

Dear Comrades,

The attached document represents a serious shift for the IS. It is submitted to the group by the EC. It will be voted on at an NC June 9. The NC will be open.

The rest of the agenda has not yet been finalized and will be announced shortly. It will probably include discussions around new areas of work that are opening up - nuclear power, reproductive rights - as well as some discussions of our labor work.

EC members will be travelling to the branches to discuss this document at branch meetings throughout the month of May. They will contact the individual branches to make arrangements. If there are any questions contact the center.

In struggle,
Gay

The E.C. is proposing that the I.S. become a federation with a political definition that is looser and broader than what we are today, but that remains based on the notion that we are building a revolutionary socialist trend in the labor movement. It is our frank assessment that our attempt to build a Leninist workers combat organization in the working class in this period has failed. If we are not to fail as a socialist trend in the working class altogether, we must now make some severe changes in the internal life and organization structure, as well as clarifying our political perspectives.

To say that we have failed to build a Leninist organization is not to say that the entire experience of the I.S. has been a failure, or that there are no options open to us in the future. We have succeeded in rooting our cadres in the industrial working class. A number of our members have become leading figures in local unions, reform movements or groupings, and in other areas of union life. We have shown that revolutionary socialists can indeed lead workers in the struggles of the day. On the basis of these successes, and the erroneous lessons we have learned and the understanding we have gained, we can play a key role in future developments. We have not, however, been able to build a growing, internally healthy, Leninist group in this period.

The major problems of the organization now are easy to locate: 1) little or no growth; 2) a seemingly permanent factional situation that makes us more like two organizations than one; and flowing from that, 3) no effective internal discipline; and finally, 4) a crisis of political identity in which cadres active in the unions question the meaning and purpose of membership in the I.S. Each of these problems feeds on the other. For some members, under these circumstances, membership in the I.S. appears as a burden. For those in the Center, forced to balance factions and to head off fights that no one wants, but which always seem immanent, "politics" has the character of a treadmill.

We believe that the source of these problems, and of the mistakes in past attempts to deal with them, are to be found in the objective situation that prevails in the U.S. and in the American working class today. Under the current circumstances any attempt to build a genuine Leninist group will fail.

The failure of the I.S. in building a Leninist organization has also been duplicated by every other political current which emerged from the movement of the 60's with a party building perspective, and faced the conservatism of the late 70's. The result is the exhaustion politically of the cadres of that movement who have survived into the 70's.

Accompanying our past attempt to build a Leninist workers group was a heavy dose of voluntarism. This voluntarism was justified by our analysis of the period. This analysis said that in the context of the crisis, the traditional reformist leadership would be unable to lead reform struggles adequate to the response of the workers. We assumed a fairly rapid rise of worker resistance in the second half of the 1970's, that would push past what the reformists were willing to do. In part, this has turned out to be true. The traditional union leadership--and the official leaders of the women's and minority organizations--have not responded adequately. What we did not reckon on was the rise of new leaders whose politics and views were also reformist. Reform movements, or

reform-minded organizations and campaigns have arisen in the unions, among women, Blacks, and Latins. And, in some situations, revolutionary socialists have been able to fill vacuums and become leaders of real forces. But for the most part these movements, or impulses towards movements, have been led by people with liberal ideas about how society works and how to function in that society. On the one hand, this explains why virtually all impulses towards resistance and movement appear so tentative, so painfully slow in development, or in some cases stagnant. It also explains the difficulties of the revolutionary left. The presence of liberal leadership has filled the vacuums, the low level of social movement have added to a conservative, cautious political atmosphere that is difficult for revolutionaries to gain ground in.

The basic problem faced by the I.S. faces the entire revolutionary left. Today's revolutionary left is a product of the movements of the 1960's, and it has never transcended that fact. As a whole the revolutionary left has not grown. To be sure, hundreds, even thousands of people, including workers, have passed through the left. But no group has succeeded in establishing stable growth among sections of the population not already on the left. Occasional "realignments" have swelled one or another group, but the left has not reached much deeper into the population than it had ten years ago. The revolutionary left is certainly smaller than it was in the early 70's. The numerical stagnation of the left, and of the I.S., is primarily the result of a situation in which workers and social activists have not seen the need to go beyond reform. Reform organizations have grown--ACORN, NOW, various anti-nuke groups--but in so far as they have seen the need to move beyond a single issue pressure politics it has been in the direction of one or another version of mainstream liberal politics within the Democratic Party. The growth of DSOC and social democracy in general is both a result of this and a cause of its continued dominance among social activists.

For a group like the I.S., with a Leninist/voluntarist perspective, such a situation coupled with the subsequent lack of growth, is a breeding ground for factionalism. In other words, voluntarism and discipline do not mix well when combined with stagnation. With permanent factions, discipline becomes impossible in a situation where no one can "prove" their perspective over the others'. Hence the current state of the I.S. and of our inability to transcend it with the current set of assumptions about discipline and organization.

The final, and potentially most serious, problem facing I.S. members is the difficulty of maintaining a revolutionary political identity in a reformist movement. Many, perhaps most, socialist groups try to solve this problem by being sectarian. We have rejected this. For us the problem is compounded by the fact that other leaders of the union reform movement --and other social movements as well--who remain reformists in their political outlook, often function as we do. Furthermore, the base of these movements remains reformist in consciousness. Under these circumstances it is all too easy to feel an open identification with a revolutionary group to be more a hindrance than a help. It is easy to lose sight of the advantage that a national group provides by synthesizing our common and diverse experiences and the long-view that this gives us. For on a day to day basis our own actions, in today's circumstances, are often not much different from other movement activists. The fact that we have a long view, see the need for revolution down the road, etc., should be what holds us to our tasks, but can also become a source of impatience and frustration in a period that while obviously pregnant with the future,

the labor pains are far apart and delivery seems forever postponed.

Under all of these circumstances it is no surprise that the I.S. has ceased to be either voluntarist or Leninist in practice for some time. Our trade union work, for example, has matured and no longer tries to get blood from a stone by monumental acts of voluntarism. Nor can centralist discipline be revived by the application of voluntarism. Yet, because the pretense of discipline continues, political differences continue to find permanent factional expression in secret maneuvers and underground networks. This situation makes the I.S. even more unattractive to those workers or leftists who are sympathetic to us. On the other hand, it is difficult to see any advantages to this situation.

Furthermore, this permanent factionalism makes political discussion, and the important task of updating our political identity, more difficult. For the two major groups are locked in an organizational embrace that dictates a hostile repetition of the same debates year after year. For political discussion to be freed of the current set-up, for the debate over the role and functioning of revolutionaries in this period, and in the 80's, to be healthy and constructive, we believe that the parties involved must be broadened beyond the current I.S. majority-minority duality. The group must be loose enough for new trends to develop in it, or to enter it from other sections of the revolutionary left.

We also believe, however, that the dissolving of the I.S. would be a tragic mistake. It is clear that a revolutionary party cannot grow from the remnants of the movements of the 60's, but only through a new movement, a new left, produced by new struggles, and the healthy interaction between that movement and an organized group of revolutionaries. In the 1960's, we and others were unable to play that role with the movement, except sporadically in one or two places, because we lacked the organization and cadres to do so. We were the product of the movement, not its shaper. This was because of the collapse of the old left, including our own tendency, in the years just prior to the development of the new left. We face the same potential tragedy today. The collapse of the organization and cadres before the new movement develops. If so it will have the same tragic outcome as the 60's, a new left with great political volatility and instability, open to the politics which can derail it as sectarianism and Maoism did in the late 60's.

We therefore will oppose any attempt to liquidate the I.S. politically or organizationally. We believe its central ideas--revolutionary socialism from below, workers' democracy, insurrection, party and class, bureaucratic collectivism, independent struggles of the oppressed, etc.--and its cadres have a vital role to play in a new movement and a vital contribution to make in the politics of proletarian self-activity and emancipation. We are seeking to create the organizational form for these ideas to survive, and be reinforced, in the next few years, without enervating factional strife, or voluntarist exhaustion, so that the cadres of revolutionary Marxism can prepare for the time when it is possible to build successfully a Leninist party, or party embryo.

Deepening our roots as a political trend in the labor movement requires organization, exchange of experiences, the development of a national and even international perspectives. No string of local collectives is adequate for functioning in the American labor movement. A complete lack of organization makes political debate more difficult, and

the development of perspectives a merely random process. Furthermore, organizations remain a necessity for active political intervention in the unions and the social movements. We are not proposing dissolution, but a step backward to a looser form of organization--one that is more reflective of the relatively low level of struggle and the basically decentralized character of the movements that do exist.

The basic tasks of the I.S., are the same as those spelled out at our 1978 convention. We will continue to build the reform movement in the unions, with the long-range objective of creating a left-wing and a socialist trend in the labor movement. We will also help to build, or rebuild the movements of the oppressed. And we will work toward a revolutionary regroupment based on the class struggle. In the shorter run we will take any possible initiatives that can produce positive steps toward regroupment, or open the possibility of a larger, broader revolutionary socialist organization, so long as these steps are consistent with our emphasis on working class work and a perspective based above all on developments within the working class.

We are not proposing that the I.S. cease to have a Leninist outlook in politics. Rather, we are proposing an organizational adaptation to an unfortunate reality. The ability to adapt to reality is, after all, the central feature of Leninist method. We recognize that this change is a step backward from what is desirable, but it is one that is necessary to prevent further disintegration and to open the way, at this time, to some partial steps toward regroupment which, hopefully, can prevent, or help reduce the further disintegration of the revolutionary left as a whole.

The loosening of the I.S.'s organizational structure and the broadening of its political identity are not simply related to the internal situation in the I.S. Those workers who are coming to socialist politics and revolutionary conclusions view the proliferation of centralist revolutionary groups with narrow, exclusionary political definitions as divisive and uncalled for. While this is not always correct, and there is a need for political clarity that necessarily produces a variety of organizations, the fact also remains that the crisis of the revolutionary left is producing some movement in the direction of the ideas we view as central--both the understanding of the centrality of trade union work and the realization that Russia and China are not what they say they are. Moves towards positions and strategic ideas we hold central, of course, are not automatic or guaranteed. We want to intervene in this process and become a poll around which the best elements of the revolutionary left can rally. In particular, we want to be a poll against the absorption of the revolutionary left into social democracy or into some new, utopian, venture to create a "new communist party" or to collapse into the CP or SWP. Working with and at some point even merging with sections of the revolutionary left can offer us a road forward towards a larger, non-sectarian group based in the working class. The loosening of the I.S. and the ending of permanent factionalism will make it easier for us to convince other elements of the left that we can live with differences and debate without engaging in factionalism and splits. In so far as we do become a poll for the revolutionary left, and demonstrate to left-moving workers that the revolutionary left can work together and that we can lead that process, we will be more attractive to workers. It is this process that can position our political tendency, as well as a broader revolutionary left, for the tasks of the 1980's.

In this period we will recruit people to the IS politically on the basis of our full world view. We will motivate joining the IS as the necessity for a section of the rank and file/reform movement to be won to revolutionary ideas. In other words, people will join us not because "we're the best fighters" (although we are) but because we can explain what is happening in this increasingly irrational world we live in as a whole. Included among these ideas will be the necessity of revolutionary regroupment with healthy sections of the left as well as that wing of the rank and file movement that is won to these politics when the time comes, to build a revolutionary workers' party.

We propose that the IS become a national federation based on the following program in brief:

1. For workers revolution from below to establish workers power and workers democracy internationally.
2. For workers control of the trade unions, to build the rank and file and reform movements in the unions.
3. For labor independent political action. Opposition to the capitalist parties, to the corporate liberalism of the Kennedy's and its social democratic variant of the DSOC strategy.
4. For unity on the left - for political dialogue and united efforts in building movements and activity in the context of building a mass revolutionary organization.
5. For women's liberation, for Black liberation, for the liberation of all oppressed groups. For building the independent movements of the oppressed.
6. Opposition to all forms of class rule, capitalism and bureaucratic collectivism.
7. Opposition to all forms of imperialism, east and west.

THE SPECIFICS

1. The Center

The role of the center will be to put out CHANGES, develop pamphlets and educational material, facilitate communication and travelling, lead on the question of regroupment, continue to develop LERP and continue SUN.

The Center would no longer set the line on all questions, administer over fraction and branch problems or attempt to determine local perspectives.

Proposals for national work like the anti-nuke movement or anti-abortion campaigns would be suggestions. The local branches would determine their own priorities.

2. The EC

The role of the EC will be the editorial board of CHANGES, to speak

for the organization nationally, assure that the appointed tasks of the Center are carried out, organize NC meetings.

The EC will not necessarily be fulltime, although it will be resident in Detroit.

The EC will be elected at the June NC

3. CHANGES

CHANGES is the voice of the whole organization. The general line of much of the magazine will be guided by the EC. CHANGES, however will have room for differences in the group. A special section of the magazine on perspectives for revolutionaries will be organized around debate. Minorities in the IS will be able to present their views, as minorities, in this section. Topics and organization of this section will be guided by the editorial board. Articles for this section will be serious and not polemical against other positions in the group.

4. Branches

The local branch will determine its own priorities and perspectives. This will often mean hammering out a line as well (although help could be gotten from experts in either the center or other branches.)

Branches would also determine their own level of functioning and level of discipline in external work.

Branches would also be responsible for minimal national dues per member. The remainder would be used to pay local organizers, branch needs, etc.

5. Membership

Members would be members of branches or at large.

6. National fractions

National fractions would exist where relevant. Their function would be to determine the line for their area of work.

They would establish, internally, the level of discipline that fits their needs. Obviously the level of discipline needed in the national teamster fraction would be much higher than would be needed in the national steel fraction, as the steel work is much more local in character.

7. Discipline

Discipline will have to be relearned in the group growing out of the needs of the work. That is why we are proposing that levels of discipline be worked out by the units that carry out common work: branches, national fractions, etc. Discipline will concern questions of external work.

8. National Committee

A National Committee will meet every six months. It would be delegated by branch and elected each time. The ratio would be one delegate per ten members or major fraction thereof. A branch of 5-9 members would get one delegate, 10-14 two delegates, etc.

The role of the NC will be communication and discussion, including the dissemination of political discussion throughout the organization.

9. National Convnetion

A national convention will be held in two years. The NC will be impowered to call a convention earlier if the situation changes.

10. Rights of Minorities

Minorities within the group will have the fight to recruit to the group on the basis of their politics.

Minorities will have the right to publish their own material externally, as long as it ws clearly stated what it is. These meterails will be circulated by the center.

Minorities will have access to the pages of CHANGES as stated under CHANGES editotial policy.

Minorities will have the right to circulate material internally either through an internal bulletin or a seperate document sent out as part of a regular mailing.

11. National Staff

Sifficient national staff will be hire to produce CHANGES and administer the national federation.

(SUN and LERP and seperate staffs.)