

APRIL/MAY



RED TIDE TAKES THE LEAD! 200 people march and rally in Detroit-- demanding Gary Tyler be set free!

is news of the month '76

for is and rt members only

NATIONAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

This edition of News of the Month covers the months of April and May. There will be one more edition in June before the convention. This is because in the next few weeks all our attention, both in terms of production in Detroit and discussion in the branches, will be around the convention documents and resolutions. The first two discussion documents will be published along with the convention rules and agenda and sent out with the paper on Friday, May 14. These are the documents on building the organization and our industrial work. A week later the other two discussion documents on domestic politics and the international situation will be sent out. By the end of the month the actual resolutions (about 18 in all), which come out of the documents and form the actual basis for discussion at the convention, will be in the branches. Just to remind you, the convention is the July 4th weekend and according to the provisional agenda will be a two day meeting with another full day for national fraction meetings.

The other important developments which are not covered by separate articles in this month's news are that the black conference is now scheduled for the weekend of June 12th in Detroit. The east coast and mid-west branches should already be preparing for their black members and contacts to attend. All the signs are that it will be a fine conference and the details should be out in another week. This month will also see the organization once more taking up serious defense work. The magnificent demonstration to Free Gary Tyler which was held in Detroit last weekend will be repeated in more than half a dozen cities over the next few weeks. This initiative, for which the growing Detroit Red Tide branch should get all the credit, is the most important non-industrial initiative we have taken in a year. It is absolutely vital that we put the necessary resources into it. So far the response, especially amongst black workers, has been extremely good. There is a real possibility of this work resulting both in Gary's freedom and a significant step forward for the IS.

In another shift of emphasis which points up the effort (outlined in the Interim Perspective) to re-establish the political life of the organization on a firm footing after the heavy emphasis on the teamster contract, the Women's Commission has embarked on a program of visits to branches designed to help restart the women's caucuses where they no longer exist, and strengthen their political direction where they do. This will also be discussed at the national women's caucus meeting at the convention.

There is no separate article in this issue on branch reports. This is because there is very little new to report in the established branches of the organization. In the last month, the reports we have received show that the branches have been virtually at a standstill and the fact that several branches haven't even sent in reports at all tends to confirm that assessment. But it should be reported that splitting the Louisville branch into two failed due to the loss of members and there is now, once more, a single Louisville branch. There are now, however, two Chicago branches based on auto and teamsters plus a Gary branch based on steel rather than the boring old Chicago branch.

The Detroit district has also added a Teamster branch to its three auto branches.

The only other developments worthy of mention are that the Indianapolis branch is now firmly established with a membership in double figures, though it has yet to recruit locally. The Cincinnati branch is less firm, but has recruited its first local teamster. The NY teamster has now moved its operations to Jersey and is expanding activity into auto. The comrades in the two brand new branches deserve a lot of praise. The whole organization can be proud of what they are doing.

Finally, let me briefly mention the question of public forums, or public meetings, of the IS. During the teamster campaign, the public presence of the IS through its public meetings almost ceased to exist in many places, or at best was restricted to topics directly associated with the teamster work. That was understandable then, but isn't anymore. We have to move back to regular public meetings right away, because we aren't going to bring people around our politics unless we have some political events to bring them to. All branches must have one such meeting in May and another in June, and let's show a little imagination with the topics.

Glenn Wolfe

The close relationship we share with the British I.S. has always been very important to us. Both in terms of direct help and in terms of using their experience, the British I.S. has played an important role in our development over the last few years.

Over the last few months however, our level of activity has interfered with the process of keeping our members well informed about the state of the ISGB and many comrades, hearing rumors of splits in the organisation have understandably become concerned. This article should clear things up, for a while at least and we will try to keep people in the picture every few months thru the "News of the Month". You should also be aware that SUN now gets copies of Socialist Worker by air and can thus provide that paper to the branches both cheaply and up to date.

The last two years have been very hard for the revolutionary movement in Britain. In 1974 the labor movement succeeded in kicking the Conservative government out of office, it was replaced by a Labor Party government which with the support of the trade union leaders was able to con workers into passively accepting from Labor what would have been fought to the death before 1974. In short before '74 there had been a high level of struggle, strike, factory occupations, demonstrations etc. After, there was a feeling in the working class of relying on the govt or at least not fighting the government because the only alternative to it was worse.

These conditions were damaging to the revolutionary movement, in fact with the exception of IS, this period virtually destroyed the revolutionary movement in the class. The sectarian daily paper "Workers Press" collapsed and most of the other sects ran to work on the campuses and in the Labor Party to hide their weakness in the working class. The I.S. declined a little but at the end of the period it is in a stronger position in terms of increasing its size and influence than it was at the beginning. Its campaign against unemployment over the last few months has been a huge success, mobilized thousands of workers and finally established the IS as an important factor in the British Labor movement. The Communist Party no longer has the left fixed to itself. The organisation is now once more beginning to expand both in membership and newspaper sales. The rank and file movement (and papers) is reviving and the prospects look good. It should also be understood that the organisation came thru this bad period smaller but tougher and clearer about its politics.

The middle-class left wing of the organisation split off to return to the sect world of "pure politics" where only words are important and action counts for nothing. The right wing of the organisation, led by some of the older national leaders of the IS who were no longer in the leadership also split off to form their own little sect. Their motive was a wish to work closely with the Communist Party in the trade unions and thus mush over important political differences. No more than a few hundred people, mainly middle class, were involved in both splits and they are all on their way out of revolutionary politics. Three thousand members remain in a tougher, tighter, more influential I.S. There are still many problems, both internally and externally, for the British I.S. But they are the real problems of establishing a strong ~~NA~~ workers party and sooner or later, despite the setbacks, they will overcome them. There is no reason for friends of the ISGB to be pessimistic

REPORT ON EDUCATION

Overall the organization is beginning to take education more seriously. A calling of most organizers on the state of education in their branch revealed the following: All new members have either completed or are in the process of completing the Basic Education Program. The general assessment of the Program is that it meets the most minimal educational needs of new comrades in that it begins to familiarize them with our overall politics and perspectives. The major problem has been getting new members to complete the program. The revised edition should improve that since there will be only 6 classes. However, it is the responsibility of the branch/district leadership and the new member's buddy to do everything possible to get the new members to the classes by impressing on them how important we think it is.

It is too early to assess the Advanced Class. Most branches have just begun it, or are in the process of setting these classes up. More on that in the next report.

The Educational Notes were used either for branch or fraction meetings, or for background reading. Also there are now between 15-20 comrades scheduled for cadre training (7 comrades have already been through in the last 6 weeks) in the period between now and the convention. Remember all that's required to take advantage of this service is a week's notice to the Educational Director and no more than two comrades at one time. It is open to every member and geared to his/her level of political development.

The one area of education that still has to be developed is one on one. It is the responsibility of the branch/district leadership to ensure that this happens. Several suggestions on how to do that: 1) Make a survey of all members to see who's interested in what and pair them up. 2) Coordinate with the buddy system for new members. 3) When a member gets interested in a topic, have that announced at a branch meeting and say that anyone interested in reading on this topic, get together with that member and set something up. This is one of the more effective ways to carry on education for everyone. Don't leave it to chance or it won't really happen.

Future Plans

1. The revised Basic Education Program will be out by May 22.
2. Going out within the next week will be two reading lists: A list of important classics with brief summaries following each for further reading beyond the two classes. A list of political novels.
3. Within the next month we will have out a short pamphlet on the Russian Revolution (How it was won).
4. Plans are being developed for an educational column in Workers Power which should begin by the end of May.
5. Plans for the Summer School move ahead. We have a very nice place and the classes are now being set up. Several classes on women's liberation have been added.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Educational Notes will not appear for May and June due to pre-convention discussion. The time set aside for these discussions should be used to discuss the convention documents and resolutions.

Marilyn Danton

INDUSTRIAL REPORT

AUTO Fraction Report--

by Mark L.

Since the Collective Bargaining Convention in March, there have been no important gains in the Coalition for a Good Contract campaign. Without a fixed goal and deadline, the drive for pledge cards has fallen off. This is due to the fact that the plants are still not bubbling over with 'contract fever,' and that the Coalition has not yet developed a clear program of activities that can focus the campaign and move it forward. The Auto Fraction Steering Committee is taking steps to correct this.

On the local level, caucuses and CGC groups are planning campaigns on the Local Supplemental agreements. These contracts are the place to deal with the "small" but real enough everyday hassles that workers face--health and safety, notice of overtime, transfer rights, etc.

Nationally, the first issue of the Coalition newspaper, CONTRACT COUNTDOWN, will be out this week. The monthly newspaper, along with other paraphernalia (buttons, bumperstickers, T-shirts, etc.) will be a help in making the Coalition a real organization.

More importantly, there is the question of activity. At this time, the Coalition is only solidly committed to a few events--a fund-raising cabaret in early June, and a demonstration at the beginning of bargaining in July. Many other ideas have been bounced around, the most serious of which is a "Short Work Week" rally, to be held at a park in Detroit. We would hope to have the Coalition be one of many sponsors, along with more bureaucratically-minded forces who would be able to bring out workers we could never get to.

The Steering Committee is now drawing up a worked-out battle plan to move the campaign ahead. We are looking in two directions. One is to find those cracks in the machine that can be exploited (the short work week rally); the other is to seize the "small" problems that can agitate workers to activity (local issues). Both approaches are designed to demonstrate that yes, you can change things.

POSTAL Fraction Report--

by Cal W.

The postal work is slowly gaining some momentum. The speedup continues, and now for the first time, there is a clear pattern of resistance by the workers. In Philadelphia, a contract fight at the bulk center includes refusal to accept overtime. In San Diego, threatened lay-offs led to postal workers' demonstrations throughout southern California. In the Bay Area, there has been a demonstration against speed-up at the San Francisco bulk center.

In Seattle, the clerks' rank and file group, CAN'T, is active and growing in influence. Seattle letter carriers, led by rank and file militants, forced a strike vote in their last local union meeting, but failed to carry the vote. In Cincinnati, a militant carrier, suspended for fighting route changes, organized informational picket lines. The response of the top union leadership to the speed-up has been to threaten a national publicity campaign against the service, paid for by the clerks' strike fund. The "left" in the carriers, led by Sombrotto of NY, is making noise again, but they refused a request by Seattle carriers for any solidarity action.

There is no reason to think that this resistance will not continue to build. Behind all the recent propaganda about inefficiency in the post office, mis-management, and so on, lies the continuing drive to get more out of the work force, through the use of more casuals, speed-up on the sorting machines, forced overtime, and transfers, "route equalization" for the carriers--all the issues that we saw as key to the fight for a decent contract last summer.

The RANK AND FILE POSTAL WORKER continues to be well-received, and has intervened in a limited way in the struggles that we know of. There are no doubt many actions beyond our still small network of militants. The press run is 5,000, but these are all distributed, and there is now the possibility of increasing the press runs. There are now 12 sponsors, representing all three crafts and 10 cities. Two groups, one in Seattle and one in Pittsburgh, sponsor the paper. In addition, there are now local newsletters in Seattle, Pittsburgh, the Bay Area, Boston. There may be newsletters in Cincinnati and Philadelphia in the near future.

Paul, the convenor of the fraction, is now completing a national tour of postal fractions in which he will visit the Bay Area, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. In June he will also visit Boston, NY, NJ, and Cincinnati. The main task now is setting up a functional fraction, with local convenors, a national bulletin, and so on. We are also planning to move the paper to Pittsburgh in June, and the postal fraction there will become the basis for beginning to build a national leadership for the postal work. At the convention in July, we plan to hold the first national postal fraction meeting, and there we will begin to map out a campaign for the rest of the year, during which the APWU and the NALC both hold conventions, and when the speed-up will continue, if not increase.

We still want additional sponsors for the paper, and we want all branches to help widen its circulation. Later this spring, we hope to get UPS drivers to distribute the paper, as they often cross paths with carriers on their routes, and face some similar problems. The Postal Service management now hires former UPS supervisors to train their own supervisors and plan the mechanization and speed-up, particularly in the new bulk centers. Other workers, particularly Teamsters and phone workers, who meet carriers on the streets, should take the POSTAL WORKER with them, and tell them about the various rank and file organizations.

We will publish the first national bulletin once Paul completes his trip, so members should be prepared to have reports or any other material ready to go by mid-May. There will also be another issue, #4, of the POSTAL WORKER, published in mid-May.

TELEPHONE Fraction Report--

by Harold K.

At present all the telephone comrades are working around their up-coming CWA convention, to be held on June 21st in Los Angeles. They are trying to get delegates to the convention elected in their locals, running as United Action (UA) candidates. The balloting is still going on in Louisville and Seattle. As comrades will already know from reading WP, the NY people have completed their election--the UA candidates didn't win, but made a remarkably strong showing in the election nonetheless.

The point of running in this delegate election is to raise issues around the contract; at the convention there will be a broad caucus of people who support the UA resolutions. The comrades are presently trying right now to get support from various local officials, etc., to build for a national contract campaign. We are also going to this convention to begin to build a network of contacts for a contract coalition in the future. In all of the three main cities, fund-raising is going on to send UA people to this convention even if they don't win the elections.

Seattle is currently pushing for elected stewards; it looks like there will be an election, and that the recently de-certified UA stewards will win the elections and win back their former posts. In Louisville, the local president launched an attack on a leading comrade there during a stewards' meeting. He explained that the company was out to get HK, and so therefore he didn't have to worry about him any more. St. Louis continues re-building at the local level for UA support.

Another issue of LONG DISTANCE will be out next week. The fraction will meet this weekend at the NC and have an initial discussion on perspectives for the next year and a quarter.

TEAMSTER Fraction Report--

by Joe N.

Evaluation of the Freight Strike

The forces for a decent contract came out of the contract fight stronger than they went into it. The credibility of TDC has increased among Teamsters who saw it as the only reason the strike happened at all, as the only source of information when the official union was silent, and as the only force willing to fight on the important issues. In spite of an inevitable post-strike let-down, there is strong sentiment among TDC militants for continuing.

The first post-strike step for TDC, the contract rejection campaign, emphasizes some of the weaknesses that first were revealed during the strike. While there is tremendous sentiment against the settlement, there is also no confidence that TDC can actually organize a rejection. This indicates TDC's lack of an organizational base. TDC has been more of a network and a movement than an organization, and that has hurt.

It can be argued that the strike was organized by the union against the ranks, rather than against the companies. The strike was begun without organization or information. Chicago was permitted to keep working. In quick succession, the Interim Agreement, the settlements with the Motor Carriers Labor Advisory Council and the Irregular Route Carriers, and the final settlement with the main employer group, TEL, added to the confusion of the ranks. They had little time to respond before the situation had changed again. This pace of events and the official nature of the strike left little room for rank and file initiative. People were glad the union had called the strike, and looked to it for leadership. Hostility centered on Fitz, and there were considerable illusions about and trust in many local officials. In Detroit, where local officials had been thoroughly discredited before the strike, TDC was able to challenge the local's direction of the strike. In other areas, awareness came too late.

In addition to lack of organization, the other major weakness of TDC was its inability to focus on one or two key issues. This allowed the official union to turn the strike into a wage fight, and probably will allow them to sell it. A clear issue would have been a peg to hang all the anger on, both during and after the strike. These two things--organizational weakness and lack of focus on a key issue--are the major problems of TDC. They must be corrected in any movement that goes beyond the contract.

Beyond the Contract

Despite organizational weaknesses, we have emerged from the strike greatly strengthened. Most Teamsters do not blame TDC for not "winning" its demands. They are disgusted by the role of the union, and saw us as the only sensible opposition.

But we must develop what we have quickly. That means developing among militants a clear sense of the kind of organization that needs to be built. The directions are these:

The economic crisis and the employers' offensive will put severe strains on the union and open it up to major reform currents. These currents will be susceptible to all the illusions that Teamster activists have about local candidates, the courts, and constitutional issues as levers for union reform. We must be able to ride with these currents, but distinguish our strategy from theirs.

The key is the rank and file strategy. We will advocate activity on the job, as well as in the union, around a program that will include contract demands, union democracy, corruption, unity of all Teamsters, etc. However, the programmatic list will not be the most important defining factor of the group. The key will be the focussing on issues that the ranks can actively struggle for.

To get this new organization started, we are doing the following: a document outlining the need, strategy, direction, and program of the organization will be produced shortly. This document and an outline of the proposed organizational structure will be taken to key TDC activists and an effort made to convince them to argue for the perspective. We will project with them a meeting of about 50 people for late May or early June. This meeting would plan and issue a call for a rank and file convention in late July or Early August.

We understand that many are impatient for an organization sooner, but we want to see that this is more firmly grounded politically, organizationally, and financially than was TDC. As soon as the document is written, an organizational outline done, and travel scheduled, local fractions will be notified of their responsibilities.

A Footnote on CONVOY--One of the major successes of TDC was CONVOY. We had the information. We will continue publishing a national paper--and encourage the development of local papers. The technical details of coordination will be part of the organizational perspective.

Central States UPS Contract Fight

An officially sanctioned Central States UPS contract strike began on May 1. The union has responded to UPSurge militancy by calling the strike and adopting a number of its contract demands. What the officials' strategy for either winning or selling out the strike is remains unclear.

The strike authorization meetings on the weekend of April 24-25 were a big step forward for UPSurge. Militants entered those meetings with four UPSurge motions. (See UPSurge #8 for details.) In five cities, all the motions passed. In most others, one or another got to the floor before the officials were either forced to promise action on them to forestall a vote or close the meeting abruptly.

UPSurge had also organized a pre-strike campaign to involve part-timers in the fight and the UPSurge leadership has committed itself to help direct strike activity from the Cleveland office on a rotating basis.

At this point the strike is fairly static, with neither the company nor the union making any effort to break it. UPSurge picket signs are much in evidence on most lines. There have been no confirmed reports of the company trying to run through the Central States.

A meeting of the UPSurge Central States Steering Committee was held in Cleveland on Wednesday, May 5. It discussed focussing on a few demands at the point of a sell-out, how to handle a tentative agreement, and the soliciting of support from other areas. It also decided on a petition campaign to reaffirm the ranks support for the UPSurge demands, and call for special local ratification meetings. The question of amnesty for two fired UPSurge militants from the Central States was discussed, with emphasis on the grievance procedure.

UPSurge is also moving ahead with a full organizing effort in the East, where the new area-wide agreement is due to be negotiated this summer. A meeting to kick off the campaign was held in Baltimore on April 24. About 200 militants adopted a list of demands similar to the Central States UPSurge proposals, and agreed to organize in their locals to prevent the handling of Central States' struck goods. A meeting of the Steering Committee elected at that meeting was scheduled for later this month to map strategy for supporting the Central States and organizing the East.