

THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST COMMITTEE'S

Viewpoint in Brief

Independent Socialism stands for a policy completely independent of and opposed to both of the reactionary systems of exploitation of man by man which now divide the world: capitalism and totalitarian Communism. It stands for uncompromising support to every democratic movement of the people against all capitalist or Communist regimes, and to every movement for social emancipation from their power.

Capitalism is an outlived system whose lifeblood is private profit and corporate oppression, even when represented as a "welfare state" or mixed economy," and even when its government is administered by liberals or social-democrats. In the midst of a false prosperity based on a Permanent War Economy, it still perpetuates poverty, unemployment, racism and imperialism.

The so-called Communist regimes—of Stalin or Khrushchev or their heirs, Titoists, Maoists, or other—have nothing in common with our socialism. They represent a new type of totalitarian exploitive state, based on a social system in which the state owns the means of production but only the ruling bureaucratic class "owns" or controls the state. The various Communist Parties are essentially political agents of this class, not allies of socialism. This ruling class may concede reforms under pressure, like all other rulers, but the limits of such reform are set by the fact that it will not willingly give up its totalitarian state control or reform itself out of power.

Socialism—a new social system in which the people own and control the basic sectors of the economy—cannot exist without the fullest effective democratic control from below, of all social and governmental institutions. The socialist movement must be a movement of opposition and alternatives to the ruling Establishments, seeking to fight them from below, not relying on per-

meation from above. We look to the working class and its ever-present struggle as the basic progressive force in society.

We stand for a policy of complete independence from and opposition to both war camps, capitalist and Communist, which are engaged in an imperialist struggle to dominate the world. We are for strengthening all tendencies toward a Third Camp of those who reject both war blocs and their military preparations for a nuclear catastrophe. We advocate a democratic, anti-imperialist foreign policy, instead of the Cold War power-politics of either Washington or Moscow-Peking.

The Independent Socialist Committee is an unaffiliated educational center, not a party or action group, but its education, based on the ideas of revolutionary Marxism, seeks to aid socialists in their participation in every current struggle to better the people's lot now:

- For independent political action in opposition to both old parties, by the labor and civil rights movements and other progressive forces, looking to the building of a new party.
 - For a left-wing and anti-bureaucratic force in the labor movement.
 - For militancy and a Third Camp policy in the peace movement.
 - For full support to all militant struggles for complete civil rights for Negroes, and against appeasement of either white-supremacism or white-liberalism.
 - For full civil liberties to all, including Communists and fascists, and against the reactionary "anti-Communism" which is the American Establishment's mask for political witchhunting.
- This view of socialism is both democratic and revolutionary, both humanist and working-class; and it is only as a revolutionary-democratic movement that socialism presents a third choice for the world, as the alternative to both capitalism and Communism.

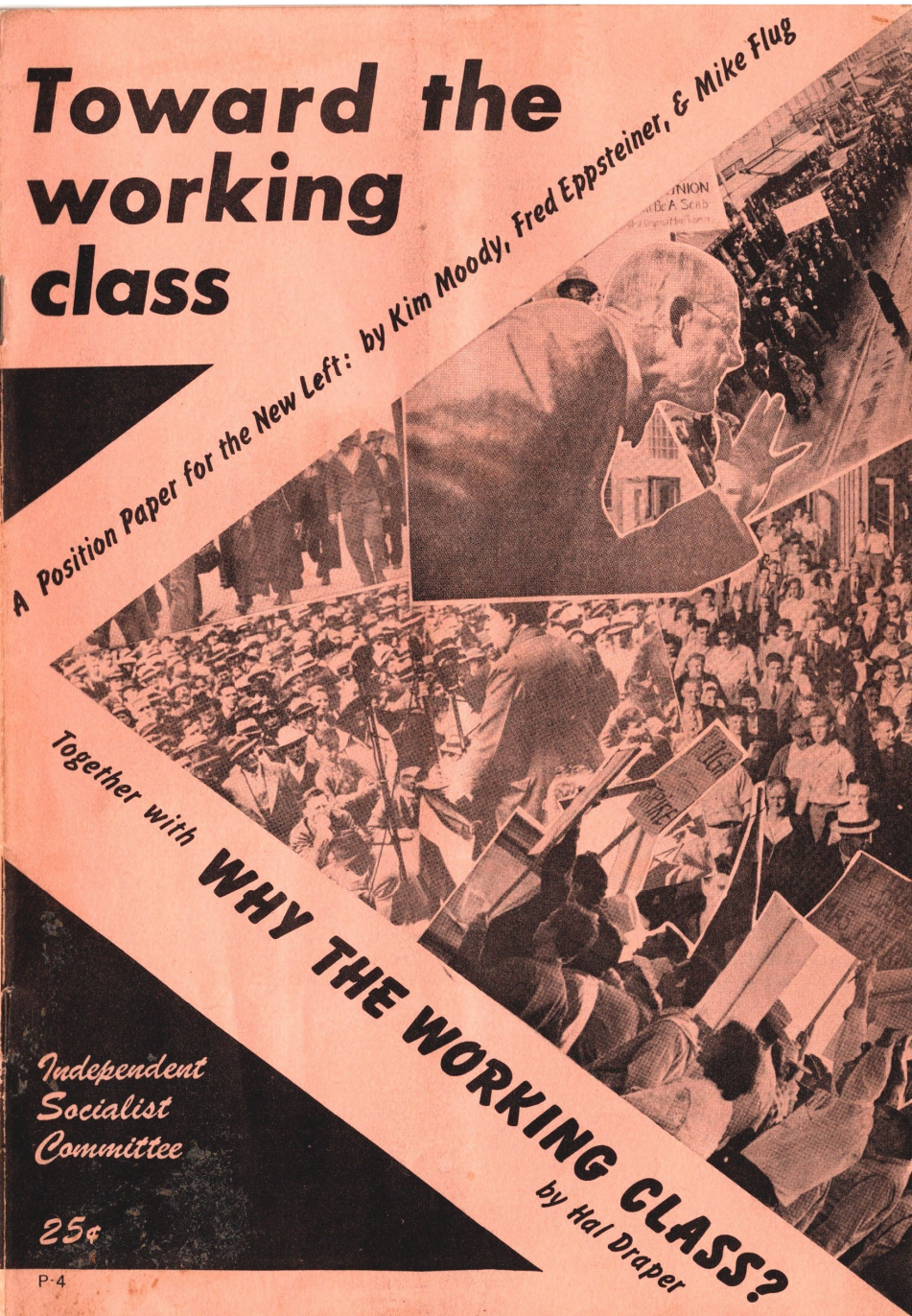
Toward the working class

A Position Paper for the New Left: by Kim Moody, Fred Eppsteiner, & Mike Flug

Together with **WHY THE WORKING CLASS?** by Hal Draper

Independent Socialist Committee

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Pamphlet No. 4

Published by the
INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST COMMITTEE
A Center for Socialist Education
P. O. Box 910, Berkeley 1, Calif.

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The article "Toward the Working Class" was originally published as a position paper distributed at the Clear Lake conference of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1966, and was also published in the September 9, 1966 issue of the SDS *New Left Notes*, from which it is here reproduced. The article "Why the Working Class?" is reproduced from ISCO's first Clippingbook *Introduction to Independent Socialism*, slightly revised.

KIM MOODY: a member of SDS since the Port Huron convention in 1962; active in the Baltimore SDS and the Baltimore ERAP project U-JOIN; helped organize the independent Baltimore City Social Service Employees Union; was a member of the Baltimore Independent Socialist Union, now of the Independent Socialist Club of New York.

FRED EPPSTEINER: a member of SDS since 1963; worked in U-JOIN; presently a staff member of the Maryland Freedom Union (MFU); member of the Independent Socialist Union of Baltimore.

MIKE FLUG: a CORE activist for a number of years, working in rent strikes and community organizing around New York; now a staff member and one of the organizers of the Maryland Freedom Union.

TOWARD the WORKING CLASS

An SDS Convention
Position Paper

by

Kim Moody
Fred Eppsteiner
Mike Flug

Why do socialists view the working class as a potentially revolutionary force? Is it not true that the AFL-CIO actively supports and participates in America's Imperialist policies? Isn't it even true that the white mobs that have attacked Civil Rights demonstrators in Chicago and beat up Negro youths in Baltimore were composed of working class teenagers and adults? The answers to all of these questions and many more like them must be, Yes! Well, then, what is so revolutionary about the working class.

First of all, it must be pointed out that socialists do not identify with the working class because they "idealize" workers. Much less do socialists entertain illusions about the trade union movement and its well entrenched leadership. White workers in racist mobs are not excused because they are workers; union bureaucrats who attempt to "educate" Latin American workers in the glories of the American Way of Life are not excused because they function as labor leaders. Socialists, like any radical worth his salt, struggle to defend the Negro community from white racists and to build a revolutionary workers movement in Latin America. In fact, the socialist view of the working class is not based on any set of purely moral positions; it is approached from a different point of view.

To begin with, the socialist view of the working class as a potentially revolutionary force is based upon an analysis of the social position of the working class. The most obvious fact about the working class, is that it is socially situated at the heart of modern capitalism's basic, and in fact defining, institution, industry. Industry, be it production or service, is so much the heart of American society that you can say it is what defines

the structure of society, that is, what decides who is rich, fair to middling, poor. This sounds so obvious to any radical that you might wonder why we have even mentioned it. The point can be made by way of a comparison. If welfare recipients organize and create an insurgency in the welfare system that is highly successful in the end they have only helped about 8 million people. It would be an important fight and a great victory for those who are on welfare but it would hardly scratch the surface of American society. On the other hand, if there were a general insurgency in industry, wages, etc. were raised, workers were given democratic control over their jobs, etc., tens of millions would be affected, the whole basis of the American economy would be changed. The point is not that welfare recipients or Negroes should not struggle, they should and must; the point is that the working class has a uniquely strategic position in American society—they are at the root of the economy. They are at the root of the same economy that causes poverty and creates welfare institutions. The working class is not the only group that must struggle to revolutionize American society, but it is a group that cannot be left out of this struggle.

There is another social fact that gives workers a unique place in any movement that would revolutionize society. For the most part, workers do not need to be organized in the same rudimentary way that poor communities must be organized. Workers are already organized. They are organized by the very conditions under which they work. They are organized in factories, warehouses, giant stores, mass transportation,

offices. Every day they are brought together by their employer. Furthermore, they are brought together under circumstances which they do not control. Workers are not allowed to forget "their place". For nearly half a worker's waking existence the conditions of his work struggle against those things that divide him from other workers, race, religion, politics, etc. In short, the collective conditions of employment under which most workers work provide a cohesion greater than any neighborhood. This is why, when the working class does move, as it did in the 1930's and 40's it moves in a massive way. —

Alright, these are advantages that workers, if they ever move in a progressive way again, have over other sectors of society, but what is to guarantee that the workers will ever move? In fact, workers, or at least some sections of the working class, are always struggling and moving. For the most part, the continuing struggles is visible. Later we shall discuss the existence and extent of these struggles, for now it is necessary to point out why workers are compelled to struggle. First of all, there is just plain old economic necessity, bread and butter. Everyone knows that the bosses do not usually just grant raises to workers. In one way or another, usually through unions, workers must fight for what they earn, be that a lot or little. One of the greatest snow jobs done on the American people has been convincing them that most workers have "made it". "They're not rich, of course, but they have a home, etc., etc.," Many workers do have homes, etc., etc., but the fact remains that the basis condition of life for most workers is one of insecurity. The average worker in manufacturing now makes about \$95 a week, which isn't much if you have a family as most workers do. In transportation it is a little higher and in the service industries it is lower. As the cost of living rises workers must struggle harder to meet their bills, to feed their kids. In their struggle to maintain a decent existence, workers must fight not only the bosses, but today also the government. Workers face not only the resistance of the corporations, but the 3.2 guidelines and the threat of injunctions from the Federal Government. For those who have doubts about the willingness of workers to struggle for progressive ends,

take a look at the recent airlines strike of the International Association of Machinists. Not only did this strike hold out against the threats of a Congressional injunction, but the rank and file had the guts to flatly reject a settlement pushed by Johnson himself. What other organized group of 30,000 has so clearly flouted the President's will in recent months? An interesting political side light to this strike is that four IAM locals have recently called for a break with the Democratic Party and the formation of a third party. Keep in mind that this was a struggle that occurred without the benefit of radical organizers, it was, in a way, a spontaneous act.

There is another area of insecurity that workers face that most people are not aware of. That is the fact that a worker's job is still not a completely secure thing. The lay-off and hiring systems of most manufacturing corporations is still such that a worker unless he has a great deal of seniority, is not sure what he will be doing next year. In some industries, such as shipping and long-shoremen's work, a man may seldom find a full week's work. Construction is, of course, seasonal, so that the relatively high wages paid are usually diluted by unemployment or the need to take a lower paying job or travel long distances to find work. Added to these long standing problems, is the fact of automation. In addition to such unemployment as automation has caused, it has begun to transform the structure of the work force. This has meant that many workers are forced into new jobs, usually paying less. Employment in manufacturing has remained static, while public and service employment has grown. Service employment is lower paying and even more degrading than manufacturing work. The fastest growing areas of public employment are, because of educational requirements, closed to most workers. Although this process has many implications, the primary point here is that it has caused even greater insecurity for many workers. It should be pointed out, even though it will be mentioned later, that this situation goes a long way to explain why in the absence of a program for revolutionary struggle, some white workers have turned their frustrations on the Negro.

In addition to the workers' economic problems and situation, there is his position at

the point of production. Much has been said on the Left about "alienation." Historically this concept referred to the alienation of labor, the fact that the worker found himself to be an appendage of the machine. This idea was formulated by Marx and others in the nineteenth century, but it has even more meaning today. Today's worker in no sense controls the conditions of his work. In production, the very motions and speed of the workers activity are determined by the machine he faces. Automation, far from curing or alleviating this situation, has exacerbated it. There is, today, a tremendous speed-up on America's production lines which makes greater and greater physical demands on the worker- and incidentally, also decreases his relative share of the national wealth. A great many wild-cat strikes have occurred over the speed-up. Related to this point is the necessity of the worker to struggle for greater control over the conditions of his work. Since the early days of the Industrial Revolution, workers have struggled to gain a say in the work process, but automation has made this struggle even more crucial. Not only has automation produced a speed-up, but in many industries it has actually made the work load heavier. Pro-automation contracts such as the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) has signed, have caused greater job insecurity for many workers and heavier physical labor for those with security. For signing such a contract, Harry Bridges and the ILWU officialdom faced a rank and file insurgency of Negro workers.

In summary, it should now be clear that workers have reason to struggle against the status-quo. What is most important is that these reasons for struggle are the defining characteristics of the worker's everyday life. If he is to maintain his dignity, his economic security, and even his health, the worker must struggle. Furthermore, the conditions of his work and his social position are such that he must struggle collectively, in concert with those of his class. His struggle involves not only "bread and butter" but also the struggle against a government which is dead set against the worker gaining "too much." In fact, as we shall see, the worker does struggle constantly.

Well, if the worker is always struggling, then why is the AFL-CIO almost never strug-

gling? Historically, in America, the unions are the organizational form through which workers have struggled. Unlike most countries in the world, labor has never developed its own political arm -- a labor, social-democratic, or revolutionary party. Workers, to a greater extent than any other social grouping besides the ruling class, have shown an enormous capacity for self-organization on a democratic basis. The initial organization of any industry has almost always been done by the workers themselves. In some cases they have gone on to form their own unions, in others they have called in or been approached by already existing unions -- as in the 1930's. Whatever the case, there has not been, and will not be, any guarantee that over time such mass organizations will not become bureaucratic. Without going into the complex history of the bureaucratization of American labor unions, suffice it to say this is what happened to virtually every union in the country. To a certain extent this was due to the relative prosperity of the 1950's when the level of worker's struggle and therefore participation was rather low, but even here there are important exceptions. For instance, one of the most massive rank and file struggles against bureaucracy and for a militant fighting policy was waged in the 1950's in the United Steel Workers -- the so-called Dues Protest Committee and the Organization for Membership Rights. Nonetheless, by the time our generation of radicals arrived on the political scene, the unions had become highly bureaucratized institutions. Specifically, this has meant that well entrenched officials have had all the decision making powers. It is important to understand that a group of bureaucrats that have held high office in large organizations such as unions for years and years -- as is the case in most unions -- no longer have the same experience as workers in the shops. The union bureaucrats function in a different social milieu than workers. They live with the upper-middle classes, they hob-nob with leaders of industry, they visit the white house. Workers, of course, do none of these things. The result is that the union "leaders," those who make the policy, lean not toward the workers, but toward the rulers of his nation. Since most unions are rigidly bureaucratic, there is little opportunity for the workers to make their voices heard,

no explanation of rise

under normal circumstances. Hence, there have developed in the last few years insurgencies of rank and file union members to regain control of their unions, or at least make their wishes known. Occasionally, this pressure from below forces the bureaucracy to wage a good fight and call a big strike, such as the transport workers strike in New York or the recent airlines strike. Generally, the struggle of the workers against the labor bureaucracy goes on without public attention and without press coverage. Even a dramatic event like the murder of the Painters' rank and file leader, Dow Wilson, is able to find only small coverage in one or two papers -- and then only as a result of the determined efforts of serious labor reformers.

Yet, invisible or not, this struggle goes on, day in and day out. What is most important here is that this struggle defines, for a socialist, what "orienting toward the working class" means. When workers, to advance their interests and build a militant struggle are fighting the bureaucrats of their own unions, as well as the bosses and the government, it is clear that we, socialists and radicals, look to the rank and file workers as our potential allies. So here it is, we do not mean orienting toward the labor officialdom -- Reuther, Meany, Wurf, Bridges, or even Helstein. We wish to dissociate ourselves, and we hope SDS as a whole, from the bankrupt, coalitionist notion that rubbing shoulders with Walter Reuther is "orienting toward the working class." The labor officialdom, as a social grouping, is neither capable of nor interested in social revolution and participatory democracy. We are far less impressed with the liberal posturings of certain labor officials than we are with the relatively inarticulate struggling of rank and file workers. When we speak of looking to organized labor, we mean the struggling rank and file. Our attitude toward the bureaucracy is that they should be kicked out of office and the unions remade into democratic workers organizations. We do not reject the unions, because they are the only mass organizations of workers today, but the function of the radical in the unions is to change them -- to fight to make them truly democratic and militant.

We have already mentioned rank and file struggle in the unions. To support the contention that they exist we will refer to a

few of them. In the United Auto Workers, regarded by some liberals as a model of democracy, rank and file insurgency is nearly universal. Every election year there is a tremendous turn-over of local leadership -- the union's structure makes it nearly impossible to throw out the International leadership. In the last couple of years there have been countless wild-cat strikes in the UAW. The issues involve contract sell-outs, greater job control, and union democracy. Reuther and his staff have consistently attempted to absorb or simply crush these insurgencies. In the UAW, militant rank and file activity is regarded, by the leadership as "irresponsible." In the United Steel Workers, the rank and file fights of the 1950's have continued to this day. Although I.W. Abel's victory over MacDonald was meaningless in itself, it was a reflection of the wide-spread discontent among the workers. The hottest area of revolt in the USW is in the Pittsburgh-Mackeesport area. A long-standing revolt in the Paper Workers has resulted in the formation of an independent union, the Western Federation of Paper Workers, and a bolt to the Teamsters on the East Coast. There have been, in the last couple of years, countless insurgencies in the Machinists' Union (IAM). Until recently, the President of the IAM was Al Hayes, Chairman of the AFL-CIO Ethical Practices Board and a member of the LID. Hayes, the liberals' liberal, expelled workers from his union and has placed dozens of locals under trusteeships, refusing any basic democratic rights to union members. Philadelphia Teamsters carried out a bloody wild-cat strike against the opposition of Hoffa. (Most rank and file struggles have involved both Negro and white workers.) In virtually every union they are allowed in, Negro militants have struggled for equal rights as union members. Literally hundreds of examples could be given to support the idea that the workers continue to struggle, but there isn't space here for that. The fact remains that every major union has experienced, in the last few years, significant rank and file struggle. The class struggle has not disappeared, it has simply been forced to take on a new set of enemies, the labor bureaucracy.

A corollary to rank and file struggle in existing unions is the growth of an independent union movement. In California, the

militant Grape Workers have formed the National Farm Workers' Association, which is now spreading to other states. The Grape Workers have placed their militancy above affiliation with the AFL-CIO and have had to fight attempts by the Teamsters to get sweetheart contracts. In Mississippi, SNCC attempted to set up the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union for farm workers. Although this attempt has not been very successful, it did produce some militant struggles. In Baltimore, the Maryland Freedom Union has been organizing low-paid Negro retail workers with great success. The MFU has won contracts that AFL-CIO unions said were impossible to win. Across the country, social workers (believe it or not) have organized independent unions that have waged unusually militant struggles and linked up with welfare recipient organizations to fight for the transformation of the welfare system. All of these independent unions are militant and democratic. They serve as an important example for rank and file workers in bureaucratic AFL-CIO unions. These independent unions have come about because the AFL-CIO has refused to organize these areas of employment. They are not dual unions in the traditional sense. But they are militant workers' organizations that are developing progressively more radical political ideals.

So, the working class is impelled to struggle and does struggle. But there is still a major question to be dealt with. What is the political outlook of these struggles? Do they have a political outlook? The fact is, that generally rank and file insurgencies do not have a consistent political outlook. Like movements of the poor or of students, they grope around for political answers. When workers are struggling collectively for their interests the thrust of the struggle is progressive and they are responsive to radical ideas. Historically, socialists in the shops have found it easy to relate their ideas, or at least some of those ideas, to these struggles. Very seldom do political ideas come from a vacuum. Workers, like anyone else who is frustrated, will look around for ideas that make sense to them. When they are struggling they are open to

radical ideas, when they are not struggling, or when there are no radicals around, they may listen to others. This is why certain groups of white workers in southeast Chicago turn into racist mobs and a few of the most frustrated turn to right wing groups. The right wing groups appeal to the workers, in a distorted way, on the basis of their experience in their neighborhoods. The neighborhood experience of workers is not necessarily radicalizing, there frustration can be turned against the Negro. In the shop or in the union it is somewhat different. Right wingers have very little to say about militant unionism. Radicals, on the other hand, have a great deal to say about it. All of this leads to two points. On the one hand, radicals must relate to the working class to workers is in the shops.

The union movement was the stomping ground of the Old Left, and look where it got them. It's not too hard to see why the Old Left failed to radicalize very many workers. The failure of the Socialist Party to gain a following in the working class from the 1930's on, stemmed from the fact that the SP never really oriented toward the rank and file workers. It is no accident that the SP and its various subsidiaries, such as the LID, have coalitionist politics. These are the politics of the labor officialdom. Such workers and left wing socialists as do exist in the SP come from a different tradition entirely and do not play much of a role in party policy making. The SP is conservative and coalitionist because it has no other hope for survival. The Communist Party is a somewhat different problem. Although it is also true of the CP that its primary orientation was toward the labor leadership, this was true in a different way. From 1936 on, when the CP had some influence in the labor movement, the Party's primary tactic was to wrangle its members and sympathizers into positions of power in the unions. This was done under cover -- "ain't nobody here but us progressives" -- and through manipulation. When it adopted the Popular Front line, CPers, being politically indistinguishable from any good liberal, were able to gain some control in a number of unions. But they did not educate the workers in radi-

calism. Indeed, they could not do this as they did not function as radicals themselves. Furthermore, the CP tended to act on the basis of Soviet foreign policy requirements rather than on the basis of the needs of the workers. Hence, after Hitler invaded Russia, the CP became super-patriots and pushed such anti-labor policies as no-strike pledges. Needless to say, you cannot work effectively with workers if you are obliged to follow the abstractions of one or another nations foreign policy. In fact, Communist "internationalism" is really a form of nationalism - at that time Russian nationalism. Following the war, the CP argued, for a while for the continuation of wage restraints - not very popular among workers. Finally, in 1948, CP unionists pushed the socially abstract, classless campaign of Henry Wallace. Wallace, who always made it clear that he was for "progressive capitalists" did not run a radical campaign. In fact, his whole message was a sort of mushy call to Soviet-American friendship. Needless to say, this did not attract many working class votes. By the end of all of these fiascoes, the CP union leadership had no real rank and file support, which made it rather easy for MacCarthyism to destroy many of the CP controlled unions. One could drum up the old failures and crimes of certain Old Left groups for pages, but the point is made. You cannot organize workers for radical politics by manipulation or flirtation with the bureaucracy. Participatory democracy is just as viable for workers as for anyone. In fact, it is absolutely the best way to organize workers, because it is the only way that actually builds revolutionary consciousness.

From the point of view of revolutionary socialists, consciousness is the most important element of workers organization. By and large American workers have economic class consciousness and trade union consciousness. They can and do organize their own struggles for limited specific ends. What American workers lack most is political consciousness; the realization that they can organize politically to change the entire structure of society in a way that will benefit them and almost everyone else - except perhaps the

capitalists and their politicians. This sort of consciousness does not develop automatically - not for workers, welfare clients, the poor, or anyone. Much of it must be taught. This is the primary job of radicals. But, let us stress again political consciousness cannot be imparted by manipulation. The radical that seeks to bring a political message to the workers must share in the experiences and struggles of the workers. It is not enough to be the best radical, he must also be the best rank and file unionist. This brings us to the practical point of this paper.

SDS, as an organization, and SDS members should orient toward the working class as the decisive social sector in bringing about the transformation of American society. This should be true both of our intellectual analysis and our action programs. In addition to organizing the poor. SDS should begin seeking ways to politically organize workers, as workers, that is in the shops. Now that the Black Ghetto movement has raised the slogan of Black Power and decided that the Black Movement should be led by Blacks, white radicals should accept their responsibility to organize whites. As radicals who support the concept of Black Power, we are forced by the logic of this position to turn our efforts toward the white community. It should be obvious that the writers of this document believe that this must mean organizing in the white working class. There are, of course, other possibilities, but we feel that this would be the most fruitful. Our responsibility in this matter is enormous, for given the racial polarization that is occurring, it is clear that if we do not organize white workers there are others who will - with disastrous results.

In the last year or so there has been a growing orientation among SDSers to work in the labor movement in one way or another. Some students have organized university employees on their campus. Others have supported strikes or leafleted workers. Still others have taken jobs on union staffs as organizers. We believe that supporting strikes, organizing workers for independent unions or even existing unions is good, but it is not enough. Furthermore, there is a sort of hierarchy of value in these acti-

vities. Working on a union staff may provide good experience for a student or ex-student but it cannot be a place from which political work can be done. The type of political work expected of union staff members is quite different from what we are talking about - that should be obvious to all. As a union staff member, your primary loyalty, whether you view it that way or not, is to the bureaucracy. You will, in that situation, find yourself doing coalitionist political work, even if you are allowed to do the more or less radical end of that work. The point is not that being a union organizer is selling out, it is not; but that you cannot do serious radical political work from that position. Participating in organizing drives, particularly militant, independent ones like the Grape Worker's drive, can also be a good experience for students. It is preferable to actually being on the union staff since you can, as a volunteer, maintain your independence and be more open about your politics. But obviously, as a student volunteer your position is different from that of the workers and your involvement more peripheral. As with supporting strikes, that amount of real political work you can do is strictly limited. Such activity does, however, serve one good purpose, to show the workers that those demonstrating students they see on television happen to be on their side. This is worthwhile, but it still is not enough. Eventually, if the radical movement is to make a serious impact, radicals must go into the shops in the same way they have gone into poor communities.

We want to make it clear what we think working in the working class involves. First of all, it can not be done lightly. It is an extremely serious thing to decide to devote a good portion of your life to working in industry. There can be no romanticizing this, because it simply is not romantic. Not everyone is suited to do this sort of thing and it should not be made into some sort of moral virtue, excelling all other virtues, to be "in the shops." More concretely, the person who plans to enter the working class must have an ideological commitment to the working class. Those who believe that workers are fat-cats, or that the revolu-

tion will be made by peasants who must encircle the rich industrial nations, had better stay away from the workers. We already indicated some of the mistakes of the Old Left; it should be pointed out that not only the Old Left is guilty of these mistakes. There are groups today whose primary political considerations are based on the ideas and needs of various foreign ruling classes. Zengakuran activists in Japan have a wealth of stories to tell about how the Maoist Japanese Communist Party has helped to put down strikes because they viewed Japanese-Chinese trade agreements as more important than the interests of the workers. We must be clear that our politics are in line with the interests of the workers and that our internationalism is genuine and revolutionary for all workers. Again we want to stress that the role of radicals is to build consciousness, self-realization of one's power and potential, and not simply transplant slogans. We believe that radicals are to relate to or help real struggle. The first job of radicals is to relate to or help organize rank and file struggle and to bring program to that struggle. For the radical movement today, this means that we must have such programs and the understanding to formulate them.

What we propose then, is that SDS begin to work toward organizing in the working class. We do not propose that people go into shops without planning or discussion. To be effective we must know the history and structure of the labor movement, we must know what shops to go into which ones are politically important and which are not. We will have to be clear in our break with coalitionism, and that means breaking completely with the Democratic Party. People will have to plan their lives for this sort of work and perhaps even learn skills that will get them the right jobs. All of this cannot be done at one convention, it cannot simply be voted on. But there is something that can be done.

We propose that the SDS Labor Committee be enlarged and transformed. Although the labor committee should continue to publish its newsletter, it should take on the serious task of educating SDS members in

the history and structure of the labor movement. Even more importantly, the Labor Committee should take on the responsibility of doing serious research into the internal politics of unions today. This should be done both on a national level and on the local level. Research groups in industrial areas should be set up, under the coordination of the Labor Committee, to determine what struggles are going on in their locality, what significance these struggles have politically, how they relate to other struggles elsewhere in the same union. This research and discussion is to be oriented toward the practical end of setting up groups to work in the shops in those locations that seem

most promising. We would add, that outside labor committee, SDSers who might consider working in such a situation should educate themselves in socialist politics. We, as socialists with an independent and revolutionary perspective, believe that those politics that are most relevant to the working class today are those that reject the old ideas and priorities of the Social Democrats (SP) and the Communists. We refuse to tie the working class to the policies of any nation, whether they pose as "socialists" or not, for to do so is to sap the revolutionary potential of the working class and to destroy the hope for a true working class internationalism.

WHY the WORKING CLASS?

by Hal Draper

For social change toward a better world, socialists believe the most important and indeed decisive social force is the struggle of the working class. Why the working class?

Why do socialists believe there is a special connection between their own great goal of a new society and the interests of labor, this one segment of society? Is it because we "idealize" workers as being better, or more clever, or more honest, or more courageous, or more humanitarian, than non-workers?

--Isn't it rather true that the workers have time and again followed reactionary courses and leaders and have by no means shown any invariable affinity for progressive causes? Don't they follow Stalinist totalitarianism in countries like France and Italy; and where they do not, are their own trade-union bureaucrats much of an asset? Haven't they been misled and deceived like any other section of society? Aren't they filled with race prejudice in the U.S., sometimes even more so than the upper classes? If it is true that workers are "naturally" pro-socialist, why is it they have made such a mess of things, voting for reactionaries and fakers and supporting the status quo? ... And so on.

Most of this type of questioning is based on simple misunderstanding of the socialist viewpoint about the working class. Especially in this country, where the socialist movement has always been relatively weak, the most popular anti-socialist notions are most often founded on misinformation about what socialists believe, because their voices have not been loudly heard.

Socialists do not "idealize" workers in any sense whatever. Taking them man for man, as individuals, there is no reason to argue whether workers are "better" human beings than others because they are workers. This whole approach, whether pro or con, has nothing to do with the socialist conception.

To underline this in a different way: If we try to view social issues as merely conflicts between Good People and Bad People, then surely we must say that men who insist on starving others are Bad. The present minimum wage is surely a pittance; yet opposition even to this pittance was strong among employers, especially small employers, while virtually absent among workers. Is this a tendency of employers because they are Bad Men? On the contrary, these employers are just as likely to be kind fathers,

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generous friends, indulgent husbands, charity-givers--not the type to deliberately run over children in the street. They act one way as individual atoms in the social fabric; they act in quite another way as part of their class collectivity.

They explain this, when they do, by saying "Business is business." This is their way of distinguishing their individual and human thoughts and role from their role as a member of the business community--that is, of their class. In the latter case, the conditions of existence and interests of "business" make out of them a social force that has little resemblance to their individual psychologies.

Like every other class or group, the working class is more than the sum of its individual atoms.

Man for man, workers are not "naturally" more pro-socialist than anyone else. It is a question of what *direction* they are pushed in by the conditions of their existence *as a class* and by their interests *as workers*, just as with any other group.

This indeed is one reason why so often socialist ideas tend to be *initiated* in a systematic way not by ideologists from the working class but by men from the "educated classes," the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, men like Marx and Engels, for example, who were not proletarians themselves--altho it should be noted that the impulsions to the systematization of such ideas were coming from the working masses' struggles and conditions, not from other sections of society. Individuals were led to align themselves with the working class.

If they were drawn in this direction, it was because here was the dynamic social force which they recognized as the decisive one for putting flesh and blood on ideas.

When a working class is politically and socially undeveloped it is well-nigh inevitable that its members will be filled with all sorts of backward and even reactionary notions. For example, it has often been found in the U.S. that racial intolerance decreases with amount of education: college graduates are less prejudiced, &c. Now, in general, working-class children get less schooling than upper-class offspring. So according to this pattern, workers should be far more filled with racism than the middle class. It is instructive to see where this neat pattern does and *does not* hold.

It holds best where labor is most poorly organized as a class, and most recently organized, and where it is organized in the least class-conscious fashion. The South is not only a cauldron of racism but also a sinkhole of union-busting and open-shop-ism. Toward the other end of the scale, racism is combated--as nowhere in middle-class groups--in the more militant mass-production unions that sprang from the CIO upheaval, like the Auto Workers, not to speak of the socialist movement.

Here anti-racism is not a function of school education; it is a function of class education. In many a mass-production integrated local, the organization is often more anti-racist than the sum of its members. That is, the dynamics of *class* needs push it

more strongly against racism, which is divisive of the class, than do the individual opinions of its members.

What we have been emphasizing is that the socialist sees no special magic in the "worker" as an atomized individual. The special "advantage" of the working class springs from inherent drives of its *class* position in society, its ineradicable interests as a group, its conditions of life; and this "advantage" comes into play insofar as this class organizes itself (as it is inevitably driven to do) and transforms the thinking of its individual components in the course of class experiences.

Now it is this sort of thing that the socialist calls the development of class-consciousness. The U.S. is the one modern country in the world where the working class is still at a rather elementary stage of class-consciousness. Therefore it is particularly in this country, and most particularly among academicians who have no roots in the real social struggle of our times, that the special role of the working class is most persistently questioned.

It is much harder to do so in Great Britain, for example, where this "special role of the working class" is the daily headache of the Tories, and also of the Labor Party leaders themselves. Or in France and Italy, where the strength of the Communist Parties is closely connected precisely with their ability to use and abuse "the special role of the working class." Or in almost any other European country, where the working class is well organized as a class. Or even in leading countries of Asia and Latin America, where working-class-based forces play prominent roles out of all proportion to the size of the class.

In this respect it is the U.S. which is "out of step," which is the exception to the rule; and while American bourgeois ideologists may be grateful for this exceptional position, they have no license to deny the rule.

The "rule" is that all over the world organized working-class struggle is inextricably bound up with every effort toward freedom and human emancipation. Where the working class has been defeated, democracy and progress and humanity have been defeated too. Where the forces of freedom have fought, in Hungary 1956 as in capitalist Europe, it is the working-class forces that have been in the van.

There is no other sector of society of which this or anything like it can be said--not the middle class, not the intellectuals, not the "educated classes," not the students, not the "managers," not anyone else except the organized working class, for good or ill.

What is the "advantage" which the working class possesses, willy-nilly, by virtue of the terms of its own existence under capitalism? Here in outline form are the special characteristics inherent in a social class whose individual human components are (remember) no better or worse than the rest.

(1) The conditions of life of the working class lead it to *organize* in the first place--and most solidly as a homogeneous movement.

There is, of course, one other class which rivals the working class in this respect: the capitalists themselves, whose own class-consciousness and sense of class solidarity are ever-present models for the workers.

Never has a predominantly agrarian population (farmers or peasants) been able to duplicate the organizational achievements of the working class. The difference is no reflection on the individual farmer. By terms of their life, they live in atomized groups which stress self-sufficiency, separateness, reliance on individual effort; they are not thrown together in crowds and subjected to simultaneous stresses in the heat of social struggles as are workers.

Workers are taught organization not by superior intelligence or outside agitators, but by the capitalists themselves. They are organized on the assembly lines, in the factory gangs, in shifts, in work teams, in the division of labor of capitalism itself. Capitalism cannot live without "organizing" its workers, teaching them the virtues of working together, therefore of solidarity.

It teaches discipline. It enforces centralization of effort. It hammers home every day the advantages of pooled work, and the subordination of individual self-interest to the needs of a group.

It does not teach this lesson equally to all workers: it is plainer for assembly-line workers in the mass-production industries than (say) for an office secretary who takes dictation from a personal boss, who works *with* a boss rather than *with* fellow workers. This is intended only as a simple example of the different degrees of "education" which capitalism's conditions grant to different kinds of workers. This fact links up also with the social views which arise among these different strata of workers--simply on the basis of this first point: class *organization*.

(2) The interests of workers as a solidarized group, organized by capitalism, lead them to *struggle*.

It must be emphasized that this often takes place quite apart from the conscious desires and wishes of the labor leaders themselves. Labor leaders, risen from the ranks of lowly workers and aspiring to be accepted as respectable and responsible members of bourgeois society, often *want* to substitute pleasant and friendly conferences with management for any kind of conflict. Having freed themselves from the condition of existence to which the mass of workers are condemned, they tend to become "bourgeoisified"; they want to integrate into the ruling class, or at least find as respectable a niche there as a corporation lawyer.

And indeed they could do so (so many do!) if not for the fact that it is the working class that they are standing on in order to reach so high. For the working class needs representatives in order to oppose the bosses' interests; but the bosses accept the friendship of these labor leaders only insofar as they "behave." From *below* these bourgeoisified bureaucrats, there always arises the pressure of mass demands, the unslakable needs of the workers which cannot be wished away with fine talk about class collaboration, the aspirations steaming up from the depths of the class, demanding "delivery of the goods."

Some bureaucrats can continue their precarious balancing-act for substantial periods, in "normal" times of class quiet particularly, as everybody knows; but even the most conservative and most bourgeoisified union leader must to some extent satisfy the class needs of his constituent base, or else--. This is in the worst case, of course, and there are not a few such "worst" cases in the society-corrupted labor bureaucracy of this country. But whether timidly or militantly, consistently or hesitantly, competently or crudely, even the conservative union leader who does not "believe" in class struggle must be its instrument, to the extent that he functions as a labor leader at all.

(3) The direction of the workers' organized struggle inevitably tends to be *counter to capitalism*--or, more finely, this struggle always tends to *go outside the framework of capitalist institutions and ideas*.

Steadily the labor movement's insistence on *social responsibility* for all aspects of life comes in conflict with the capitalist insistence on the rights of private property. For the essence of capitalist private-property relations is that this whole area of man's life--the economic sphere--is to be withdrawn from the rule of social responsibility, and is to be ruled by the unilateral power of capital as its birthright.

Capitalism has been forced into many compromises in this respect, as is well known--mainly this one, that (a) the state is accorded power to intervene as representative of "society," provided (b) that the associated capitalist class retain full control of this intervening state. (This is the process of "statification" under capitalism in a nutshell.) But whatever the compromises, the working-class movement can never be satisfied--not even the undeveloped union-conscious labor movement of this country.

More militant unions (e.g. UAW) have raised demands like trade-union intervention in the setting of prices or in peering over the capitalists' books to check their profit. In periods of intense class struggle, sit-downers have taken over the factories without a qualm over the rights of private property. The tendency of the unions in politics is to support social controls all the way down the line--over offshore oil, natural gas, prices, health insurance, etc.--in the name of social responsibility vs. private property. Insofar as this support of "statification" takes place without concomitant insistence on control by a socialized democracy, this is indeed a contribution to the bureaucratization of capitalism rather than its democratization. But given a socialist framework, it is this insistence on social responsibility vs. private property which is the germ of the labor movement's inherent and ineradicable "creeping socialism."

The intuition of the reactionaries is not altogether baseless in this respect, though often exaggerated and viciously directed. Even Samuel Gompers used to argue that his simple slogan of "*More!*" for the labor movement was a more "revolutionary" slogan than the socialists'. At any rate, it is true that, insofar as labor consistently presses for "more" out of the economic pie

even when this is incompatible with capitalist needs--insofar as labor presses for "more" social responsibility and less rule by private profit--insofar as labor presses in this direction without drawing back when the capitalists yell too violently--to this extent labor drives the logic of its own existence outside the bounds of the capitalist framework, and tends to explode it.

Of course, we socialists would maintain, and experience shows, that this does not happen except when the working-class movement grows up to adopting socialist leadership and program; but all we are stressing in the present connection is that the class conditions and needs and interests of the workers drive their organized movement, in the course of its struggle, right up against the bounds of the capitalist system.

This is not true of any other group in society--only of individuals from other classes, who may decide to throw in their lot with the working-class struggle. It is enlightening, for example, to study the type of political program commonly adopted by non-working-class parties which set out to express protest: radical peasant parties, or urban middle-class reform parties, or farmers' parties in the U.S.

Peasant parties most typically stop well short of proposing the abolition of capitalism, confining themselves to proposals for improving their class's lot in ways compatible with the rule of private property; for the peasant is a very tenacious small private-property holder himself and does not easily see beyond this class limitation. In a different kind of case, as in the Nazi appeal to middle-class elements, a kind of pseudo-anti-capitalism may be patched up by directing slogans against bank capital as distinct from "good" productive capital; or, as in the case of Henry Wallace's program, supporting "progressive" capitalists against "reactionary" capitalists.

But what is noteworthy is this: only in the case of working-class parties, all over the world, does the program and goal of the movement turn fast or slow toward a basic assault on the fundamentals of the capitalist system itself.

Obviously most Americans will not consider that this is a good thing! But the fact itself is what we point to, as illuminating the "special role of the working class," for the benefit of Americans who cannot see that the working class *as a class* does play any special role whatever.

(4) The conditions and interests of the working class not only push it toward organized struggle against capitalism, but impel it toward *a courage and boldness and militancy* which are well-nigh unique to it, at critical moments of struggle when these qualities are called for.

Now at first blush this may seem to be in contradiction with our earlier statements that workers are not necessarily personally "better" in any sense. Are we now saying that workers are braver and bolder, etc.?

Only with the same qualifications previously explained. We are talking about their potentialities as an organized class--

plus, perhaps, for many individuals whatever carryover takes place from organized behavior to personal behavior as a result of education in struggle and conditioning in life situations. But it is the class behavior we are interested in.

Stereotypes may be bad, but class "stereotypes" contain more than a kernel of truth. Thus, there is the "Timid Professor." We have known many professors who were not at all personally timid; yet the sweeping stereotype contains a truth about the impact of academic life and its pressures upon the social psychology of professors.

In his *White Collar*, a study of the middle class in America, C. Wright Mills (a non-timid professor) drew a generalized picture of the new middle class which is relevant here. They are the "rearguarders," says Mills, waiting for someone else to move. As a group they have no cohesion, but are on sale to the highest bidder or the most likely winner. "They have no steady discontent or responsible struggle with the conditions of their lives. For discontent of this sort requires imagination, even a little vision; and responsible struggle requires leadership." As individuals with private positions (Mills continues) "they hesitate, confused and vacillating in their opinions, unfocused and discontinuous in their actions... they have no targets on which to focus their worry and distrust. They may be politically irritable, but they have no political passion. They are a chorus, too afraid to grumble, too hysterical in their applause." In the short run, he concludes, they follow the panicky way of prestige; in the long run they follow the ways of power.

This scathing portrait is a picture of a social class, not an insult directed against middle-class individuals, just as we have been discussing the social potentialities of a class and not "idealizing" workers.

But surely, realizing the truth of this portrait, one can see why middle-class groups simply cannot work up the dynamic drive which is necessary before one can be "courageous and bold and militant."

Take a simple model: A factory worker on a picket line can and often does abuse entering scabs and may even have to be restrained from physical attack; he is not constrained by notions of bourgeois respectability, even though he may be quite "respectable" and "bourgeois" on normal occasions. He is, in fact, more alienated from class society, no matter how he thinks, or how he thinks he thinks. But now go along the scale of workers up (or down) toward more and more "respectable" white-collar workers and employees, to office employees, to bank tellers, to fashion-house fitters, to...college professors. And try to imagine them yelling at scabs on a picket line.

We use this example only as a handy and visualizable token of what is involved: the dynamism of the class in its organized struggle for "something better." History provides a better record --the record of the working class in far more crucial situations than mere strikes: records of the heights of valor and self-sacrifice that have been reached by unknown workers, not named he-

roes, in revolutionary struggles. But these things are not visualizable for the average American, who after all is himself the product of a society dominated by middle-class mediocrity.

(5) Finally, we are talking about the organized and militant anti-capitalist struggle of *the only class which has the social power and weight* to abolish the old order and build a new society.

Whatever a historian may say about the role of force in revolutions, it is a Marxist principle that social revolutions are not made by bullets. This is a caricature of socialist revolution spread by certain types of policemen and certain types of professors. The Marxist socialist believes that when the working class, and its associated allies from other sections of the people, are in their massed majority ready for the abolition of capitalism, it is their *social* power which will determine the result in the last analysis.

The social power of the class depends not only on its numbers. It depends also on its homogeneity and organizability, as we have discussed--its striking power. It also depends on the indispensability of the services which it performs in keeping the society's work going.

No other class has its hands so closely on the basic work without which the system grinds to a halt. Not a wheel can turn without them. No other class can precipitate a social crisis by the deliberate decision of its organized cadres as in a large-scale strike. When the working class goes into battle, all of society is embroiled, for all depends on it. Everytime the working class stirs, the rest of society quivers. Yet there is debate over its "special role."

After all of the above, there is still a deeper "why" to be asked, a question that goes behind all of the points we have made up to now. Within the confines of this article we can only point to it.

In the last analysis, the "rearguard" character of the middle classes, which Mills pointed to, reflects their political and social blind-alley. They cannot give society a lead because there is no *social program* which effectively corresponds to the special interests of the middle classes. From the conditions of *their* existence arises no pointer to a way out for all of society.

In contrast, the working class, as the bottom layer of all classes, cannot even stir without *pointing* to a program, even when it itself rejects it: the abolition of capitalism, its class antagonist, and the assumption of social responsibility by the people democratically organized, regardless of private profit.

At bottom, it is because the interests of the working class, implicit in its struggles, point a program for a basic transformation and reconstruction of society, that this class is pushed to take a vanguard role in every struggle for freedom and emancipation.

We need hardly spend much space affirming how cognizant we are of how often the working class and its interests have been deceived and betrayed by its enemies and false friends. The his-

tory of capitalism, from one point of view, is nothing but a history of continued duping of the working class. In fact, deception of the working class is one of the most important conditions for the maintenance of capitalism or any other exploitive system.

It is not really necessary for us to learn all about this from critics who like to argue that socialists' "faith" in the working class is misplaced. It is hardly necessary for us to be reminded, also, that today in good part the Communist Parties live by their ability to dupe and deceive the working class in countries like France and Italy. The battle for socialist democracy against both capitalism and Stalinism can even be summed up as the battle to free the working class from its deception by each of these class enemies.

But this is a battle which, by definition, is won as soon as the workers are "undeceived." It is meanwhile a downright irrelevancy in *this* connection for critics to tell us, as they do regularly, that because the working class has so long been deceived and betrayed, we must conclude that it is hopeless.

We point out only this: It is the *working class* that it is crucial for reaction to deceive, not the middle classes or any of the "rearguarders."

The socialist revolution, once observed Rosa Luxemburg, is a war in which there are necessarily a continuous series of "defeats" followed by only one victory. Nothing can be guaranteed, of course, except the honor and dignity of fighting for a new and better world, rather than the vileness of adapting one's mind and heart to a vile one. We guarantee to no one that the working class is predestined to "behave according to our blueprints" even if *we* sit by in interested passivity to see whether *it* carries out its "mission." We offer only a road of struggle and a choice of allies in the only war worth fighting, the battle for a socialist democracy against the rival world blocs of war and exploitation.