


873 Broadway  
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New York, N.Y. 10003  
September 18, 1970

TO ALL NC MEMBERS AND SWP ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

The enclosed letter is for the information of National Committee members and party organizers only, and is not for general membership distribution at this time.

Comradely,

  
Jack Barnes  
Organization Secretary

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Saturday  
August 22, 1970

Art Sharon  
SAN FRANCISCO

Dear Art:

Here is a brief account of reports given at the Oberlin Conference about our activities in several unions, plus some additional information. The reports will be available on tape soon. But I am sending you this report now to give you an idea of what we are doing and where we have been most successful.

At Oberlin we heard reports by ten activists from different sections of the country and different types of unions. They are engaged, in some instances, in different kinds of trade union work. Some, as in the case of teachers in two instances (Detroit and New York) have worked within broadly constituted and rather powerful caucus formations. Others, as in the case of some social workers, have had or presently hold elective office and have managed to gain popularity as opponents of the war and because of this succeeded in getting the union to endorse and financially support antiwar demonstrations. Another report was given by railroad workers who are members of a standing committee in their local union, the Right to Vote Committee, and who are busy now building a national committee of the union on this idea of the Right to Vote.

In Atlanta, Ga., SWP candidates for public office (one is also a union member) were able to intervene effectively in the sanitation workers strike there, as supporters of the strike. They are doing the same thing now in a strike at the Dobbs airport restaurants. This way they make some friends and establish cordial relations with rank and file union members as well as some officials of the unions. This helps Militant sales, especially when the paper has stories of the local strikes or news about the local SWP election campaign.

We have also had some experience with small local caucus formations. One of these sprang up in the oil workers union in Houston, Texas. We knew some of the activists in it, but didn't get involved because it was one of those self-named "young workers" groups that had no other expressed purpose than to change the leadership. It failed in this objective and soon disbanded.

In general our whole experience in unions around the country at this juncture shows that we stand to gain most in literature sales, close contacts, even a few recruits, by introducing antiwar resolutions, selling our literature and propagandizing for socialism.

There is an improving climate for this kind of activity. This was shown by our work in LA and Seattle and now in Madison in the social workers' unions and other locals of AFSCME, in Detroit and Atlanta and in Connecticut in the teachers' union, and I think you will soon find some favorable developments along these lines in Berkeley in the postal workers' union there.

We would like to step up this type of work in all areas where we have activists in the unions. They will, of course, be governed in part by circumstances within the particular union. But it is a rare shop or plant these days where there is no talk about the war and where no one is interested in reading such a paper as The Militant.

I have the uneasy feeling that right now, because there is more open discussion and a generally more militant mood -- especially among younger workers -- that there is sometimes a temptation to join small caucus formations or to organize such caucuses in order to take control of a local union when this seems possible. Very often such moves get our comrades in a position where they appear not much different from other office-seekers in the union. Also there is a tendency, at this stage of development in the unions, for these caucuses to adopt the mistaken notion (or to give this impression because of the heavy fire they direct against their union opponents whom they seek to oust from office) that the main enemy is the union bureaucrat and not the employer. This is what happened to the United National Caucus in the UAW. They talked about "issues," but the caucus was a pure and simple anti-Reuther caucus. It was tiny. (Reuther correctly described it as "miniscule.") But within it were such diverse elements that it could not support a resolution against the war in Vietnam.

These caucuses, and the fight over union posts that always develops, get in the way of what we would like to do in the unions now. We want to keep all doors open, and talk about the broad social issues of the day, the war, growing unemployment, the need for independent political action. These are the things written about in The Militant. Where there is need to say something about a particular union situation, it can best be said in The Militant, as we did in the series by Tom Cagle last winter.

Comradely,

s/Frank Lovell