful and destructive, but they are sometimes necessary, and sometimes beneficial. In such cases, revolutionaries don't shrink from them.

However, there are also other times when, although the problems which cause disaffection are extremely real, and although there's an urgent need for the membership (and leadership) to deal with them seriously and thoroughly, such a bitter faction fight, leading to such terrible (and likely) results is not at all what's called for by the situation. At these times anybody on any side who pushes the fight along rigid factional lines, that is, who tries to "smash" opponents by attacking their weakest points or who seeks to "destroy" the other group by personal attacks on its leaders--has to be blamed for being on a short-sighted, irresponsible and destructive course. In these cases, such actions will not clear the way for a politically correct solution. Instead, they will make it that much harder for the organization to avert an unnecessary disaster.

A careful and open-minded look at the issues raised in the "New Course" document and a review of the present direction and state of the I.S. has convinced us that what we face is the second kind of situation--one in which a destructive faction fight around the Left Faction's conclusions or around uncritical affirmation of the policies of the current leadership would be unwarranted and tragically irresponsible.

B. Where We Stand:

We disagree with most of the conclusions expressed in the "New Course" for the I.S. document. These conclusions just do not follow from the arguments, concerns and criticisms (many of which we share) made by its authors, and would, if adopted by the I.S. as they now stand, amount to major political set-backs to our chances of becoming the revolutionary workers' organization we seek to be.

Handwritten notes in the left margin:
- "I.E. 2/15" with a checkmark
- "LW" with a checkmark
- "Lew's this" with a checkmark
- "False polarization" with a checkmark

At the same time, while we therefore see the need to take a strong stand in reaffirming the basic thrust and meaning of the I.S. strategies attacked by those conclusions--notably Industrialization and National Priorities (and mass work and agitation if done in a way to not hurt party-building as well), we also see much that is wrong and profoundly disturbing in the ways these strategies are being implemented, and in some of the effects their implementation has had on the organization. After all, the present crisis of the I.S. was not created by the Left Faction (or the ISGB, for that matter). The fact that, in our opinion, the Left Faction's leaders were irresponsible in forming a faction so precipitously (without first trying to bring about a more open discussion of our problems), in no way alters our conviction that responsibility for the degree of stagnation and demoralization in the I.S., indeed even for the very development of such a faction in the first place--must fall largely at the doorstep of our leadership.

It is urgent that we move the discussion as quickly as possible beyond the point of having to decide between the false conclusions of the LF vs. total loyalty to the EC's policies. Current practices have to be re-examined and discussed thoroughly, not in a take-it-or-leave-it spirit for either the LF or the leadership, but in the light of how to truly correct our failings as an organization. This draft outline is put forward with an appeal to comrades on all sides to proceed soberly and non-factionally, so that a potentially correct solution of this crisis can be reached, one which will move the I.S. forward in a coherent and clear political direction.

II. RESPONSE TO THE "NEW COURSE IN THE I.S." DOCUMENT

A. The Left Faction's criticisms point to real problems. The following list identifies symptoms which add up to nothing less than a severe crisis in the health of the I.S.

1. Stagnation of growth and recruitment--we have not increased our size to any extent worth mentioning in the past year let alone to anywhere near the goals proclaimed last year. Our record of holding and training those new members (workers as well as non-workers) we did recruit has been appalling.

- comes from practical work always a tendency -

2. De-politicization of the I.S.--The level of political knowledge and consciousness throughout the organization is far too low. Discussion and thorough understanding of perspectives and strategies in the organization rarely gets beyond "learning the line". Often the underlying motivation and assumptions behind a particular line or perspective are grasped by members in a hazy and confused manner. Sometimes apparent changes in our line or emphasis are not motivated politically and discussed throughout the membership (for example our advocacy of a Black Party or shifting stress on calling for independent Black and women's caucuses). Our previous positions, or expectations are rarely re-assessed or critically evaluated (with some notable exceptions such as auto fractions CGC evaluation). The flow of information (between the center, the fractions and local branches) vital to the ability of all members to understand and politically assess all the aspects of work done by all the various parts of the organization, is severely restricted. Many members in different parts of the I.S. don't even know what other sections of the organization are doing, let alone developing the ability to evaluate or defend that work. When branch and/or fraction reports are written, they rarely go into the political questions involved in their work, which is one reason why they almost never get discussed.

is this true for Boston for the whole org?

from this point.

In the light of this, members must increasingly rely on Workers' Power for their major source of politics. Here too, the concern with making it a major tool for our agitational movement-building has produced a similar de-politicization of its content as well (for more on WP, see pt. 7, below). Whatever the justification for them, there's no doubt that certain organizational practices and institutions have not helped the situation either. The disciplined EC and NC, the restriction of certain discussions to closed meetings of leadership bodies, the prohibition of (or atmosphere of intimidation against) certain other discussions (such as when John Charlton of the I.S. G.B. was here and branches could not engage him in discussions on Portugal), when coupled with this general lack of information and active communication, all contribute to the maintenance of a politically passive membership, a weak and unconfident secondary leadership increasingly dependent on the center for political direction, and finally, an isolated and mistrusted top leadership itself. crux

Can anyone doubt that this depoliticization, eroding as it does the conscious, voluntary shared commitment to our politics which is necessary to sustain membership in a revolutionary group, and is the basis for true bolshevik discipline, is a major reason for our inability to recruit and hold new members? Is it not obvious that these depoliticization has a great deal to do with our now having to deal with a "Left Faction" (composed to a significant extent of newer members) that can attack assumptions long considered to be firmly established in the I.S.? no

3. There is widespread demoralization in our ranks--In spite of our Teamster successes (and, in ways the LF points out correctly, partially as a result of them) many of our members in branches throughout the country are either tired, dispirited, or frustrated. Many industrialized comrades do feel burned-out. Again, what the LF says about the effects of the "triumphalist" tendencies of our leadership to place unrealistic expectations and burdens on these comrades is largely valid.

On the other hand many of our non-industrialized comrades feel dispirited and frustrated by the lack of attention, guidance and encouragement they receive from the leadership and, worse by the experience, often, of being regarded as 2nd-class, backward (if not outright "worthless") members. many are

4. Opportunities Do Pass Us By--or rather, we pass up opportunities to intervene, recruit, or at least establish an I.S. presence in situations and places where the returns to the I.S. in periphery and party-building would certainly be worth the effort. (Although we differ strongly from the L.F.'s advocacy of what, without the anchor of long-range planning and National Priorities, would add up to a scatter-shot approach of dissipated efforts, we do think that the I.S. can, and must develop a different view of non-priority work. As matters now stand, the prevailing feeling in the organization towards involvement in activities and arenas outside of our industrial priorities (and outside of special, nationally initiated campaigns such as Gary Tyler, South Africa, etc.) ranges from outright hostility to thorough indifference, to reluctant toleration. With rare exceptions, there is little support, let alone active encouragement from our national and local (which is sometimes worse in this regard) leaderships to comrades and branches outside our main fractions taking local initiatives in these areas. This is a rigid, narrow and short-sighted application of the concept of priorities which actually negates the true meaning of "priorities" ("most important," but not "only worthwhile"). It is self-defeating, because the gains from serious, limited and carefully-controlled activities, aimed at students, independent radicals, and workers

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in non-priority work--places could become crucial recruitment sources for cadre that can, in turn strengthen our....industrialization and priority work! This point of course carries still more weight if these students are Black or Latin, and still more, if they are of working class origin. But lets not be such workerists as to pretend that only if this last criterion is met does that work have any value. The present I.S. with all of its industrial work would not exist had such rigid, simple-minded and dogmatic barriers been put in the way of the recruitment of most of our initial cadre (and present leadership). Of course, we understand that resources are limited, and that our main energies cannot and will not be diverted from our industrial priorities, but we must realize that it is this very scarcity of resources, plus our conviction that in this period we still need to industrialize revolutionaries, that makes a systematic concern for such recruitment "feeder" sources more, not less, important.

A most important case of such missed opportunities in current I.S. work is the crucial area of Women's work. Given the overwhelmingly male character of our industrial priorities, a lack of creative initiative and openness to non-priority work means that we will continue to recruit decreasing percentages of women, and that we will be less likely to be involved in, and even less likely to lead, struggles of working women.

Because of the difficulty (not impossibility) of recruiting women in enough numbers through our industrial work in priority areas, the recruitment of women should be a central goal of our non-priority work. We must search, systematically and consistently, for opportunities to implement our Women's Liberation Perspectives. In addition to propaganda efforts around women's issues (such as abortion etc.) aimed at recruiting women from the various areas discussed above, should be on the look-out for strikes and union-struggles at places with a predominantly female workforce. The Trico strike for equal pay that the ISGB has been involved with is a good example. We should not have missed the opportunity of finding some way to relate to the 6-week nurses' strike in Chicago.

Similarly if the I.S. is to truly live up to its commitment to struggle for the liberation of all oppressed groups it must develop a similar and equally serious (even though much more limited in terms of resources) concern for involvement in activities that can result in Latin (mainly Puerto Rican and Chicano) recruitment. Finally, in all our work, we should not let our commitment to Gay Liberation become a dead-letter. — *this is the Boston perspective* —

5. There has been a marked tendency on the part of our leadership to replace leading politically with top-heavy administration and internal discipline.

ALTHOUGH IT IS CERTAINLY FALSE, AND A SLANDER TO THE ORGANIZATION TO CHARGE AS THE LF DOES THAT "EVERYONE KNOWS THAT THERE IS NO DEMOCRACY IN THE I.S.", true democratic centralist development in the I.S. has been distorted by a number of factors. First and foremost among these is the depoliticization discussed in pt. # 2 above. Democratic centralism, the highest form of democracy in a combat organization, will tend to degenerate towards its opposite, bureaucratic centralism, to the degree that it is exercised in (and then, over) a membership that lacks the consciousness to accept discipline out of loyalty to the politics of the whole organization (and hence, to the leadership), and instead accepts it out of a passive deference to the leadership's authority, identification with a clique or, must have it imposed by the leadership by increasingly non-political means.

*Some changes in 175 — capture them — capture now —
only a possibility*

more true for ISGB - not a method

In the I.S., the EC has (for reasons that may be very laudable, but that's beside the point) found itself substituting itself for national fraction leaderships (CWA, IBT), launching heavy interventions into the decisions of local branches ("kicking ass" it's called) and building a network of EC loyalists throughout the organization in a way that has hindered, not helped, the true development of a real secondary leadership capable of implementing I.S. political policy with initiative and independence. There has been a policy of "building up" some comrades, and "destroying" other comrades, not on the basis of merit established in open political life, but, more often in covert ways-- (putting people down behind their backs, giving special attention to others (selected, it's true, in part for their hard work, but also for their loyalty, pliability, absence of criticism, etc.) allowing them a special "pipeline" of information to and from the center of the organization, while other, equally hard-working comrades, who for one reason or another have earned the E.C.'s mistrust, are, at best, largely ignored.

This faction fight reveals some tragic results of this method of leadership. Several excellent new comrades, initially promoted to positions of local leadership (mainly as branch organizers) on the basis of their promise, but despite their relative inexperience and understandable lack of political depth had been made to act as the boots to "kick recalcitrant" but politically more experienced "ass" in certain branches. This they loyally attempted to do, under great pressure (but little political guidance) from the center. What greater indictment and proof of the un-political nature of this pressure can there be than the fact that a number of these comrades now turn up as signers of a document which totally rejects all the policies of our EC (the good, along with the bad, sadly)? *True, but only part of the problem*

These practices: of "courtship" of certain comrades contrasted with expulsion threats to others, developing "insiders" vs. a membership with limited access to political information (exacerbated by disciplined E.C.'s and closed NC meetings) occur in a context of a climate which already inhibits open political discussion of important parts of our perspectives and political lines (whether on Portugal, or on the Sadlowski campaign.) The point here is not to get into whether this or that line is correct or not; nor is it to question the absolute need for discipline and self-restraint in discussions, in order not to hinder our external work and hold on to contacts and new members. We do not want the bogey of "returning to the talk shop" either, rest assured. But it is precisely our point that real unity in our organization can only be built on the foundation of political agreement achieved by the democratic participation of all comrades from the bottom up. (and then, from the top down, as well). The ironic and sad up-shot of going the other way is that now the I.S. will be forced to become that much-dreaded "talk shop" for at least the next several weeks, to fight for our very survival. We must put an end to political apartheid in the I.S. before it puts an end to us!

6. There are right-ward pressures involved in our mass-work--to state this is to point to an objective problem, not to criticize the EC, our industrial fractions or anybody else for that matter. This right-ward pressure has always been understood by Marxists to be a fact of life for revolutionaries attempting to lead or organize workers in a period such as this one, where the political programs and consciousness that our efforts focus on cannot yet be revolutionary. Trotsky, for instance, recognized the same tendency when he discussed the trade-union section of the SWP. It has been a necessary and inescapable experience for revolutionaries involved in this kind of work in this kind of period everywhere. To the extent that it means that contact with reality moves revolutionaries to the right of sectarianism and ultra-leftism, such as happened when

our initial industrialization forced us to abandon the "struggle-group" conception, these pressures are all to the good. To the extent that they serve to put us in the same ball park with workers involved in real struggles and give us a chance to be relevant and begin building a base by trying to lead, these pressures are to be welcomed. The problem is for us to know when we're in danger of being pushed too far--into opportunist political practice. Is it when we decide to give critical but unconditional support to a Miller or Sadlowski? We don't think so. What about when we decide to fold our own rank and file organizations into Fight-back, leaving it only to official I.S. publications (W.P., and what's happening to that steel pamphlet that was supposed to be produced?) to do so? Such questions need full discussion at all levels of the organization, for our cadre needs to learn and internalize a method for making such political judgements. The truth is that there's no automatic abstract formula that can help prevent us from sliding into opportunism. Our ex-comrades in the RSL (and sundry pathetic offspring) thought they discovered it in the magic amulet of The Transitional Program! and rushed head-long into sectarianism. Stalinists and Social Democrats of all varieties don't seem to worry too much about it, so they don't have much of a problem. But we do, and the Left Faction's attempt to deal with it by saying we should abandon mass work altogether is worse than no solution, for a number of reasons to be discussed below. One point to be made to them here though, is that their conclusions against industrialization and mass work ignore the fact that this same problem operates in the other direction as well: Isolation from the class and lack of involvement with its day-to-day struggle exerts a "left-ward pressure" straight towards sectarianism and ultra-leftism, which is one major reason we feel that adoption of their conclusions would be a political set-back for the I.S.

Trotsky's prescription for the trade-union of the SWP was not that they should stop doing mass work in the trade unions, but that the party as a whole could and had to act as a political check against this ever-present pressure to the right. The documents that came out of this Fall's NC--notably "Mass Work, Politics and Party-building"--offer promising (if overdue) steps in the direction of fulfilling this advice. We wholeheartedly endorse the direction towards party-building (not against mass work, but as an absolutely crucial complement to it) and towards re-politicization these call for. However, we fear that unless the problems in points #2 and #5 above are overcome, these steps may prove to be more "bent stick" rhetoric, in practice turning out to be a broken reed. For re-politicization, periphery-building and party-building--that is, re-establishing the primacy of revolutionary politics, as we continue and even intensify our mass-work and low-level agitations (which, of course, we must do)--cannot be a matter of a mere "campaign" or "turn" to "correct an imbalance." It must become a permanent feature of a fully-democratized--that is, truly democratic-centralist--I.S.

7. There has been a failure to understand and properly utilize propaganda by the I.S.

When, in what is probably an extreme over-reaction to the excesses of our "turn to agitation," the Left Faction rejects mass-work and de-emphasizes the importance of agitation, they commit a serious error, for no revolutionary group will be able to establish itself and grow in the working class on the basis of propaganda alone. When the I.S., in recent years, derided the importance of propaganda, in what was, in part, our over-reaction to the practice of the empty phrase-mongering of sectarian "Trotskyist" groups and New Left commentary and study groups, we

committed an equally serious error. For the LF is right to remind us that the I.S. is still, after all is said and done, basically a propaganda group. This does not preclude mass-work and agitation, but it does mean that, at this point in our development (and in the development of working-class consciousness) the overwhelming bulk of our recruitment must be, and, in fact, is (no matter what anybody might pretend) done on the basis of our socialist political ideas (in varying degrees of political complexity). Agitation and mass work enable us to do very good things to help build the workers' movement; they put us in contact with workers, and can even bring them into our periphery; but without propaganda (whether in WP, other publications, leaflets, forums, or one-to-one raps) we cannot complete the job of recruiting to, and therefore building, the I.S. This may all seem rather obvious when put this way, but the I.S. has not been utilizing this understanding in any systematic and effective way for quite some time now. Our obsession with "being a real force," "having a decisive impact," "moving significant numbers of people," etc. has tended to blind us against the importance of putting conscious and systematic effort into the consistent expression and spreading of our unique revolutionary socialist ideas. This is the external side of the depoliticization described in points 2, 5, and 6 above, and is both cause and effect of that depoliticization. It means that we tend to recruit and grow only from those areas where enormous agitational efforts and the protracted grind of movement-building finally yield us tiny handfuls of contacts to propagandize more fully, or else, more easily, but virtually by accident, from contacts made in our unsystematic non-priority work.

WE MUST STOP LETTING THE POTENTIAL AGITATIONAL USEFULNESS OF OUR MAJOR RECRUITMENT TOOLS--pre-eminently W.P. but also our forums and rallies, etc.--WEAKEN AND UNDERMINE THEIR PRIMARY PROPAGANDISTIC ROLE. That this is precisely what's been happening, and thus is a major cause of our stagnation must be recognized and corrected. It is altogether right and proper to not tie ourselves to any abstract political program when we put out a rank and file newsletter or leaflet in order to move people towards a desired course of action. But it is a completely, different matter to allow such considerations to cloud and dull (and sometimes erase) the picture that we present of the revolutionary socialist I.S. at a forum or in the pages of W.P. Here is where our unique political contributions must stand out, so that contacts have a way of deciding whether our politics are worth joining. *which contacts* If there's a reason to emphasize the positive aspects of a Sadlowski victory in a leaflet to steelworkers, there's equally good reason to give our full position on the MPLA in Angola (a frequent W.P. reader would have no reason to think we see it as any less of a revolutionary party than the PRP is in Portugal) or ZANU (the frequent W.P. reader would have to turn to ABC News to find out that it's allied to the bourgeois nationalist NKOMO) or on Carvalho (our frequent W.P. reader would know why it was good the revolutionary Left ran him in Portugal, but would not know from us, that he does not exactly represent the ideal of a revolutionary leader). When we criticize the fact that too often (not always) W.P. tends to be written for the "lowest common denominator," we're talking, not about the readability of its style, which is great, but about its lack of political content.

This has nothing to do with "abstraction" vs. "concreteness," "dullness and difficulty" vs. "liveliness and interest." It has to do with the fact that if we want our readers to know about our politics and to consider joining the I.S. it's nothing short of scandalous that

we're probably the only newspaper in the world to rarely discuss the presence and role of Cuban troops in Angola. The N.Y. Daily News, with a circulation of millions of workers, has no trouble mentioning it and giving its analysis. We seem to.

the
The same problem exists with many of the forums and rallies that we organize at which we feature speakers from other political groups or tendencies with whom we wish to have a united front. Potential I.S. contacts attending these (on Southern Africa, etc.) have no problem learning what the politics of our guest speakers are all about, but would have to listen with intense concentration to begin to suspect that there's something different, special, unique or superior that the I.S. (or W.P.) stands for. If our leadership is serious about correcting the distortions caused by our one-sided movement-building mentality, and truly intends to re-emphasize I.S.-building, it will do well to direct its attention at these manifestations of the problem as well.

Finally, we must devote more effort (or more serious efforts) to cast our propaganda net more widely. W.P.'s and pamphlets can be more systematically distributed to bookstores and newsstands, we can have more forums and speakers in communities, schools and colleges, and local branches can address some propaganda leaflets to struggles that are not necessarily in our main priorities--all without significantly cutting into our central priorities. The results--in wider and bigger periphery and recruitment would certainly be worth the effort. Such activities--although secondary to and not to be confused with our on-going work in the priorities--are nevertheless crucial for us to expand our size and therefore have more "I.S. political cadre to lead the next stage forward."

a truism, but too vague

II - B. THE MAJOR CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY THE LEFT FACTION IN ITS "NEW COURSE" DOCUMENT ARE WRONG AND MUST BE REJECTED BY THE I.S.

Though we share many of the deep concerns about the state of the I.S. which moved some of our most valuable comrades to form or support the Left Faction, and though we agree with them that the current leadership is largely responsible for this crisis, we believe that, in the "New Course" document the LF missed the mark disastrously in coming to advocate the abandonment of industrialization, national priorities and mass work. These three aspects of the political course and methods of the I.S. are fundamental aspects of our strategy for the creation of a revolutionary workers' party in the U.S.

1. Industrialization

The EC is absolutely correct in its reply to the ISGB when it cites the particular historical circumstances that made the separation between the Left (let alone revolutionary socialists) and the American working class virtually total for decades. Industrialization in this country does have both a special urgency as well as special potential as compared with the other capitalist nations. Few of the factors that facilitate re-connection between workers and revolutionaries in other countries (such as the maintenance of socialist traditions in some form or other, the existence of massive political parties that, despite their betrayals have served to keep political class identification alive, the absence of virulent anti-communism that exists here, etc., etc.) operate

here. On the other hand, some of these same factors, as well as some others, such as the relatively less rigid class lines in cultural terms, serve to give industrialization a greater potential for success here. In any case it is far truer here than in Europe, that, in order for us to get to do any "inside" work (as the LF puts it) we've first had to "get inside," and will continue to have to do so for quite some time to come.

It has been the tactic of industrialization that has been responsible for the organization to not only to begin to make contact with workers at the center of their on-going struggles (and the seat of working-class power), but also to begin to develop a concrete and realistic knowledge of the class-struggle that no observing, theorizing and "intervening" from the outside by itself could ever achieve. The level of our political discussion of labor perspectives is infinitely superior--because it's more concrete and reality-based--in the present I.S. than those we had at our inception, or than those of other non-industrialized Left organizations, thanks to industrialization. The fact that we've industrialized even makes it much more possible to engage in better outside agitation and propoganda (as was the case in our postal intervention). Rather than lengthen this document with unnecessary repetition let us just state that we fully endorse the excellent defense and justification of industrialization written by the EC in its reply to the Left Faction document.

2. Priorities

As for the LF's conclusions against priorities, they would have come much closer to hitting the mark if they had focused their attack on the narrow and rigid implementation and interpretation of the meaning of priorities which has been fostered by the leadership. The real meaning and use of national (as well as local) priorities to guide our overall work, and assist our long-range planning, has been transformed into a set of principles to exclude (or at least discourage) work in different arenas, or other kinds of initiative and activity. Instead, the LF chose to accept the leadership's definition of "Priorities" and then chose to reject the whole idea outright (and then threw in a rather ridiculous argument against planning to boot; one wonders why they cite the axiom that "Theory is the Guide to Action"). At any rate, as they themselves say (but then contradict, without qualification) any group does need priorities--we add, especially a small group, and especially national priorities, that can give the organization some long-range direction of where (according to the best of our theoretical ability) we should be heading, so we can be there as the action happens, and not have to chase after it from the outside.

More concretely, we see no reason to question the long-range validity of the considerations and analysis that led the I.S. to identify the industries and the unions (UAW, IBT, USW and CWA) that for various reasons can be expected to be the arenas for key and leading developments of the U.S. working class struggles. Our ISGB comrades seem to have forgotten the difference between predicting the likelihood of certain developments and trends and prescribing them (very much the way bourgeois critics of Marx do when they accuse Marxism of "seeking to impose Laws on History"). The subjecting our work to such national priorities has several important advantages to our development as an organization--it insures that we have continuity, consistency and discipline in our efforts over time. This is the only way that we will continue developing serious and scientific politics that are not based on passing phe-

nomena, but are built up on actions that can be evaluated, criticized, re-assessed to give us an ever fuller and deeper understanding of what needs to be done. Second, it does mean that, over time, we will be recruiting a cadre of workers whose on-going existence and political work is central to the whole organization, so that the development of a revolutionary workers' leadership in the I.S. is a real likelihood--much more, and much sooner than if we recruited workers peripherally (although we should not expect this to happen as soon as various statements out of Detroit proclaimed last year).

Our quarrel is not with the way the I.S. deals with its priorities; it's with the way the organization has dealt with its non-priorities (see section II A, pt. 4 above).

3. Mass-work

As with industrialization and priorities, so with "mass work," the LF could and should very correctly have attacked the excesses of the "turn to agitation"--since these (triumphalism, false expectations, disruption of party-building, depoliticization) severely distorted the potential value that mass work should have had for us. (Instead, it seems to us that wherever some surgery is needed to remove some bad growths from vital organs in the body of I.S. political practice, the LF leaps in with a machete, seeking to chop away the whole organ. This may be a bad habit picked up from the B.S. artists (Bending the Stick, that is) in our leadership. If the authors of the New Course document persist with this method, they'll leave behind a trail of broken machete knives almost as long as the trail of broken sticks left by the EC. Because, the methods of industrialization, priorities and mass work are, despite the distortion they've suffered, too important and firm to be chopped away so crudely.

(For a more sober discussion of the role and implications of "mass work" see pt. II, A6 above.)

III. TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE I.S. CRISIS

A. Many comrades who are as convinced of the severity of the crisis as we are, and who are equally convinced that industrialization, national priorities and mass-work are not, at bottom, the causes of our problems, are seeking other explanations for them. Among the factors being discussed are: EC mistakes in having (and fostering) illusory expectations of tremendous success and growth out of our mass work, serious defects in leadership methods at all levels of the organization (from the EC down to the local branch fractions), weakness of our membership (lack of activity, lack of confidence and initiative, "resistance to making the turn," etc.).

We believe that all these factors are worth discussing, but hold that if the discussion remains at such a symptomatic level, we won't be able to pull out of the crisis for long before it recurs. Any discussion which concludes only that "for a time we have to push the other way" or "a balance must be restored," or that the EC (or future ones) avoid making the same mistakes, or even that the main thing that needs to be done is to replace this or that leader, or even the whole EC, will not only tend to be scapegoating the EC unfairly, but will be missing the point of how such mistakes could end up having such disastrous effects

on the membership. After all, even the best of leaderships mis-estimate either the pace of events, or the workers' response to them at times. And it's not as if we've just been decimated by brutal state repression--we've even had some real successes to be proud of! So what needs to be understood is why the widespread demoralization and stagnation in this period that should be offering real hope?

B. De-politicization is the key--It's not that we don't feel that EC practices (by omission as much as by commission) should carry a large share of responsibility (as any central leadership in an organization like ours must carry). In fact, the EC was correct when, last year, they proclaimed "We will be judged by the results!" It's rather that, in spite of all this, the fundamental source and key to all of our major problems lies in a process that pre-dated the current EC. We're talking about the de-politicization that has been especially marked in the I.S. since 1974 (in reaction to the horrors of the 1973-faction-fight and split) but has probably been a part of our make-up since our very birth as an organization struggling to break away from our roots in the "New Left" student movement of the 60's--with all of its petty-bourgeois flaws: endless abstract "theorizing," lack of discipline, etc.

This depoliticization (described in section II #2 above) has wrought havoc on our ability to maintain cohesion and morale in the face of hard times.

raise it as a fetish
~~It~~ works somewhat as follows: In an organization that does not develop its membership's consciousness by activity fostering the practice of democratically debating political alternatives, the mistakes that leaders make (and it's inescapable that leaders make mistakes in any organization--even the All-Time Original Bolshevik Party) are very difficult to counter-act in the membership. A membership that, by and large, has been carrying out its activities not with the independent initiative of a truly internalized political consciousness, but rather constantly experiences being "revved-up" with the carrot-and-stick combination of: cheerleading exhortations, artificial (because premature) promotions of members to positions of heavy responsibility (unfair to the "lucky" member because she/he is not armed politically for them), the granting of special "insider" status to some, on the one hand (this all is the Carrot) and on the other hand the "kick-ass" routine of abuse disparagement, threats, etc. (this is the Stick--Bent, of course)--a membership with such experiences is more likely to have significant portions become passive, unconfident, uncritical, dependent and finally, when and if the cheerleading becomes hollow, demoralized and disaffected. Some parts of it even become fighting mad and join factions organized around crazy conclusions! Certainly our leadership, to the extent that it fostered this "Kick-Ass/Kick-Ass" school of leader-member relations, or to the extent that it tolerated or didn't fight it when practiced at the local level, is guilty of worsening the de-politicization of the I.S.

But still, and this is important not just out of fairness to our EC, but so we understand the whole thing to the fullest extent, the de-politicization preceded this EC, and in fact, was not just caused by such leadership ~~methods~~ but itself helped bring those methods on.* [See note at bottom of page 12.]

C. The roots of the de-politicization--This de-politicization, as well as the accompanying pseudo-Bolshevism (attempting to develop centralist organizational methods and disciplined norms without having the

political content of active (not formal) democracy) described above is not so hard to account for when we think about the implications of the class origins of most of the cadre of our still relatively young organization. It is a necessary by-product of the workerist attitudes many of our cadre developed in the fervent attempts to break as far away from our previous political milieu (the petty-bourgeois movements) as possible. In striving to "transform" ourselves first, into an organization fit for stereotyped conceptions of "real" workers, and then into a "workers' combat group," we've only slowly been learning that it's the petty-bourgeois style of political debate that we must get rid of, and not the actual politics themselves.

If we are to really learn this lesson, and not to continue infecting those workers (~~who~~ who are increasingly coming around) with similar anti-political prejudices, we'll have to achieve a real break with this petty-bourgeois malady which, though understandable, historically is now holding us back from further progress.

IV. SOME PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS

We understand that the problems discussed here cannot be overcome overnight, and that a political change of the whole organization is needed rather than a reshuffling of the leadership. The I.S. must become re-politicized, or rather, more political than ever before. Fresh ideas and methods must be circulated and discussed throughout the membership, and established fundamentals need to be re-affirmed. More important though is that our basic strategies and perspectives must be re-motivated in such a way that this reaffirmation rests on a conscious political foundation.

A. To these ends we propose that the I.S. hold a special convention, to be held after a reasonable period of discussion in the branches--possibly around Washington's birthday. This 3-day special convention should be structured as follows: —

1. One full day around our labor perspectives, particularly on our methods of building the rank and file movement--It should include such issues as mass work, the use and importance of agitation, of propaganda, the nature of the "militant minority," united fronts. All of these should be tied to our goal of building an independent rank and file base, and to the principles and methods of Class-Struggle Unionism. In spite of the fact that previous membership conventions have already affirmed I.S. policy in all these regards, the widespread lack of clarity and confidence on these questions on the part of so much of our membership shows the urgent need to have this discussion.

2. One full day on "Party Building"--Although, as we've indicated above, we heartily welcome the Fall NC documents ("Periphery Campaign," "Mass Work, Politics and Party-Building"), we feel that a fuller discussion towards making the concern of building the I.S. itself a permanent feature and top priority in all our on-going practice is now required. This dis-

*In the light of the way these practices have developed, we strongly urge all comrades to re-examine the document on Democratic Centralism written by Sam F. of L.A. for the 1975 I.S. convention. Many of its excellent arguments have now been shown to have particular relevance to the crisis the organization is currently experiencing.

discussion should focus on

- a) Recruitment
- b) Periphery-Building
- c) Workers' Power
- d) Political Education and Cadre Training

3. The final day should be on:

- a) I.S. internal organizational methods and structures, norms and methods of internal political discussions, and role and method of leadership
- b) It should culminate with elections to national leadership bodies.

B. The Special Convention should be seen as the culmination of the discussion period forced on us by the crisis, and should signal its end. It should be clear to everyone that, given the present political turmoil in the organization, a meeting of the N.C. as presently constituted would be totally inadequate for the achievement of this resolution. This current N.C. was elected on the basis of a very different political alignment in the organization. Nothing short of the full convention with delegates representing the present political concerns of the membership will do the job. To this end, we will be working on specific proposals and resolutions to be addressed to the various sessions. We urge others to do likewise.

C. Initial Specific Proposals:

The following are our concrete proposals for the time being. They fall under two headings: political and organizational.

1. Political

a) Priorities

We fundamentally agree with the recommendations on labor work and perspectives which we understand to be contained in the document coming out of the L.A. branch and there is therefore no need to repeat them here. We wish it to be clear that we continue to support the basic thrust and direction of I.S. work in our priority areas. The problems we are addressing now have to do with the general political illness of the I.S., which goes far beyond any given fraction.

b) Non-Priority Work

We have to recognize, as was stated in a recent EC document, that no matter how great our politics and strategy, our success will be limited by our ridiculously small size. Therefore, some activities are justified simply on the basis that they will help us recruit. (As long as the organization has national industrial priorities and our work in them is the primary work of the organization, we do not need to worry about recruiting "the wrong sorts of people" through this other non-priority work.) Local branch execs should have it as a constant ongoing concern to search out opportunities to recruit and build our periphery. A periphery campaign is not sufficient. Relating to people and places outside our priority work who would

be open to our politics is an essential, even though non-priority, part of our perspective--and not just an occasional exception. This would mean different things in places. (And the proportion of priority and non-priority work would vary; in some branches it might make sense to do none of the following because of the consuming importance of priority work, whereas in occasional other branches where priority work was unavailable the non-priority work might be the bulk of the work). The following is the kind of work we have in mind:

1. Activities

- a. If we have a member or contact who is already doing rank and file work within a non-priority union, the individual case should be explored and sometimes they should get the assistance of the branch. The teacher work in NYC is an example of this. It would have been terrific had we had such a contact or member involved in the rubber strike.
- b. Given the difficulty of recruiting women through our industrial work, the recruitment of women should be a central goal of our non-priority work. We must consistently and systematically search for opportunities to implement our Women's Liberation perspectives. In addition to propaganda and non-trade union movements mentioned below, we should be on the lookout for strikes and union struggles where there is a predominantly female work force. The Trico strike for pay that the ISGB has been involved in is a good example. An example of a lost opportunity is the 6-week nurses' strike in Chicago.
- c. If there are groups protesting cutbacks in social services or working around other non-work place issues like racism, abortion, we should explore the possibility of participating in them (e.g., Community Labor Action Against the Cuts, Union WAGE); sometimes we should even organize them (e.g., WAR).
- d. It is the responsibility of the national leadership to ensure that systematic and consistent student work be done in a limited number of schools and/or cities where this is a realistic and worthwhile perspective in terms of possible recruitment considering the nature and social composition of certain schools and cities (for example, Boston, New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area). This would be done under the direction of a coordinator designated by and responsible to the national leadership and on the basis of a unified national political program for our student work and perspectives. While we do not believe that it is now possible or desirable for us to try to help build a student movement

the fact remains that other organizations such as the Young Workers Liberation League, the YSA and the Revolutionary Student Brigade have been recruiting considerably on campuses particularly in community and state colleges and universities with large working class and Third World student bodies. There is no reason why we should or could not tap this still very important source of recruitment. This general approach of recognizing the wide local and regional diversity in the United States which makes serious student work possible and desirable in certain cities and schools but not necessarily in others applies even more in regards to Latin work. Again, there is no reason why the approach discussed above could not be very fruitfully applied in a number of cities with significant Latin populations (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles). Sometimes there have been instances where student and Latin work could have been combined such as the important Latin struggles at Hostos Community College in New York City.

2. Propagandistic Work

For example:

- a. Organizing forums, films, literature tables, etc. at campuses where there are likely to be a larger number of students open to our politics.
- b. Participating in what rare, non-sectarian radical or Marxist schools exist, such as the School for Marxist Education in NY, and other habitats of independent radicals. (Many independent radicals are hopeless but others would be sympathetic to us if they knew us.)

3. Political Education and Training

- a. Discussion of national fraction work, including fundamental motivation, should go on in every branch; every member should be informed and fully understand the primary work of the organization.
- b. Cadre schools should be held on a regional as well as national basis and not just for organizers.

[The amount of space we have spent on non-priority work does not mean we think it should be a priority. This detail is necessary to correct the rigidity of our present orientation.]

2. Organizational

- a) New leadership bodies should be elected. (This does not preclude electing all or some of the present leadership.
- b) The EC should no longer be disciplined.

- c) NCs should be open except for personnel, personal and security discussions.
- d) Appointment of organizers should be collaborative and there should be veto power for both branches and EC.
- e) There should be an appeals board, politically elected by the Convention, to deal with cases of discipline. (This existed for many years in the ISBG and it has now become necessary for us given the fact that more than a handful of members have complained that they have been threatened with disciplinary measures in the course of political disputes with leaders of the organization.)
- f) There should be no suppression of information and discussion as occurred, e.g. with John Charlton's visit and written reports from comrades visiting Portugal; in fact, these should be circulated and discussion organized.
- g) A political editor or editorial board for WP should be chosen by the EC. This is necessary to beef up what is currently the weak political content of the paper.

We are convinced that, with discussion and implementation of these proposals, and others like them, those excellent comrades who are currently disaffected can be saved for the I.S.--and--the I.S. can be saved for them and all of us as well.

FINAL NOTE

We disagree with the Left Faction on one last thing: it's not simply bluster to declare that "we have left the world of the sects." What this means is not that we have ceased to be a sect (we haven't technically), but that in our practice, with all of its failings, we have begun on the long road towards the revolutionary workers' party--whereas most other sects are still busy chasing up and down side roads. We're taking our first steps down that road largely because of industrialization and planning. Our present course threatens to land us in a rut, but the "New Course" threatens (despite best intentions) to take us off the road altogether. Let's move on!

Peter D.
Nancy H.
Sam F.

New York
12/26/76

midwest priorities —
C.C. as an electoral play only —
local priorities for Boston —
— heavy th org. —