



Discussion Bulletin

Published by
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
873 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003

Vol. 27, No. 7
August 1969

Contents

	Page
ON SENDING YOUNG COMRADES INTO THE INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNIONS, By Barbara Gregorich and Phil Passen	2
ON THE GI ANTIWAR MOVEMENT, By Allen Myers	4

20 cents

ON SENDING YOUNG COMRADES INTO THE INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNIONS

By Barbara Gregorich and Phil Passen

The purpose of this document is to discuss the need for the party to encourage, in a conscious, organized way, young comrades who are not directly engaged in campus work to get jobs or learn trades which enable them to join industrial unions. As recently as 1965 the basis for this need was stated in our organizational bulletin, where we said:

"The working class is the only class in modern society that is progressive and truly revolutionary. Only the working class is capable of saving humanity from barbarism. Only a revolutionary party can lead the proletariat to the realization of this historic mission. To achieve power, the revolutionary party must be deeply rooted among the workers, it must be composed predominantly of workers and enjoy the respect and confidence of the workers.

"Without such a composition it is impossible to build a programmatically firm and disciplined organization which can accomplish these grandiose tasks. A party of non-workers is necessarily subject to all the reactionary influences of skepticism, cynicism, soul-sickness and capitulatory despair transmitted to it through its petty-bourgeois environment.

"To transform the SWP into a proletarian party of action, particularly in the present period of reaction, it is not enough to continue propagandistic activities in the hope that by an automatic process workers will flock to the banner of the party. It is necessary, on the contrary, to make a concerted, determined and systematic effort, consciously directed by the leading committees of the party, to spread out into all sectors of the mass movement -- civil rights organizations which are becoming radicalized and in which workers predominate; labor organizations within industry and among the unemployed; campuses where an increasing number of students are turning toward socialist ideas." (our emphasis) ("The Organizational Character of the SWP," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Volume 25, Number 3, pages 28-29.)

While we have, since 1965, made a "concerted, determined, and systematic effort, consciously directed by the leading committees of the party" to enter the campuses, we have not made the same effort among the industrial proletariat.

Why and Why Now?

Certainly in most branches there are comrades who are members of trade unions. Also, there are always occasional comrades who decide to enter indus-

trial unions or apprenticeship programs. The worst attitude we can take toward our trade union work, however, is to leave the decisions as to which comrades should enter the unions entirely up to individuals. The entire history of Marxism has taught us the need for a conscious, organized orientation toward all aspects of party work. We are not advocating that the party tell a comrade that he or she must enter a trade union, but that a general line be set of encouraging those comrades (and the number is increasing) who graduate from school or who hold jobs of little strategic importance (clerical, computer programming, sales, social work, etc.) to enter basic industry (auto, steel, transportation) or to begin learning a trade that will enable them to do so.

We think that the party should consciously lay emphasis on entering basic industry rather than on merely entering trade unions. In the recent Internal Bulletin which listed party membership figures there was only one figure on comrades' trade union membership. That was that 35% of the party are in trade unions. (Internal Bulletin, April, 1969, Number 2, page 30.) The bulletin did not give an age breakdown on which party members are in unions and it did not list which unions comrades are in. It was reported at the 1969 YSA Plenum that 26 out of 784 YSAers are in trade unions. Combining this with other figures from the Internal Bulletin, we see that only a small percentage of party youth are in unions. But what unions are our young comrades in? There are no figures on this, but from our knowledge of the party we estimate that a large number of these comrades are in nonstrategic areas of employment like social work or teaching.

We think that young comrades who have to work should, whenever possible, begin developing roots in the decisive sections of the proletariat -- the sections that Marxists know will be the key to the victory of the socialist revolution. Comrade Mandel, in his speech "Workers Under Neo-Capitalism," describes what he calls the increasing proletarianization of white collar, clerical, and technical workers and even says that in the broad sense of the term they can be called part of "industrial labor." However, he never says, and our party has never said, that our orientation should change from the concept that the key sections of labor are those who play the basic role in the process of production and distribution -- the production workers in auto and the basic metallurgical industries and the transportation workers. On the contrary, comrade Novack said in

his speech to the November, 1968 YSA convention:

"The relative reduction in the directly producing force does not nullify the key role of the proletarians within industry. In the relations of production, quality is more decisive than quantity. Ten thousand transport workers are far more crucial in social struggle than ten thousand office workers. When 35,000 transport workers shut down the New York City subways and buses several years ago, everything ground to a halt in the hub of U.S. capitalism.

"The strategic position that the mass production, transport, and communications workers occupy in the operations of capitalism invests their actions with a power exceeding their actual numbers. As direct producers, they alone can start or stop the most vital sectors of the economy. The capitalist regime is well aware of the latent power of the strike weapon wielded by blue-collar workers and constantly seeks to hamper its use. In practice, the rulers have little doubt about its revolutionary potential.

"Thus one million industrial workers command incomparably more revolutionary power than seven million college students. Although the three million teachers constitute the largest single occupational group in the country, their collective economic power is less than that of the half-million blue-collar workers in the steel mills." ("Can American Workers Make a Socialist Revolution?" International Socialist Review, January-February, 1969, pages 56-57.)

It is this key section of the working class that is most important when we speak of rooting the party in the working class. The tendency that gains hegemony in this section will lead the entire class.

We have in the party today a growing number of comrades who have graduated or will soon be graduating from the YSA. There are always YSAers who are leaving school. These comrades will be able to spend only a limited amount of time involved in student work, no matter what kind of jobs they have. This situation presents the party with the opportunity to take the greatest advantage of our campus recruitment -- to build a young cadre rooted in the workers' movement. We know that when the working class as a whole begins to radicalize, our comrades will not be able to just jump in and be listened to. We will have to have been in the workers' organizations -- discussing, analyzing, and demonstrating our capacity as leaders -- in order to be listened to. Now is the time to begin

developing that core of proletarian revolutionists who will be listened to, because now is the time when we have the forces with which to begin.

The growing atmosphere of dissatisfaction within the industrial unions gives our comrades increasing opportunities for fruitful contact work and in some cases for participation in developing left-wing union caucuses. During the last few years we have seen growing inflation, spiraling cost of living, speed-up, and problems of automation set an increasing number of workers into motion: first against their bosses to protect their standard of living, and then against the antidemocratic and collaborationist methods of the union bureaucrats. Young workers are especially dissatisfied. They are most concerned with job security and actual wages, the two things the bureaucrats have been sacrificing for the so-called fringe benefits.

Even though the working class as a whole is not radicalizing now, the general climate in the country and the unions is one of at least a willingness to listen to various political viewpoints. Indicative of the general climate in the unions are the growing number of union officials who are speaking out publicly against the war, the Alliance for Labor Action's emphasis at its founding convention on ending the war as "the number one priority" of labor, and the growing number of black caucuses in unions. Despite this, we still do not expect anything more than one-by-one recruitment out of the unions in this period. Nevertheless, we must have comrades in the unions and these comrades must talk politics to fellow workers. As Comrade Breitman said in his 1965 document, "We must do it [propagandize within the unions] to build the party now and to establish political ties with the human material out of which the future union left wing will be built." ("Political Work in the Unions," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Volume 25, Number 12, page 2.)

In conclusion, we are not saying that the party should pull any of its student members off of the campus. We are not saying that the party should send all members into the industrial proletariat. Nor are we proposing a "summer work-in" of the SDS variety. But we are proposing that the party, in accord with our understanding of the necessity of being rooted in the working class, take advantage of the recent recruitment and consciously send some young comrades into the industrial proletariat.

July 25, 1969
Cleveland

ON THE GI ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

By Allen Myers

Although the GI antiwar movement is still in its infancy, most of the political divisions that exist in the civilian movement exist in the GI movement as well, although in an often modified and less sharply posed form. The key distinction which separates our line from that of all other tendencies is the perspective or lack of perspective of building mass actions among GIs.

The civilian antiwar movement is already massive, although not as massive as we expect it to become. Because of its visible size, it has sometimes been able to force the participation of organizations which, in their basic line, are little inclined to devote energy to the building of such an independent mass movement. The recent approaches to the antiwar movement by SDS are just the most recent illustration of this process.

On the other hand, the GI antiwar movement is anything but massive, although mass sentiment against the war does exist and in the army, at least, probably surpasses the sentiment in the civilian population. This situation gives our opponents a relief from the pressure to operate within an existing mass movement which they are subjected to when trying to project their line in the civilian world.

The Communist Party

CP participation in the GI antiwar movement is virtually non-existent. The last implication of such activity -- if it deserves that name -- that I am aware of was Ron Lockman's refusal to go to Vietnam. There are no GI papers which appear to be produced by members of the CP or Du Bois Club or to reflect their line.

Youth Against War and Fascism

At first glance, YAWF, through its creation of the American Serviceman's Union, appears to have a substantial following. The ASU claims a membership of several thousand and a circulation of its paper, The Bond, of 15,000. These figures, however, require some comment.

For the vast majority of its members, belonging to the ASU means only that the individual paid one dollar to get The Bond instead of receiving it for free. The Bond had the advantage of being first in the field, and YAWF has recognized the importance of ensuring that it appears regularly. Except for a small number of "organizers," many of whom spend most of their time in the stockade, most ASU members joined simply

because The Bond was the first organized antiwar expression they met with in the military.

The ASU is a "union" like no other that has ever existed. It concentrates not on collective action but on individual resistance; The Bond, for example, gives much prominence to GIs who refuse orders to Vietnam, "take sanctuary" in churches, "resign" from the military, etc. In addition, relatively little space in The Bond is devoted to the war, the greatest attention being paid to grumbling about conditions of life in the military. The ASU lists a program of 8 demands, only one of which mentions the war -- and even this demand is phrased in a way that is designed to encourage individual resistance rather than collective action: "The right to disobey illegal orders -- like orders to go and fight in an illegal war in Vietnam."

The ASU leadership -- which is not elected, although one of the ASU demands is for the election of officers in the military -- is extremely sectarian, regarding the ASU as the movement. Although they have refused to help build demonstrations, they try to take credit when GIs participate, just as they have implied in The Bond that several GI papers which have no connection with the ASU are ASU papers. (YAWF is apparently quite worried about the mushroom growth of GI papers outside its control. In recent months, it has been encouraging its members to found local papers.)

Fortunately, it is very rare to meet an ASU member, or even one of their organizers, who shares the leadership's sectarianism. For the rank-and-file, joining the ASU has not solved any of their problems, and they can be persuaded as easily as any other GI to participate in collective, antiwar actions. We can expect that as the movement grows, the ASU's following will dwindle rapidly, if not absolutely, then at least relative to the strength of saner tendencies.

Progressive Labor

There are two GI papers, one at Fort Gordon and one at Fort Hood, which have pushed the views of PL. Their line is basically one of abstention, papered over with super-revolutionary rhetoric. The way they tell it, fascism -- always misspelled, for some reason -- is just around the corner if it's not here already. Consequently, it is rank madness to "expose" GIs in demonstrations, since this will automatically result in repression. The only thing GIs can do is sneak

around the barracks preparing for -- the socialist revolution!

Lest anyone think I exaggerate, I'd like to quote a little from Fatigue Press, published at Fort Good. In an article last winter attacking the planned April 5-6 demonstrations, FP said: "This type of action pulls soldiers off posts and orients them toward civilian activities, thus shifting their emphasis from the post where it should be, to the campus and city. In addition, the kind of soldier who would consent to participate in the sort of activity which would single him out so obviously probably has potential as an organizer. But if he is out marching, he is separated from those he should be organizing."

"Civilians seem often to ignore the fact, that, though they feel very little repercussion from such an activity, GIs are hassled endlessly upon their return to duty. Sure, marches and rallies are legal, but soldiers are punished for their participation nonetheless."

"Then the civilians say, 'If you get busted, stand up for your constitutional rights of freedom of speech and assembly,' completely overlooking the fact that constitutional rights exist only for the rich. Also, crying 'Fight for your rights' implies that these rights do exist and shifts the center of our attention from revolution to reform."

"Lastly, one must petition before one is allowed to hold an outdoor mass meeting or march. Thus we are asking the man for permission to exercise our rights, and are leaving ourselves wide open for a bust at anytime he feels we are becoming a threat."

Students for a Democratic Society

The line of SDSers in the army is distinguished from that of PL chiefly by the use of "barracks organizing" instead of "revolution" as the verbal fig leaf for their abstentionism. "Barracks organizing" is counterposed to collective mass action in the same way that "community organizing" used to be counterposed to mass demonstrations. Like PL, the SDS line plays on and encourages fear of the brass.

The "barracks organizing" of SDS, like the verbal radicalism of PL, tends to degenerate into nothing but bitching about conditions. (This is a tendency that afflicts many of the GI papers, whether or not they are under the direct influence of SDSers.) This is not at all incompatible with periodic leaps to extreme ultraleft positions.

This spring, New York SDS began a major intervention at Fort Dix, support-

ing a bi-weekly 8 page "GI paper" called Shakedown and opening a coffeehouse. Both tools were consciously used to try to prevent GI participation in the April 5 demonstration and in Memorial Day demonstrations in New York and Philadelphia.

Since the split in SDS, however, the two prime movers behind the intervention have been excluded from the paper and the coffeehouse, and there are a few signs that SDS's activities at Dix may be a little less factional in the future.

Events have already done much to destroy the credibility of the ultraleft line. The development of GIs United at Fort Jackson, and later at Fort Bragg, was, as the Political Committee resolution notes, a higher form of the movement, raising the question of the right of GIs to conduct antiwar activities openly on post. GIs United is an eloquent contrast to the ultraleft "barracks organizing" demagogy -- just as the building of a mass civilian movement contrasts with the SDS verbal radicalism of "anti-imperialism." At the same time, the successful defense of the Fort Jackson 8 demonstrated to GIs that it is possible to win -- a perspective that is indispensable to the eventual development of a mass movement.

We should not expect, however, that the immediate future will see successful attempts to imitate the GIs United development at other bases -- or even that the two existing organizations will survive the removal of key activists. In a sense, Fort Jackson -- and Fort Bragg was really an extension of the Fort Jackson situation -- was a preview of what we may expect in the next stage of development of the GI movement. The fact that this next stage may be just around the corner increases the importance of recognizing the distinction.

GIs United developed because of two key ingredients: a nucleus of activists who thoroughly understood the three-point approach outlined in the Political Committee resolution; and a significant number of GIs willing to step across the line between antiwar sentiment and antiwar action. I have not discussed with the participants the way in which the Fort Jackson situation developed and am therefore not prepared to say how much the second ingredient was dependent of the first. But what is important to note for the future is that the two factors will interact: Leadership that understands the three points will be able to use the transitional character of that approach to move larger numbers of GIs into action, and a growing movement will tend to throw up leaders who understand the approach.

The reason that we cannot depend on

more GIs United's tomorrow is that this interaction has as yet nowhere developed to the point where it is self-sustaining. Such a development is more and more favored by the objective situation -- simultaneous continuation of the war and the "peace talks," revival of the civilian antiwar movement, growing opposition to the war in the civilian population, the probability of sectors of organized labor entering the movement -- and of course in the last analysis depends on the continuation of it. But the concrete strategical problem facing the GI antiwar movement is: What kind of activities at the present stage will draw in the largest number of GIs and prepare the way for mass GIs United-type formations in the next?

An activist at Fort Dix once told me: "What we need (in order to build the movement) is a teach-in a month." He was not speaking about the need for education, although that is an important factor; he was speaking of the need for concrete activities in which GIs could be involved on-post and off-post simultaneously. That is, in the present stage the GI antiwar movement needs to be dual-centered.

One center naturally must be on base: distributing GI papers, publicizing activities, seeking out new activists, etc.

The other center is in the civilian world, generally around some section of the civilian movement. It may be any one or more of a number of activities of varying usefulness: teach-ins, publishing GI papers, coffeehouses, demonstrations, etc.

There is no point in bemoaning this second center of activities; it exists and will continue to exist in the present stage wherever an even slightly hospitable civilian environment exists. The GI movement is not yet at a level where its entire energies can be consumed on post. An orientation which requires activists to concentrate exclusively on on-post organization is more likely at this point to produce demoralization than new branches of GIs United.

Although, as noted, the GIs United type of organization represents a higher stage of the struggle, it is important not to draw any artificial or mechanical distinction between on-post and off-post activities. Properly directed, the dual centers of the present movement are complementary, not competitive. In the very beginning of a movement at a given base, when there are a mere handful of activists who find few GIs willing to become involved in action, the off-post center will be predominant. As more GIs become involved, the on-post activities take on

proportionally more weight, until, with a GIs United situation, the movement spends virtually all its time and energy in on-post organizing.

An important caveat needs to be added to this sketchy schematic outline: Not all off-post activities lend themselves to this sort of development; some may cut directly across it. To take two examples:

1) Coffeehouses have generally tended to become an obstacle to the development of the movement, ending up as little more than places where GIs drink coffee and shoot bull. In part this has been true because the coffeehouses have usually been operated by political tendencies that cannot offer GIs a practical political orientation, but even under the best circumstances a coffeehouse would be only a building, a place to meet and plan activities or conduct teach-ins, etc. In actual practice, frequenting coffeehouses has usually been a substitute for political activity.

2) GIs in the New York area a few months ago decided to open a "Service-man's Antiwar Center" in the city in spite of the fact that they did not yet have a sufficient base for such an organization. Consequently, the Service-man's Antiwar Center was stillborn; it is an office where the few activists involved waste their energies sending out letters and appeals that bring no response from other GIs. S.A.C., like the coffeehouses, is thus a substitute for building the movement.

There is at least one more danger during the inevitable period when the GI movement is oriented primarily toward the civilian world. This is a premature involvement in the factional battles of the civilian movement. While such involvement has occasionally won a few activists to a better understanding of and respect for the line of the SWP and the YSA, it far more often produces confusion, cynicism and demoralization.

The three-point approach outlined in the Political Committee resolution is transitional not only in the sense in which we normally use the term. It is transitional also in the sense that to the extent it is followed it tends to lead the GI movement from the stage at which it is centered around off-post activities to the stage in which it is centered on-post. The concept of the GI as citizen, for example, really means the GI as civilian. The attraction of the concept is due to the fact of the temporary nature of the GI's situation; being a soldier is regarded as a temporary aberration from his normal state, as an artificial covering over his real nature. GIs view themselves as citizens not be-

cause of constitutional arguments so much as because they don't view themselves as GIs. But the GI who reasserts his civilian nature by participating in antiwar activities off post on weekends is led by the logic of his position to continue his "civilian" activities when he returns to his base. -- Conversely, one of the hallmarks of the GI influenced by ultraleft abstentionist ideas is the tendency to insist on the complete uniqueness of the GI's situation, his isolation from the civilian world, the "inevitability" of repression, etc.

Thus we are led back to our starting point: The subjective factor controlling the growth of the GI antiwar movement will be the extent to which GIs understand the necessity of open, collective action, the concept of the GI as citizen, and the importance of concentrating on the Vietnam war as the central issue. GIs will absorb these ideas, if they do, from their contacts with the civilian antiwar movement, or rather, from that section of the civilian movement which understands this approach.

This means primarily the Student Mobilization Committee. A large, dynamic SMC can serve as both a pole of attraction and an example for GI activists, and is therefore, in addition to its prime function of building the militant wing of the civilian movement, an important aid in the construction of the GI antiwar movement.

It also means that comrades involved in antiwar work must be conscious of the need to explain our perspective whenever we meet GIs. We should avoid the attitude "I'm a civilian and he's a GI, so I can't tell him anything." GIs come around the civilian movement because they are looking for answers; it is our task to make sure they receive the correct answers.

The Pace of Development

"Sentiment against the war is widespread among GIs, as it is among civilian youth. But because of the restrictive nature of the military, antiwar actions by GIs are still in their initial stages. Objective developments indicate that the pace of GI antiwar protests can be expected to increase rapidly, especially as they become more and more linked up with the mass civilian protests. The development of truly massive protests and a massive radicalization in the army could only occur interlinked with a similar mood in the civilian population and its readiness to support and defend the antiwar GIs. Our perspective is that of a parallel and interrelated development of GI and civilian antiwar protests."

While I have no argument with this perspective from the Political Committee resolution, I think it is important to point out that there is at the present moment a certain disjuncture between the stage of development of the two movements. If we conservatively estimate the number of civilians involved in at least minimal fashion in the antiwar movement at one million, (one million students participated in the April 26, 1968 student strike), that represents $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1% of the entire American population. A comparable percentage of the $3\frac{1}{2}$ million men in uniform would be 17,500. I know of no precise way to estimate the number of GIs involved in some sort of action against the war, but clearly to put it at even $\frac{1}{3}$ of that 17,500 would be generous. If we compare the 1 million civilian participants not to the entire population, but to their age group, then the disproportion between the civilian and GI movement becomes still more obvious.

I do not cite these figures in order to indicate that we can or should expect any kind of such strict mathematical correlation between the numbers participating in the two movements; to do so would be to substitute arithmetic for thought. What is indicated is a contradiction between the extent of antiwar sentiment within the military and its expression in action.

It is clear that this contradiction cannot be definitively resolved short of the sort of mass upsurge in the civilian population that involves a sizable part of the working class and thus creates a situation in which the majority of GIs can express their sentiments in action. But we cannot expect that this contradiction will simply simmer quietly until the conditions for its resolution are achieved.

Nor will the contradiction be alleviated by a smooth, steady growth, at whatever speed, of the number of GIs involved in the movement. It is likely that in the immediate future the growth of the GI movement will be even more erratic and uneven than it has been in the past. At times this unevenness will be visible in such things as a large turnout for a demonstration or the circulation of a petition on a particular post. At others, it will take a form which is harmful to the movement: riots, stockade rebellions, etc.

The same objective situation in which GIs United was born exists at every post in the country, and can be expected to intensify as long as the war continues. The subjective conditions are nowhere near as favorable.

It should be remembered that the

situation at Fort Jackson came dangerously close to developing into a riot instead of into GIs United. Had it not been for the intervention of politically-advanced militants, there would have been a brief riot, followed by repression and the destruction for a time of the movement at Jackson. That kind of development remains a real possibility wherever GIs have not yet absorbed the lessons of

GIs United.

On the other hand, where these lessons are learned in time by GIs, the temporary upsurges that occur at various bases can be converted into permanent gains for the GI antiwar movement.

New York
August 1, 1969