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Dear Comrades,

Attached is an edited transcript of a report given to
the Political Committee by Frank Lovell on February 20, 1970.

Comradely,

Jack Barnes
Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

INITIAL TRADE UNION SURVEY

By Frank Lovell, February 20, 1970

I recently visited our branches in Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, San Francisco, Oakland-Berkeley, and Los Angeles; also, I stopped off in Phoenix where we have friends and a YSA local.

In all these branches I gave a short explanation of my visit in order to allay any anticipation that we may be planning any major change in orientation or basic policy. I explained that the purpose of the trip was simply to take a closer look at what we have in the unions, how many comrades are there, and to get a better appreciation of changes in the union movement.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Early in November, 1969, we sent out a questionnaire to all branches seeking the number of comrades in industry, and by last week (February 10, 1970) we had heard from 12 branches and four cities where we have at-large members. The branches reported more comrades in unions than we had known about, and we have several at-large members active in unions.

While in Minneapolis, the organizer there turned over to me a list of 11 members of unions recruited since he had responded to our questionnaire. These 11 range in age from 19 to 35. Four are in the 19 to 21 age bracket, and five are in the 27-29 range. Two are 35. All these comrades came to us from industry, and some from industries where we have comrades with years of seniority. None were recruited through union activity. All came to us by some other route, from the Forum, from the campus literature table, or antiwar work.

One comrade, just being recruited when I was there, came to us through the trade union committee against the war that our comrades had organized. He has just finished his apprenticeship in the Machinist Union and had tried to get the union to send an official observer to the November 15 action in Washington. He offered to make a contribution to the Machinist Lodge for this purpose and was somewhat surprised that they did not accept his offer which was made in good faith. This experience was part of his education.

Another comrade, younger, is a railroad worker. He came to a Forum. We have another railroad worker who is also a part-time student. He first learned about us at the campus literature table.

All these new comrades are interested in their unions and feel the potential power of the unions. Like the majority of workers they are union conscious.

I wish I could report that this recruitment of young workers is a trend in our party today, but the experience in Minneapolis is uncommon as yet.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

One of the purposes of the trip, besides to get a better view of what we have in the unions, was to get a more clear understanding of some special situations that have developed.

1) In Chicago two comrades in railroad who, almost as if by accident, fell into a movement that was beginning to get under way, gave direction to it, and I think they are primarily responsible for the direction it took. It is known as the "Right to Vote Movement." The central demand is the right to vote on the union contract.

Our young comrades managed to give this movement its present organizational form. They have reached out in all directions, and they are getting a big response from locals of the union in different parts of the country, and locally; and some in the union apparatus are encouraging them.

I don't believe there is any "militant trade unionist," working independently or in conjunction with other so-called progressives, who could have accomplished what our comrades, in such a short time, have done.

This was possible because our party apparatus is available, and because of our accumulated experience in this industry.

We have made new friends. We have a new appreciation of the oppressive forces at work in this industry. We think the Right to Vote Committees have a chance to rally railroad workers for big actions.

2) Out in San Francisco, we have a special situation in the Painters' Union. The history of this union in the Bay Area is unique in the building trades. It has a recent militant tradition established under the leadership of Dow Wilson, who was murdered by the contractors.

Our comrade Nat, a very highly skilled worker and partly on this account a popular and respected member of the local, is the outstanding leader among those who strive to carry on the militant tradition. As you know, Nat is a trained and experienced politician.

At present there is a split within the bureaucracy of the Bay Area painters' set-up, and it appears as if Nat's campaign will have use of the Bay Area painters' paper. If this develops, his chances of winning the election are favorable.

This is a departure from our general policy in trade unions. We do not think it advisable to become involved in power struggles under present circumstances. But in this case, given the special circumstances and the particular comrades involved, we believe we stand to gain from it.

If our candidate wins, we believe he will be able to use his office to good political advantage. This is a rather unusual situation, and we would like to carry it through as an experiment to find out how far we can go.

3) We also have in the Bay Area a UAW caucus in which Tom Cagle is active. We took a close look at this caucus and found that it is similar to most UAW caucuses, composed of some healthy workers salted down with union politicians and self-seeking hangers-on. So Tom and our comrades there decided to cut themselves adrift from these perennial campaigners and "union activists," and seek new allies.

Since Tom's series on "Life in an auto plant" about 25 subs to The Militant have been sold in the plant, and in addition our YSA comrades from the Hayward local sell a bundle of 50 at the plant gate every week. We hope to put together a slate of candidates from readers of The Militant to run as delegates to the coming UAW convention. We do not know what the chances of success are, but the comrades there want to try it.

"Life in an auto plant" is being published as a pamphlet, and if we can get this out in time it should serve well as part of the campaign literature.

We are anxious to make a good showing. If the slate wins it will be a big victory for us. There are many auto workers around the country who know us (some with whom we are in rather close contact) and several of them will be delegates to the UAW convention. If Tom and his slate are elected they will meet others who are interested in organizing a national caucus, and there Tom will speak with authority.

The comrades in Oakland do not have the idea that it will be a tragedy if they fail to make it as delegates to the UAW convention, but they are in the election to win.

CALLS FOR HELP

In the recent period the party and YSA have received calls from different people active in the union movement, some of them friends of ours, others part of the union bureaucracy. Sometimes a union militant who is in trouble comes to us.

1) During the GE strike the union bureaucracy felt its back was to the wall and it sought help from all quarters. We responded through the SMC, and our comrades at Columbia University provided an example of how the student antiwar movement can collaborate with the trade union movement to mutual advantage.

2) In another part of the country we were confronted with quite a different situation. A union organizer, whom we know and with whom we have worked in the past, discovered that a YSA local had been formed on a campus in the area where he was organizing. He

got the idea that it would serve his purposes well to get some of these students to help him, and he would tell them how.

The local YSA members had a different idea. They said, "We are glad to help you, but we will have to do it in the way we know best. We are students, and we will do what students can do." They found out that the industry our friend was trying to organize had a big account with the university. So the students organized campus demonstrations to demand that the university close its account with the non-union company. The university granted this demand of the students, and the workers in the plant voted for the union. In this way our comrades made friends with the most active rank and file organizers of the union. This relation enabled them to sell Militants and explain our politics.

3) In San Francisco we have a good relationship with union leaders -- militants -- in the oil industry. Some of our leading comrades were invited to a meeting of the local union executive committee. Conditions in this industry, very similar to those imposed by GE upon electrical workers, are such that the union officers (nearly all of whom work in the refineries) are anxious for help from any student group that can expose this oil industry and in any way help to cripple it.

4) In Minneapolis we have a comrade who was the central leader in the \$1-an-hour movement of the printers' local there last year. He is known as a socialist and a friend of the student antiwar protesters.

It happened recently that one of the union print shops which puts out the university paper was notified that the account was being closed. Someone at the university had the idea to move the paper to a non-union shop.

Right away the union secretary called our comrade. "Isn't there something you can do about this? Can't the students demand that their paper be published in a union shop?" Our printer comrade consulted with the campus fraction, and they agreed that something could be done. When I was there they were organizing the action.

Such activity may not seem to be immediately beneficial, maybe we don't sell a single Militant or make even one new contact in the union, but it helps our campus work and we believe it will help us in the unions soon.

Because of the way our printer comrade in Minneapolis has conducted his union work, in close consultation with the leading comrades in the branch, he has most recently been called to another city by a militant leader of one of the union locals to consult and

advise about how the \$1-an-hour movement was organized.

WORKER-STUDENT ALLIANCE

Our formula is the one we worked out during the GE strike. That is, that students should do what students can do on campus, that they should try to align themselves with workers' struggles to make common cause with the workers, but not to seek to enter workers' organizations as advisers or leaders of strike actions.

I have already mentioned two or three instances where our YSA comrades performed well, did exactly the right thing without much coaching from the party.

We don't always have an opportunity on campus to become involved in a strike-related situation. And it often seems to our student comrades that they are in an awkward situation when SDS groups -- PL or IS influenced -- come around to the YSA literature tables to ask, "Where is your literature about the unions?", or "What is your relation to the workers?" Then comes their big argument: "You say you are going to make a revolution. How will you make a revolution without the working class? What are you doing to inspire the working class? Why don't you organize and lead the workers?"

In Los Angeles we have two young comrades who are in a unique position. They are railroad workers. But they are also students. They work on the railroad at night and go to school in the daytime. One, maybe both, had been around "the movement" before joining the YSA. They know how to talk to students, including the ultra-left variety. And they also know how to talk to the young workers on the job about the antiwar movement, about the need to change society fundamentally. But they did not know how to relate to the union, the existing organization of the workers in their industry. These worker-student comrades were immediately responsive to the efforts of the Right to Vote Committees in the railroad union, the United Transportation Union.

There are other ways students can reach workers, determined partly by what our worker comrades are doing. An example of this is the sale of Militants at the plant gate in Fremont by our student leaders in Hayward. These YSA student leaders, activists on campus in student government, were enthusiastic about their Militant sales at the auto plant. Part of their enthusiasm resulted from their interest in working with and helping the auto fraction there.

There is also a certain gratification in selling at plant gates now because sales are usually good. Our comrades in Detroit found this to be the case even though we had no comrades working in the particular plant. The sale of Militants made friends for us and brought us some contacts.

ATTITUDES WITHIN THE PARTY

In all the branches the response to our present interest in changes within the union movement and the working class was enthusiastic, it seemed to me.

I found there is a rather large number of comrades in the social service unions, the teachers' union, the professions and semi-professions. These unions are different from the old-line unions. They are not job-trusts. The membership is young. And this is where many of our young comrades are.

There is a tendency to think that this area is not suited to "union work." But as it turns out some of our comrades have been active in these fields and have made party gains.

For example, a young comrade in Los Angeles is an official in his social service union. He has made one recruit there, sold 43 subs in the last circulation drive, got the union to endorse the antiwar demonstration last fall, and in addition the union contributed several hundred dollars to support the antiwar movement.

Likewise in Seattle, Debbie is a minor official of the Social Service Workers' Union, a delegate to the Central Labor Council. She brought in a resolution from her union to the Council supporting Black militants who were picketing construction sites to get jobs for Black workers. This resolution did not go over well with the building trades representatives to the Council, but it won support for Debbie among other delegates (those from the Teachers' Union.) The Teachers' Union passed a similar resolution supporting the rights of Black workers in the building trades. And when these actions were announced to the local press, Debbie got a good deal of publicity which made her popular in the Black community.

There are several instances like this that develop -- just naturally -- in the course of our work. Very often a position in a union of the social workers or teachers type can serve a very useful purpose, especially when such a job can be handled easily without consuming all the time of a comrade or group of comrades. In such cases, of course, the all-consuming "union activity" can become counter-productive.

Without exception, I found that our comrades in the leadership of the branches have a realistic appreciation of the relation between work in unions at this stage and the over-all needs of the party.

CONCLUSIONS

There is something new in the unions, I think, that comrades generally feel, or sense, and that is beginning to be written about.

It is a process of gestation in the unions. Some movement is developing, some changes occurring.

A whole class of graduates has come off the campuses, and out of the high schools, and gone into industry. They go where they can find jobs, and jobs are none too plentiful now. They keep looking. They are changing the nature of the work force.

In San Francisco, Rolland, who is in the building trades, described the iron workers on the construction sites there. He says even the physical appearance of the work force in this particular trade has changed. These workers, aloft in the steel skeletons of the new buildings, look like hippies with their long hair. They are not hippies at all. They are young workers, some with college experience. So, all we need to do is look around to know that the work force is changing.

We also know, from our recent experiences, that the unions are changing. There are opportunities for our ideas to get a hearing, for us to sell our literature, and for us to recruit.

There ought to be more opportunities for our candidates to speak at union meetings in the 1970 campaigns than ever before in the past 20 years.

How is our campus work affected by this? We make no change in the direction of youth work. Our orientation is to the campus where all doors are open, and where we have the opportunity to make the greatest gains.

We make no concessions to the ultra-lefts (the Maoists, PL; sections of SDS; IS) on the question of "a turn to the working class." They have nothing to teach us. We know the working class will make the revolution in this country. And we also know that students can relate to the struggles of the working class, but in the manner in which we are now defining that relationship, as students, not pretending to be workers, not seeking ways to electrify the working class.

We also must be prepared to answer the Stalinists who are now showing interest in young workers, advising that revolutionists should be with the masses, "that so long as the majority of the working class believe in reforms, Marxists should be in those reform movements with the masses, fighting for the reforms and at the same time helping to develop a revolutionary consciousness by pointing out the contradictions which cannot be removed without a revolution." The Stalinists are seeking an alliance now with the "progressive wing" of the trade union bureaucracy, and in order to make this alliance they want some young troops to carry out their political line. We think this leads to a poor career for young radicals. We advise against it.

Our propaganda at this stage is directed to the student youth, the Black and Third World communities. We seek to take advantage of the new radicalization which has deeply affected young workers in industry. We are finding ways to approach the radical rank and file workers. Our aim now is to recruit these workers to our political program, preparing us to take advantage of the coming upsurge of the working class which is showing only the earliest signs of a future development.

This means that we must take all opportunities to reach the young radical worker, because every such recruit now is -- for us -- another guide to mass work in the future.

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A question was asked about the number of Black comrades in unions. We have no accurate statistics. Our Black comrades work with the Black and Third World fractions. However, during my trip I met several Black comrades who work in industry. Here in New York we have some teachers. One comrade here is in industry, and a member of a predominantly Black opposition caucus in his union.