

WST DBH 7 AUG 1986

The text that follows is a revised draft of the call for a discussion around a "common program" as agreed on at the July 4 conference. The draft is currently under discussion by the National Committee and will be sent to sympathetic groups and individuals by early September. Members' comments and proposed changes remain welcome.--Steve R.

The Crisis in the American Labor Movement: How Can We Respond?

The American labor movement today is in a state of deep crisis. A decade of concessions and givebacks, the destruction of many basic industries and declining union membership have made this plain for all to see. No effective attempt to organize the unorganized has taken place for many years. The pattern of strike-breaking, from PATCO to Phelps-Dodge to Hormel to TWA and onward, grows almost unchecked.

Yet throughout this decade of defeat and decay an undercurrent of worker militancy continues, in spite of overwhelming odds. Often, however, this militancy has been outweighed by despair and frustration among working people, who find themselves demoralized by the worsening state of affairs in the labor movement. What fighting spirit does exist among the rank-and-file has yet to find a coherent, organized basis to overcome the growing tide of demoralization.

The cause for this long period of defeat can be seen in the very structure and ideology of the American unions. Continuing bureaucratization, corruption and centralization of power have robbed workers of direct initiative and control over their own affairs. Divisions by craft, industry and geography have stood in the way of real, effective solidarity. Continuing sexism and racism, in spite of the gains in these areas, have prevented full participation in the labor movement by those who stand to gain the most by it. A prevailing ideology of collaboration with working people's own enemies still cripples the labor movement, as it has for decades.

What is needed now is a renewal and reconstruction of the American labor movement from the bottom up. This new movement will clearly not come from the existing union leadership or structures, regardless of intent or sincerity. It can only come from a movement of working people, both organized and unorganized, starting at the base and independent of the "leadership".

Such a movement would be against bureaucracy and centralized power and, instead, would stand for direct democracy and rank-and-file initiative. It would oppose all ties to our enemies. It would oppose division by economic sector, geographic location, union affiliation; by race or sex. It would stand for the autonomy and real, effective solidarity of all working people, especially in the face of growing attacks on the American working class by the employers and the government.

We propose to all those anti-bureaucratic and anti-centralist forces within the American working class, both workplace and political organizations, as well as individual militants, who agree with these perspectives to initiate a discussion on the issues at hand. Such a discussion should not be for the purpose of imposing any particular organization's or individual's ideology or program. Rather, it should aim toward an examination of common perspectives and finding a basis of common activity within the American labor movement toward building a movement like that described above.

Such a discussion should be open, honest and allow for all concerned parties to participate equally in its development. Means of furthering such a discussion might include a newsletter or discussion bulletin, as well as local regional and/or

national meetings and conferences.

We look forward to hearing from all those who are interested or want more information on this proposal.

--Workers Solidarity Alliance

COMMENTS ON THE "PROPOSAL FOR COMMON PROGRAM/RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS IN THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT," BY TOM W. AND THE NY GROUP

from Chaz

I think the proposal for a common proposal/response is a good one. I'd propose that the WSA contact the groups mentioned in the proposal -- plus a couple of others, The Mill Hunk Herald staff and the Processed World staff -- to see if they'd be interested in holding a conference to see if we could formulate a common response to the labor crisis.

In all probability, a majority of those contacted will be in favor of such a conference. If that's the case, we need to begin to think about logistics now. In order to allow adequate time to prepare for such a conference, I'd think that we should give ourselves at least a full year. So, I'd propose a very tentative date for it of Labor Day weekend 1987. That date would allow other organizations plenty of time to decide if they wish to participate, plenty of time for individuals to make arrangements for time off work and to make travel arrangements, and it would also allow the event to be publicized repeatedly in the publications of organizations interested in attending or sponsoring the conference.

Another consideration is location. In order to hold the event, a location should meet two criteria~~XX~~: 1) There should be well-established groups from at least two participating groups in the area; 2) Discount airfares to and from the place should be available from most parts of the country. Those ~~criteria~~ criteria suggest two possible sites: Chicago (IWW and RSL groups are there) and NYC (WSA and RSL). Of the two places, I'd think Chicago preferable for the reason that in addition to discount fares being available, it's also within easy driving range of those living in the Midwest, Great Plains, South and East Coast. (Easy at least in terms those of us from the West are used to -- NYC and Chicago, for example, are nearer to each other than SF and Seattle.)

Finally, if we do decide to call for such a conference, we should begin to think about specific proposals we can make to address the crisis. The idea for a libertarian version of "Labor Notes" is a good one; add to that, that the project be financed through a voluntary levy on the incomes of participating groups of perhaps 3% or 5% ~~xx~~ of income. Another possibility would be to set up a fund, again through a voluntary levy of 3% to 5% of income, to materially aid activities which carry the labor movement in a libertarian direction -- wildcats, libertarian rank-and-file publications, autonomous organizing drives, etc. If approved, such a fund could be administered by a board elected at the conference, with every participating organization having at least one board member.

Finally, I'd propose that the WSA national convention be rotated geographically between the East, Midwest, and West Coast every three years. This would encourage greater participation on the part of those of us living west of the Appalachians.

Best wishes,

REPORT ON THE COMMON PROGRAM

It has been close to a year since we first initiated the idea of attempting to work with others in the libertarian workers movement. Many of you are probably wondering what's the status of the proposed Common Program. I have not reported on this proposal because it has not generated the interest we thought it might.

As has been previously reported, cover letters & and a call letter entitled "The Crisis in the American Labor Movement: How Can We Respond?" was sent to the following:

1. IWW (NY, SF, Boston, Seattle, Vancouver & General
General Headquarters) & Ann Arbor, MI)
2. Revolutionary Socialist League (National HQ, NY, SF
& LA Branches)
3. News & Letters (NY & Detroit/HQ)
4. "Discussion Bulletin", Grand Rapids, MI
5. IBM Workers United
6. "International Labour Review" (SF)
7. "Workers Democracy" (St. Louis, MO)

The results of our initial mailings and follow-ups have, overall, been less overwhelming. The breakdown of responses is as follows:

1. Absolutely no response from IWW GHQ in Chicago, IWW NY, IWW Boston & IWW Ann Arbor. One can only speculate as to the actual reasons as to why the above IWW Branches & GHQ didn't respond. We're told that Boston will respond once GHQ responded. NY, well, they've got their own ax to grind--or some of their "heavies" do at least-- with some individuals in NY WSA. At the time of our letter to IWW GHQ it was dominated by those who've exhibited consistent hostility towards the WSA. Ann Arbor, likewise.

Positive response was received from all of the above mentioned West Coast IWW Branches. In fact our SF group has had the most success in building upon the initiative. They meet monthly with the SF IWW, RSL, "International Labor Review" & assorted individuals.

2. Positive response received from LA, SF & NY Branches. SF WSA meets regularly with SF RSL & periodically with LA RSL.

NY WSA has had some initial discussions with NY RSL but nothing of substance has developed. This is due to the fact that NY RSL takes the position of voting for "progressive slates" in the unions & believes that our views are not practical when it comes to trade union reformism.

3. [redacted] in W.VA. has been in contact with N&L people in Chicago, likewise for Jake in IA. NY N&L members have expressed limited interest & there's been no meetings between WSA & N&L. The overall impression that there's limited interest on N&L's behalf.

4. I've yet to receive any reports regarding the "Discussion Bulletin".

Common Program continued

with SF WSA.

7. I am informed by SF that the folks around "W.D." (or at least some in St. Louis) are interested in the proposal & the idea of a libertarian workers conference as long as our intent is not to have a one shot deal.

If this report seems to be lopsided to reflect activity on behalf of NY & SF this is only because we haven't heard from others. I should mention that Gary wrote to me stating that there's a possibility an individual or two who've been active with the Hormel struggle may also be interested in attending a proposed conference.

There is little more that I can report at this moment. If I may add my own 2¢ let me say the following. I am somewhat disappointed by the lack of response by the IWW, but, I suppose, this was to be expected. It's pleasing to hear about SF's success and I hope that they can build upon those efforts.

I believe that at the forthcoming WSA conference we need to seriously review this project and our commitment to it. The overall potential is great, yet I think, unfortunately, that the idea has, as they say, come before its time. Or has it?

Respectfully submitted,

Co-ordinator

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

Since my last report the WSA has received mail from and has corresponded with the following:

The Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (Australia). Again I would like to urge you all to subscribe to their paper REBEL WORKER (POB 92, Broadway, NSW 2007). Sub. \$12. AIR, \$6. SEA (6 issues).

The Direct Action Movement (IWA British Section). The DAM publishes an excellent publication DIRECT ACTION (Box DA, Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester, Brit.). \$12. AIR (Pounds or cash only). ** See next page.

Anarchist Federation of Denmark (AIFD)

"Lotta di Classe", U.S.I., Italy.

"Direkte Aktion", F.A.U., Germany.

"Organizacion" & correspondence F.O.R.A., Argentina.

"Hombre v Sociedad" & Chilean Libertarian Movement. Info. & correspon-

International Workers Association, Secretariat, Madrid. Various correspondence and (all in Spanish): Invitation/Call to the I.W.A. Conference on Solidarity which was held in Hambourg, FRG 4/17-19th (WSA greetings sent); 5 page report on Uruguay & the struggle of anarcho-syndicalists in the workers movement; 5 page report on Chile; and finally a 34 page "History of the IWA: 1922-1986" pamphlet (text of talk given by the current IWA Secretary Fidel Gorron). Let me note that in regards to this pamphlet, the ASF (Aus.) shall be translating & publishing it. We have been invited to cosponsor its publication (which I favor).

All of the above items may be requested, please send appropriate monies to cover xeroxing & postage. No copies will be sent free (hey, I just can't afford it).

Tyneside Revolutionary Syndicalists. Correspondence & THE TYNESIDE SYNDICALIST. Excellent revolutionary syndicalist publication. TSR is composed of DAM members & independent syndicalists. Another publication that deserves our support (TSR c/o Tyneside Free Press, 5, Charlotte Sq., Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE2 4XF, Britian) \$12. AIR.

** Please note that the WSA averages some form of correspondence, exchange, etc. with the DAM ~~ti~~-weekly. To say the least, our relations with the DAM -- and the ASF (Aus.) for that matter-- is excellent. Let me further mention that NY WSA is quite active in support of the Albright strikers (mfgs. of goods for Laura Ashley shops) & is in contact with strikers. This campaign (which has received support from IWA Sections in Germany, Britian, the USA & further support coming in from Japan, Denmark, Holland & France. The IWA support has had great effect on the strike & has won our comrades of the DAM lots of respect.

C.N.T. (France). Correspondence; Appeal to support striking railworkers & "Le Combat Syndicaliste".

C.N.T.-A.I.T. "Solidariad Obre6"

Workers Solidarity Movement (Ireland). Correspondence & "Workers Solidarity"

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici (Italy) Congress Proceedings.

"CeNiT" (France) Organ of the CNT-AIT-Exterior

"ORTO" (Spain). Published by activists in CNT-AIT.

"ORGANISE!" Ballymena Anarchist Group (Ireland). Publication & correspondence. Pro-IWA anarcho-syndicalists. C/O Just Books, 7, Winetavern St, Belfast 1.

Northern I.W.A. Sections Secretariat. Correspondence.

Anarchist-Communist Federation (Britian). Correspondence & publication.

Workers Confederation of Brasil/Pro-IWA (Brasil). Received appeal for support of Brazilian comrades who initiated a rail strike. The strike was successful. I should add that our letters of protest were acknowledged by the Department of State (no shit!).

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- and non-hierarchically and would be organized independently of WSA, and
 - A person is not ineligible for membership in WSA just in virtue of being in prison, and
 - People who are in agreement with WSA principles are eligible to join WSA as individuals, and
 - WSA invites discussion about the relationship between the anarcho-syndicalist movement and prison organizing, and
 - The WSA extends to the Southwest Ohio Workers our best wishes and will continue to publicize the struggle for prisoners' rights.
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Relating to Other Groups:

1. Evaluation of the Common Program Initiative

After brief reports by the National Secretary (Chaz B.) and National Treasurer (Jeff U.) Sunday morning, we began a discussion on the common Program initiative and the response we had received.

We did get a few positive responses to our initiative: Stan (formerly of Seattle IWW), members of the San Francisco IWW, F and LA RSL, and Workers Democracy in St. Louis. Members of A RSL expressed interest but said they would not be that enthusiastic for a one-shot deal where groups merely exchange perspectives. They want to have some feeling that something ongoing could come out of it. Workers Democracy and Stan Anderson, on the other hand, were more enthusiastic.

, who has been the coordinator of this project, already has written a report on this (see DB #13) and so only gave brief remarks. He raised the question of what way we should go from here since the only positive response seemed to be out West. In New York there has been contact and common work with other anarchists such as Neither East nor West, who are building links with worker and peace activists in Eastern Europe.

Bill said that more concrete proposals were needed and, given our small numbers, it was important to re-evaluate our direction and decide how to develop our practice. Jeff U. stated that it was very important for libertarians to pull together if we don't want to go on forever being so small as to be hopelessly marginal. Vince said that his concept of the "common program" was that of ad hoc actions, strike support and solidarity, not based on ideology. I replied that "ideology" is probably not the right word but that there does need to be discussion of a program and analysis to serve as the basis of common action. Jeff felt it was better to leave the specifics vague so as to let the the discussions continue at this point and work things out collectively. Nonetheless, he said that he can agree we need to have specific points to discuss.

Bill said he was not very enthusiastic about the Common Program insofar as it has involved "libertarian marxists" like Workers Democracy and the RSL. He felt that he preferred an orientation to anarchists because he sees anarchists as being "to the left" whereas he regards "libertarian marxists" as more reformist.

Jeff and Rik both thought we should make the effort to push further towards an eventual Labor Conference. Bill then suggested the proposed anarchist conference scheduled for Atlanta (outgrowth of the recent Minneapolis conference; see below) as a staging ground, perhaps by having a workshop there on this proposal. M replied that although participation in some form at Atlanta is good for thought, it would not be the appropriate forum for the Common Program conference proposal. Atlanta would be both too broad and too narrow. Too broad given the presence of people and tendencies that we did not have in mind for the common program work, and too narrow in excluding groups and people who do not identify specifically as anarchists, such as Workers Democracy or IWW people. M was cool to the idea of trying to call such a conference soon, and would rather that we simply do some more publicizing on the idea, in ideas & action, for example, in order to try to generate more widespread response.

Jeff suggested the idea of regional conferences to start, and Bill and Ed both stated that there was need for developing more specific proposals. Ed felt that what is needed is an action-oriented program. Ed added that the thrust should be on agreement as a basis for action, emphasizing what we have in common. Jeff said it is up to us to take the initiative and get the ball rolling.

M. --- made a motion that:

- . We go on record as still supporting the Common Program effort, and
 - . that building towards a conference on the crisis in the labor movement is still a goal of the WSA, and
 - . that ideas & action publish some appropriately edited version of the original Common Program letter, and
 - . that WSA publish pamphlets expounding our conceptions of libertarian unionism, and
 - . that we develop a list of the types of concrete action that we advocate for libertarian militants, and
 - . that we endorse the idea of regional meetings building towards a nation-wide conference.
- his motion was passed unanimously.

2. The Minneapolis Anarchist Conference

Bill M. attended the June 21st general anarchist conference in Minneapolis and reported on events there. He said he encountered lots of people ready to go beyond simple anti-authoritarianism and open to organizing around working class concerns. He was pleasantly surprised by the good attendance at the three workshops on working class-related themes. Jon Bekken made a nuisance of himself with his attacks on WSA, but he appeared to alienate