

## An Open Letter to the SWP

# Dear Comrade Dobbs:

The war in Vietnam has been more than a political, military, and moral disaster for American imperialism. It has also sharpened the domestic social struggles and intensified the contradictions of America's permanent war economy. Inflation, mounting taxation, growing unemployment, decline in social services — these are indices of the deepening social crisis which we of the International Socialists believe will continue to grow as American capitalism finds it increasingly difficult to dominate the colonial and advanced industrial countries.

Meanwhile the class struggle has intensified throughout the capitalist countries, notably in France in 1968, Italy in 1969, and Britain today. It has been joined by a symmetrical development in the Stalinist countries, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in 1970.

In Europe the revolutionary movement has used this opportunity to implant itself within the working class and to challenge the leadership of the Social-Democratic and Stalinist bureaucrats. The creation of revolutionary parties is once more on the agenda in Europe. Such a revolutionary party draws its meaning from its ability to base itself in and provide leadership for the advanced layers of the working class.

In the United States such opportunities are now beginning to develop. There has been a growth of working class militancy and class struggle — evidenced by the growing strike wave, wildcats, contract rejections, the spreading of unionism to traditionally backward layers of the class (public and service employees), and the first hesitant steps to organization of the rank and file rebellion.

This situation opens enormous possibilities, and creates enormous responsibilities, for the revolutionary movement. The spontaneous struggles created by capitalist contradictions, if they are to be successful, must be joined by a working class socialist cadre intimately participating in the day to day struggles of the class and capable of providing political leadership.

So far, however, the separation which developed between the working class and the Marxist movement during the Cold War-McCarthy era has not been bridged. The socialist movement which revived with the radicalism of the 1960's has still not been able to find its way to the working class. Failure to meet this test, the supreme test that faces any revolutionary organization, can only lead, as Trotsky contended, to political degeneration.

It is this situation which makes the decisions to be taken by the Socialist Workers Party at its convention important. The SWP could aid in helping to build and organize the rank and file movement.

The IS has in the past year been industrializing significant portions of our cadre. Our experience shows that such a program can be fruitful now. Although time has been short, we have been able to organize fractions in auto, steel, telephone, hospitals, Teamsters, the AFT, and AFSCME. Without exaggerating our role, we have played a part in the

development of broad, rank and file oppositions in these unions.

But we are not sectarians. To build a left wing in the working class, a much larger revolutionary cadre is needed within the class. We are eager to collaborate with other radical tendencies, including the SWP, in working toward what we believe to be the primary task of socialists today.

Although we have important differences with other groups, we believe that the industrialized cadre of the several socialist tendencies could collaborate in transforming the union movement into a militant, democratic movement of class struggle.

Of course, industrialization doesn't solve all problems; it is only the prerequisite for any trade union work. Thus some other points must be made clear.

**As all revolutionaries recognize, the working class struggle faces not only the direct opposition of the capitalists and their state, but also the resistance of the trade union bureaucracy. If the working class is to succeed, it will have to throw out the present fossilized leadership and establish its own democratic leadership in its place. That is why revolutionaries have always worked to organize and build the rank and file struggle. When demands have been placed on the bureaucrats, it has been done not in order to win them over (although some may be) but in order to expose them and mobilize the rank and file.**

Therefore, collaboration among revolutionaries in union work would have to be based on an unremitting struggle to mobilize the rank and file and an uncompromising opposition to the bureaucracy.

A concrete program must be developed, based on experience and taking account of the conditions of specific industries. The basics of such a program would include the recapturing of workers' control over the unions; the extension of workers' control to production; fighting racism and sexual divisions; opposing unemployment and deteriorating working conditions; and fighting for an independent party of the working class.

Many specifics would have to be worked out, for example in the area of working conditions: in our work, we have raised demands for a stronger shop steward system, for the right to strike during the life of the contract, for "innocent until proven guilty" in discipline cases, and others. Some of these are classic demands of the rank and file movement, others are new; the experience gained in action would sharpen and define these points.

**Of course, in our view, the commitment to a working class orientation does not stop at the shop floor. It pervades all our work in other movements. Indeed, the success of these movements depends on the eventual development of links to the working class.**

Rather than presenting such a working class approach in the anti-war, women's, and black liberation movements, the SWP has presented a classless approach. In the anti-war movement the SWP has aimed at getting endorsements

from liberal democrats and labor bureaucrats. Courting the labor bureaucracy in the anti-war movement has made the SWP hesitant to fight the bureaucracy in the unions, or to propose those labor actions against the war, such as work stoppages and strikes, which the bureaucracy considers to be a greater evil than the war itself. Similarly in appealing to the bureaucracy and the liberal Democrats, the SWP has not consistently championed independent political action in the anti-war movement.

While we are for united fronts with reformists, genuine united front work demands a continuing revolutionary criticism and opposition to the politics of the reformists in the front, exposing their politics and using the united front to draw their rank and file to revolutionary positions. Otherwise, the united front becomes the bridge for abandoning revolutionary politics. This raises the question of whether the SWP is subordinating trade union work in a futile attempt to placate the union bureaucrats in the anti-war movement.

In the women's liberation movement, the SWP made a promising start by championing free and legal abortion, equal pay for equal work, and 24-hour child care as the demands for the movement. These demands could appeal to working women and create the bridge to the working class so vital for the success of the women's liberation movement.

Now the SWP has abandoned this approach and attempts to subordinate the women's movement to a single-issue abortion struggle. It has gone even further — by abandoning the demand for free abortion. In the name of a classless united front, it has chosen to abandon appealing to the broad masses of working women and minority women, to have a spurious unity with middle class women on the terms of the latter.

While we have our historic differences with the SWP on the Stalinist countries, which we contend are bureaucratic class societies, we do not believe such differences, and even

greater ones which we have with other tendencies, are necessarily a bar to collaboration in trade union work. We are both for revolutionary opposition to the bureaucracy and for workers' democracy. We do believe that the reluctance of the SWP to champion a similar approach to Cuba, or even to forthrightly oppose the anti-working class actions of the Castro regime (forbidding the right to strike, the "vagrancy laws," etc.) are further indications of retreats from a proletarian socialist line.

Similarly while giving military support to the NLF and other national liberation movements against imperialism, we as revolutionaries maintain our political opposition to these movements which do not fight for socialist revolution and workers' democracy.

We have these and other differences with the SWP, which we are not interested in watering down or ignoring. Yet in France, despite differences, our comrades of *Lutte Ouvriere* are discussing unity with the *Ligue Communiste* on the basis of a working class orientation. In the United States the level of development is different, and while there is still no basis for revolutionary regroupment of tendencies, there is a basis for the active collaboration of socialists in rebuilding the revolutionary movement within the working class.

It is this test which is presented to us, the SWP, and all other socialist tendencies. Failure to meet it will be a setback for the entire movement.

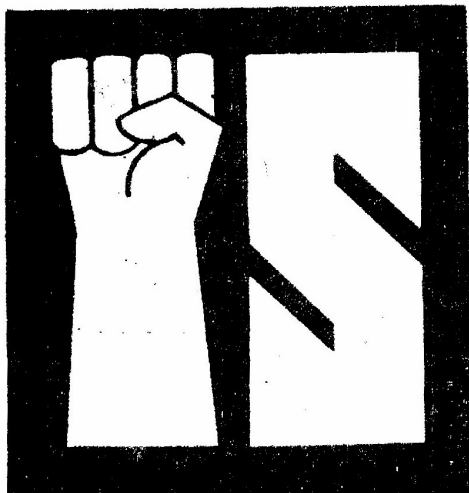
We propose that where there is agreement we collaborate together in joint industrial work. We would like to meet with you to discuss such collaboration in specific unions.

Awaiting your early reply,

Comradely,

Joel S. Geier

National Secretary  
International Socialists



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