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Contents:

Bulletin Matters ............................................. 1
A Fragment from the Story "Grandpa Time," translated by Ben Perry ................................. 3
Labour Time, Exchange, and the Transition to Socialism, Tom Holzinger ......................... 6
Letter, Adam Buick ........................................... 9
The Jehovah's Witnesses and the "Old" Socialist Labor Party, RDW .............................. 11
Letter, Bob Rossi ............................................. 14
Letter, Jon Bekken ........................................... 15
Letter, Adam Buick .......................................... 17
Two Letters, Monroe Prussack ............................. 18
Direct Democracy and Decentralist Socialism vs. Authoritarianism, Donald F. Busky ...... 19

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BULLETIN MATTERS

The first article in this issue is a translation by Ben Perry of part of a utopian short story published years ago in Esperanto. It and two letters continue a longstanding discussion of labor time vouchers, a topic with which a couple of DB readers have expressed some impatience. However, the interest in the subject demonstrated by the letters and articles published in the past few issues indicate that it is a matter of interest to many readers. This impatience would
be justified if the DB were designed to serve as a agitational journal to reach the unsaved. Then I'm sure we would all be writing on different topics. But as a forum for those already committed to libertarian (third-force) socialism, we have no agitational responsibilities and can afford the luxury of discussing topics which we must assume will be of vital interest to our class once it has completed its disillusionment with capitalism and gained the consciousness it needs to become revolutionary. In this issue Tom Holzinger contributes to the arguments for labor time vouchers (LTVs), while Adam Buick, in response to the DB25 report of his correspondence with L.L. Men, continues his crusade against them.

RDW, Bob Rossi, Adam Buick, and Jon Bekken continue what some readers may regard as organization bashing, but which has become an honored tradition in the Discussion Bulletin. In this connection, I suspect that a lot depends on whose ox is being gored. Personally I found RDW's comparison of the "old" Socialist Labor Party to Jehovah's Witnesses pretty offensive, perhaps because I was a member of the "old" SLP who spent a lot of time playing the Jehovah's Witness role on Grand Rapids street corners and it strikes close to home. Also in this issue, Monroe Prussack comments on the final installment of "The SLP Revisited" as does Donald Busky, whose article space considerations prevent me from answering with some S.P. bashing in this issue.

As always we invite articles and letters for the next issue. Remember, please—single space, narrow margins, and a dark ribbon.

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

FRANCE GOES OFF THE RAILS: THE MOVEMENTS IN FRANCE, NOVEMBER 1986—JANUARY 1987. London, April 1987; No price. This forty-page, magazine-size pamphlet combines pictures and leaflet texts from the events in France together with the publisher's commentary to explain the railroad and students' strikes in France last winter. Readers may remember the similar French language publication described in this column in DB23. Unlike the other, this severely condemns the students, contrasting the nature of their demands to the class consciousness and solidarity of the rail strikers and proletarian youth. No price is given but I would suggest three dollars from either of the two groups that collaborated to publish it: B.M. Blob, London WCIN 3XX, England or B.M. Combustion, London WCIN 3XX, England. Our thanks to a Canadian subscriber for a copy.

Per George La Forest we have received a flood of information on the struggle of the Freedom Socialist Party, a Trotskyist splinter in Seattle, to maintain the confidentiality of its membership lists and internal affairs during a legal action brought by a former member. Readers interested in this case should write to Freeway Hall Case Defense Committee, 5018 Rainier Ave. S., Seattle, WA 98118.
A Fragment from the Story "Grandpa Time" by N.A. Rubakin

[I found this excerpt in an Esperanto reader, Ni Legu!, apparently published originally during the 20's by an international workers Esperantist organization. It appears to have been written by a Russian anarcho-syndicalist, perhaps shortly before the Revolution. The translation from Russian to Esperanto was done by Hermann Konovalov and I have translated it from there into English. I am by no means a polished Esperantist but the rather stilted style is in the Esperanto. I have translated "laborbileto" as "labor ticket" but it could also have been "labor voucher." I have written to the publisher, Senaciu-lo Asocio Tutmonda (World Non-Nationalist Association), asking for more information about Rubakin, Konovalov and when and where the Russian story originated. Ben Perry]

Once again there lay before her the earth, the beloved planet of her ancestors, which leaving had brought her so much pain and fear. But now, seen anew, the earth was no longer that earlier, always grim and gloomy, always suffering land. Nor was it that earlier land of oppression, violence and darkness. No, something new, fresh, powerful and profoundly invigorating emanated from the fields and pastures, the mountains and seas, reaching towards Mari. The earth's features were alit and washed in the rays of a gay, spring-like sun. But especially was the joy of living to be seen in the faces of the people, whom Mari saw here before her—people new, strange, extraordinary, but still people—living, conscious beings just like herself. The feeling of joy, of love was written on the faces of everyone around her. Even the streets around her, lined by large, beautifully appointed homes, seemed to shine with joy. The trees in the gardens which formed a green border around every building, breathed joy. And joy was written on the great public buildings, schools, museums and libraries which made a spectator marvel with their grandeur. Luxurious cars and electric buses ran joyously along the streets. And joy was in the whistle, the locomotives and factories whose tall chimneys surrounded the city like a dense forest. But they were not those enormous joyless constructions that used to resemble barracks or prisons. These were tall palaces, vast and well lit, yet full of machines and tools. The machines thumped, whistled and thundered. They joyfully tapped and wheezed. These were no more the oppressive, enteric sounds which had so recently filled Mari's soul with cold terror. These sounds flowing out of the factory windows were new, virile and powerful, yet filled with gaiety. And this spirit of joy and life in turn captured Mari's soul. The girl looked around her with the same deep religious feeling with which each believer regards his warmly beloved God. But this religious feeling arose in her breast especially ardently when she looked at the factories, homes and crowds passing by, when she looked at an individual, a human being, who seemed wholly unlike such as those she had observed her so recently. All of these human beings around her really were human. Not half-animals, or slaves or degenerates, they did not have bowed backs or stupid expressions of obedience and fear on dry, yellow-green faces, nor shallow chests and thin
shoulders. No, these were people with heads raised high, with a brave, wise and conscious look, and kind smiles on their beautiful faces. Here were men, women and children who were well and simply dressed, without ostentation, in diverse beautiful garments. They were a noisy, multicolored, crowd seemingly without end. But in this crowd, there was not a single man with the shiny buttons or epaulets of a soldier or officer. They were just humans before all else. And none among them could be found who had been taught killing, violence and war...

"Grandpa Time," Mari asked the old man, "what kind of people are these? What kind of city and enchanted land lie before my eyes?"

Rather than answering, Grandpa Time only smiled.

"Why Mari, don't you recognize your own streets and fields?!," the old man cried. "You don't recognize your own city and country where you used to live and where you were born! You don't recognize these people, these children, who have come after you and are the descend- ants of all those who lived here with you!!"

"But, really, these people are completely different from those I used to know and saw with my own eyes," cried the girl.

"These are the same ones," said the old man, "the same people but now in completely new circumstances. Life has changed, living conditions have changed, so the people have also changed. Go up to one of them and find out for yourself."

Mari immediately did as Grandpa Time advised.

"Tell me," she asked a fastidiously dressed, fully grown youth from among a group who looked like students, or perhaps they were workers, and who now stood around her. "Whose country is this in which I find myself?"

"What, whose country?," the young man answered affably, obviously not understanding Mari's question. "Every country in the world is ours."

"What do you mean, ours?," she asked in turn.

"Yes, ours. That is, everybody's. Same as me. So you could also say mine. There obviously aren't any bosses and even if there were, they wouldn't be able to own anything because no one has divided up the world and no one would have the nerve to try."

"Really," cried Mari, "You're actually a worker! But in whose factory do you work?"

"How do you mean, whose?," the youth asked, again surprised, "in mine, of course, that is, in a communal factory. In what other factory could I work? All the factories, all the ships, mines, railroads, really everything is ours--they belong to working people just like me."
It is all property that can't be divided up, where we work in togeth-
er. I mean, everyone who works. And we all work, everyone in the
world. Everybody is a worker aside from sick and old people and
children. So why does this surprise you? Where do you come from that
you don't know about such simple, ordinary things?"

But Mari didn't even hear his last question. Her soul became more and
more filled with wonder and enthusiasm.

"But what about the pastures, the land, who owns all that?", she asked
the young man.

"Naturally, all this is property that can't be divided up, just like
the factories. Of course, whoever wants to has the right to use it."

"But who directs the work? Who has the power?" cried Mari.

"Another strange question. Of course, we all have power. Who else
would? Who do we let run things? Who do we give power to? Who has
it for a while? But what do you mean by 'power'? Really, we all have
it. All of us. Every rule or law is ours because we write them for
ourselves. It couldn't be any other way. Anyway, 'power' is a very
ancient word, and I'm not even sure I understand it completely. No
one forces anybody and so we don't need any power."

"But don't you have any kind of laws?", asked Mari.

"Sure, there are laws—I already told you that," he smiled at Mari's
confusion. "Only, our laws aren't like the ancient kind. Our law is
just a common agreement or contract and these laws and contracts
mostly have to do with managing things in the factory or with other
kinds of production. Besides, we don't need any people in charge.
Could we do anything to anybody? That would be violence."

"So who makes you work?", she asked.

"Another strange question," he answered. "I don't work because any-
thing makes me. Without work, life wouldn't be life. For example,
could someone be really alive without thinking, which is working with
your head? Could someone live without working? At one time, people
did that by force or stealing, but that doesn't happen now anywhere in
the world. It would also be violent to save up more than you need.
Everything I make is mine. My labor hours are like money to me. I
can always exchange these labor hours with any other worker's labor
hours, in other words, with any kind of products at all anywhere on
earth. A worker exchanges with another worker by means of common
stores—giving labor tickets and getting back necessary goods. This
is the whole setup, and there are no agents, dealers or bosses, entre-
preneurs or private owners among us, and there can't be any. Every-
thing that filled their pockets in the old days, we get to keep.
That's how it is everywhere in the world: in cities and villages,
everywhere. But excuse me; it will soon be three o'clock and I have
to go to the university for my classes. My wife is waiting for me
there now. And both of us, one way or another, have worked our six
hours in the factories..."
The young man politely said goodbye and disappeared into the crowd. The crowds continued to stream by unceasingly, gay, generous and brave. Their happy sounds of life merged with the singing of children, wafted from somewhere far off, and rose up to the sky. A warm, joyous sun shone down. It filled Mari's heart, too, with warmth, light, and joy—with the fullest, deepest and greatest happiness which is only experienced by the best, clearest reasoning and most loving persons...

LABOUR TIME, EXCHANGE, AND THE TRANSITION TO SOCIALISM

I've been following with the greatest interest the discussion of labour time and labour vouchers in the pages of the Discussion Bulletin. Of the theoretical work still to be done by the class-struggle left, this is probably the most problematic area. I'd like to make a couple of distinctions which I hope might spark another round of useful argument and comment.

First, we need to keep history in view. Socialism is the transition to communism/anarchy, and it is marked by scarcity, the need for orderly exchange, the accumulation of an appropriate productive capacity, the transformation of the production process, the transformation of consumption and reproduction, and so on. This transition will be followed by a post-scarcity society in which production has become a mostly voluntary pleasurable activity and its labour cost will be scarcely counted at all. So in thinking of the period after the revolution, we are considering two constellations of social and ecological relationships, not one.

During the period of scarcity socialism, the key economic decisions will be what to produce and how much, what is a fair distribution of the product, and what shall be consumed and how much. Because we are ordinary people—workers most of us—and fundamentally egalitarian and anti-authoritarian, our decisions will be made in a decentralized, communal way. (This does not mean that all decisions will be by consensus, however. Until scarcity and socially necessary labour are overcome and class memories slowly fade, there will be occasions in which a majority outvotes a minority. But at least we shall be totally equal and fair and respectful of each others' persons and views).

Exchange and distribution require a decentralized mechanism for regulating the flow of goods and services. Whereas private and state capitalisms measure these flows by price and price is determined through competition and coercion, we as workers and socialists will insist on counting the real and tangible amounts of labour hours, energy, natural resources, and environmental well-being expended in production. Labour time will be the most important of these, and everyone's labour hours will normally be counted exactly equally.

Once we achieve post-scarcity communitarianism (anarchy), however, the questions of distribution and exchange become of relatively little importance, since 'work' will have become largely pleasure, and there will be little interest or importance in measuring the human and capital resources devoted to it. On the other hand, the questions of what to produce and in what amount will become of paramount importance. Since productive activity should generally be supportive of all forms of life without being destructive of the environment, our main accounting will then be of land and water, energy, and the earth's ecological integrity.

So it is really only the socialist transition that demands an accounting of labour time. We can suggest several purposes that make this necessary:
1) fairness in distribution/consumption.
2) setting the overall level of production and consumption.
3) allocation of resources between investment goods and services and consumer goods and services.
4) transforming the production process to make it short and pleasurable.

Of the above points, 2, 3, and 4 are socialist and progressive in that they are associated with the historical drive to communitarianism. The first, #1, on the other hand, is a retrograde point, a birth scar carried into the new society from the old. "Fairness" under capitalism has meant that those who work longer or harder or with greater technical expertise or machine power are permitted a little greater consumption within the system of wage exploitation, regardless of their need to consume or manner of consumption.

In my view it is critical, to the utmost limit of our ability, to undo this link between labour time and volume of consumption ('spending power'). Otherwise we shall inevitably reproduce the competition among ourselves and the alienation that is found everywhere in both private and state capitalisms. Worse, the dynamics of points 2, 3, and 4 above will become distorted and then destroyed, and finally the goal of the transition to communism will be lost. We will need, therefore, a new way of organizing exchange, distribution, and consumption during the transition period.

We have to go back to basics, to use values, the satisfactions obtained from different activities and goods and services. Even during the socialist transition these should preview the communitarian future. That is, these satisfactions should be compared with each other and rated in importance through a social or communal process, in general taking place in units larger than individuals or nuclear families. (This, I believe, is what most of us will happily and voluntarily choose once the dog-eat-dog competitive engine of capitalism is done away with.) This may be the single biggest factor in transforming exchange and distribution, because a lot of the scarcity that we think we feel will disappear by itself as new social relationships cause us to change our priorities. For instance, we will probably give a much higher value to convivial story-telling than previously, and a much lower value to personal television sets.

How would we organize exchange and distribution without either invoking wages and/or labour vouchers (linking consumption to labour time) or setting up a rationing system based on an assumed equality of need (implying further a bureaucracy and a class structure)? I think much of our distribution will be by the rule, "Our community of consumers is entitled to as much as we feel we need, and every other community likewise." This would apply especially to such essentials as health care, education, housing, garbage collection, water and electricity, certain basic food-stuffs, and so on.

Much of the remaining distribution would take place via direct exchange with other groups producing other desired goods and services. For instance, we as a consuming community might want to start eating more bread and fewer potatoes. Fine, we can take that decision within our local group, in a face-to-face participatory way. Then in a direct and decentralized fashion we should be able to advise the bakers of the kind of extra bread we want and obtain it from them. A record would be kept of how many hours' worth of bread was taken by our consuming group.

An adding up of all the hours' worth of goods and services consumed by each group would also be kept, just as for the hours expended by each producer group. (It is unlikely that producer and consumer groups would be the same, but they could be). Clearly under normal circumstances the total volume of goods and services consumed
cannot exceed the volume produced; the labour time embedded in what is consumed cannot be more than the hours of production. Therefore some overall limit on consumption is likely to be required -- this is what 'scarcity' is all about -- though this will depend a lot on the historical circumstances under which we initiate the socialist transition.

Assuming a society-wide limit, then there will also have to be a limit on the discretionary consumption of each community as measured in units of labour time. Within each group, choosing between this or that in order to keep within the limit would seem to pose no problem, as long as the number of hours used to produce each item was known and decisions were democratic.

The tougher question will be fixing the different limits for different communities. These limits can be arrived at via democratic discussion among the groups, following a number of different considerations. Certainly we'll want to take account of group size, ages, life circumstances, special needs, and perhaps lots of other things. These factors need not be the same everywhere at all times; there might also be differences based on type of group, geographical region, historical period, existing level of technological development, and so on. What is important is that we follow the principles of equality, participatory discussions, and respect for other individuals and groups.

On the production side it is also true that not all goods are created equal, that an hour's work can produce anything from say 0.1 to 10 kilograms of wheat, depending on climate, soil, fertilizer, mechanization, and so forth. One bushel might thus contain 10 hours' work or it might contain only 5 minutes' worth. Therefore such a product will need to be exchanged on the basis of its average labour content. This means adding up the total volume of production -- area-wide or world-wide -- and dividing by the total number of hours worked to create it. Because this implies networking and coordination, it is extra important that this should not lead to centralization and the persistence of a managerial class. (As we approach abundance, these dangers will become less and less).

The above proposals may seem to contradict what was said earlier, that the measurement of labour time must not be for the purpose of doling out consumption. But on closer look these suggestions are clearly directed at points 2, 3, and 4 above, not point 1. Although the overall levels of consumption and investment are related to the level of production, (under socialism just as under capitalism), there is nothing suggested here that would count the labour time contributed by an individual for the purpose of determining his or her level of consumption.

Now this vision of the future differs from other formulations that try to rationalize the transition period. Specifically, it negates the following:

i) labour vouchers as an alternative to money.
ii) "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."
iii) "from each according to his ability, to each according to his work."

None of the above can be considered to be socialist within our new framework.

Why will we want to work at all during the period of scarcity? Might productive labour not just stop if there were no powerful punishments and incentives? I think it is certain that the needed work will get done and then some, because of:

i) the great self-discipline and practice of criticism and self-criticism in transforming ourselves and our society, imparted by making the revolution.

ii) the release of tremendous energy and excitement as work involves less and less drudgery and more creativity and responsibility.

iii) fewer working hours and/or less intensity of work, because the production of
waste will stop, all willing adults will be able to join the work force, and, there will be a fresh, socialist accumulation of tools and machinery.

iv) our natural activity and curiosity and desire to be useful, to have things to do, to be esteemed by others, and so on.

v) new processes that will make production a pleasure -- a use value -- rather than work; then it won't matter that some people choose to fill up all their time with other, even more pleasurable activities.

We can summarize by saying that in the post-revolutionary future it will be necessary to measure labour time, but only for the purpose of transcending such accounting altogether, to complete the transition to communitarianism and an ecologically-oriented society that measures other, ultimately more important things.

Tom Holzinger, 5282 Drolet
Montréal, Canada H2T 2H4

Dear Comrades,

Frank Girard, in his comments on some correspondance between L.L. Men and me (DB 25), admits to an emotional prejudice in favour of L.L. Men's defence of the Labour Time Voucher System (LTVS).

Fair enough, but he seems to have overlooked that in the course of the discussion L.L. Men was led to abandon the proposal that producers should actually be given vouchers in favour of the direct distribution in kind by some Central Planning Authority of amounts that the number of hours producers had worked entitled them to.

Here is L.L. Men's solution to the problem of how to avoid labour vouchers being hoarded to take advantage of future rises in productivity which would appreciate their "purchasing" power:

Under capitalism, people are able to hoard in all forms of assets because these assets can be turned into money which, being universal value, can thus be used in any way the asset owner sees fit. Under the LTVS, can the same thing happen? We know that the LTVS involves central planning which means that, unlike money which, being universal value, can be used to buy anything its owner wishes (this being part and parcel of the private, atomistic nature of capitalist production), LV's are tied to specific planned uses. Let me explain. For simplicity's sake, let's say all daily consumer items are produced as social deductions and distributed accordingly. In other words, workers will be issued vouchers only for major items of consumer durables such as cars. Presumably, these vouchers can be hoarded. But if we examine the question more carefully, it will be seen that such is in fact impossible. Let's say at the current level of productivity a worker will have to "save" 40 6-hour working days per year for 5 years to get a car of a specific quality. There will in fact be no vouchers issued for these working days. The workers' administration simply keeps
these records in its account books.

Let's say after 4 years the productivity has changed to the extent that only 160 hours of social labour instead of 200 are required to produce the car in question. What is to be done? Either the worker is actually given his car at the end of 4 years to his benefit (since productivity increases have the tendency to generalize, all workers will have their turn to benefit individually in such a way), or he still only gets his car at the end of the 5th year and the 40 hours of the 5th year be used for the purpose of general social consumption or accumulation. In either case, increases in productivity serve only to raise living standards of society as a whole. The planned nature of a socialist production means that when a producer goes into "long-term saving", he does not just say "I'll save 40 working days for 5 years" but will have to state specifically that this is for the purpose of getting a car of a specific quality. In such a case, it is obviously impossible for him after 2 years to go to the workers' administration and say "I've changed my mind, just give me vouchers for 80 working days and I'll dispose of them myself" for that will disrupt all planning. In other words, once a worker has made plans on "long-term saving", he will not be able to dispose of his "savings" like one can today with money. Even when arrangements can be made for people to change their mind concerning their "long-term savings", they will not just be given vouchers corresponding to their "savings" which they can dispose of themselves like one can under capitalism with money if planning is not to be thrown into utter disorder. Under such circumstances, how would anyone be able to retrieve his "savings" from the workers' administration mid-way, and then use these "hoarded savings" in order to profit from increases in productivity? Planned production renders this impossible. (My emphasis).

Now this proposal that the producers should receive both "daily consumer items" and "major items of consumer durables" directly from some Central Planning Authority without the intervention of vouchers has nothing in common (beyond labour-time accounting, that is) with the De Leon/SLF proposal which has Frank's sympathy that the producers should be issued with vouchers which they would then be free to "dispose of themselves like one can under capitalism with money" according to their individual preferences. It amounts to a proposal for free distribution in rationed amounts by some central authority.

Such a system would indeed solve many of the problems associated with labour-time vouchers (matching supply and demand, hoarding, lending, stealing, etc) but, quite apart from not being viable (could any centre really be able to plan future production down to the details of each individual producer's consumption?), would
place such enormous power in the hands of the Central Planning Authority as to undermine the democratic and voluntary nature of Socialism.
--Adam Buick, Apt A18, 2 rue Jean Engling, L-1466 Luxemburg.

THE JEHovah'S WITNESSES AND THE "OLD" SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY
Comparison and Contrast: A Case Study in Organizational Sociology
by RDW

Uniqueness

JW: The organization is the only true Christian Church. All other groups claiming to be Christian are consciously or unconsciously serving Satan.
SLP: The organization is the only true socialist party. All other groups claiming to be socialist are consciously or unconsciously serving capitalism.

Infallibility

JW: The organization is infallible because it alone fully understands the Bible.
SLP: The organization is infallible because it alone fully understands Marx's scientific analysis of society.
Note: These theories of infallibility are different from that of the Catholic Church, which claims infallibility by reason of its direct succession from the organization founded by Christ.

Urgency

JW: Since its founding in the late nineteenth century the organization has stressed the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ, and has several times specified its date. Despite the passing of these dates, members retain their sense of urgency.
SLP: Since its founding in the late nineteenth century the organization has stressed the imminence of a crisis marking the collapse of capitalism. The prediction has grown rather tired, but members retain their sense of urgency, at least outwardly.

Ideology

JW & SLP: Ideology is rigidly defined and generally expressed in standardized terms. Individual interpretations are not well received. Publication of propaganda material is centralized.

Changes of Line

JW & SLP: Changes of line are covered by taking older publications out of print.

Vision of Society

JW: The ultimate goal is a perfect society without injustice or suffering, on earth (not in heaven), personally governed by Christ, where all faithful JW's will live forever. This will be established by the personal intervention of Christ
after the JW's have prepared the scene.

SLP: The ultimate goal is a perfect society on earth, without injustice or unnecessary suffering, governed by the Socialist Industrial Union. This will be established not by the Party, but by the working class, prepared by the Party's ideas.

Anti-Intellectualism

JW: Members are strongly discouraged from pursuing higher education. The stated reason is that the urgency of the hour requires one to get just enough education to earn a steady living and devote all one's spare time to proselytizing. The real reason is undoubtedly that higher education promotes more critical thinking than the organization can tolerate. As a result, few people with a college education are found among the members.

SLP: Anti-intellectual feeling is subtle. De Leon's Marxist Science and the Colleges expresses contempt for a number of academics, but this sentiment is not explicitly generalized. Lawyers are excluded from membership, probably as a holdover of nineteenth-century prejudice against the profession. Members are forbidden to take college courses in economics, admittedly because this exposes them to dangerous ideas. Few intellectuals are willing to submit to the restrictions on freedom of expression which membership entails.

Non-English Speakers

JW & SLP: Non-English speakers in the U.S. are organized into separate units, not for discriminatory purposes, but to facilitate communication and mutual support.

Hierarchy

JW: The organization is governed by a hierarchy of institutions controlled from the top. The supreme body is a shadowy, virtually anonymous group.

SLP: The organization is governed by a hierarchy of elective institutions. The National Secretary exercises great power because of his informal ability to arrange the expulsion of dissenters.

Expulsion

JW & SLP: There is a well-defined and frequently used administrative procedure for expulsion of members, including an appeal process. Members are required to shun all contact with expelled members, to the point of returning their mail unopened.

Resigned Members

JW: The same policy of ostracism applies to resigned members.

SLP: The organization frequently "expels" resigned members in order to impose ostracism on them.

Revolts

JW & SLP: There are periodic revolts against the authority of the supreme institution, resulting in mass expulsions and resignations.
DISCUSSION BULLETIN
P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

REPORT #26
November 5, 1987

Members of the DB Committee

Dear Comrades:

Once more we are in the happy condition of having a balance large enough to pay for the next issue and for the $50 non-profit mailing fee, due January 1. This good news results not only from contributions but from a burst of renewals and new subs which have brought our subscription list close to last summer's high. I must also report that the combination of a six dollar credit from the bank and my having messed up the bookkeeping somewhere along the line brought the August 29 balance up to $146.72 from $135.72 as stated in Report #25.

From August 29 through November 5, we received the following contributions: Dick Weideman $3; A New York reader $7; Charles Collins $7; Adam Buick $19; Kenneth L. Smith $1; Francis Smith $20; George LaForest $2; Ed Willey $4; Ralph Goldstein $4; Harry Wade $20; Simon Schwartz $2; Ben Perry $2.25; Tim Mills $2; Monroe Prussack $10; Jeff Stein $2; Rik Winslow $2; Margaret M. Garcelon in memory of Dan Garcelon $20. Total $127.25. Thank you, Comrades.

FINANCES

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| Printing      | $100.00         |         |
| Postage       | 52.50           |         |
| total         | $152.50         |         |

| Balance       | November 5, 1987 | $195.47 |

Fraternally submitted

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee
Rival Organizations

JW & SLP: Ex-members frequently form rival organizations with the same structure and goals as the original organization. Such groups, lacking the firm discipline of the parent body, usually collapse due to internal bickering. The original organization considers those who participate in such groups the most depraved of all humans.

Relation to Government

JW & SLP: The ideology denies the moral legitimacy of all existing governments, but members are generally law-abiding.

War

JW & SLP: Strict neutrality is maintained with regard to all wars between existing governments, since nothing of real value is at stake.

The Draft

JW: Members are prohibited from performing military service. They do not apply for conscientious objector status in the U.S., however, since they do not object to war in any form, but are willing to fight under Christ’s leadership in Armageddon, the final battle against Satan. Ministerial exemptions can usually be obtained by virtue of the heavy proselytizing duties required of them.

SLP: The organization has no formal rules concerning the draft. Some members have served in the armed forces, some have been imprisoned for refusing service, and at least one has obtained conscientious objector status. The last is hard to justify in terms of the ideology, since members would fight in a war if the class struggle took that form.

Personality Cults (A Contrast)

JW: The founder’s name (Charles Taze Russell) is not known to most members, who blithely state that Jesus Christ was the founder. No effort is made to turn leaders into heroes.

SLP: The Party’s early leader, Daniel De Leon is the subject of earnest and uncritical admiration, to the point that many people get the false impression that he was the SLP’s founder.

Growth (A Contrast)

JW: Growth has been historically strong, with occasional brief downturns due to revolts.

SLP: Since about 1920 the membership has been in slow but steady decline, with occasional sharp downturns due to revolts.

Cross-Cultural Adaptability (A Contrast)

JW: The movement has spread to virtually every country, and grows and thrives even where it is outlawed and persecuted.

SLP: The movement adapted itself to the cultures of many immigrant groups in the early days, but has failed to establish itself outside the U.S., except for small outposts in Britain,
Postscript

The SLF is described in the present tense, though many of its policies have been changed.

Dear Friends,

I have been in a state of "near retirement" from libertarian socialist groups for some time now, my chief contact with the movement being the Discussion Bulletin and Workers' Democracy and a few other publications. After something like 10 or 15 years spent in and around the various groups I felt burned and burned out and my concerns shifted back to matters closer to home and to the labor movement itself. Given this background and these feelings, I was very happy to read about the experiences of "third camp" radicals coming out of the SLF. In many respects those of us who have emerged from the dogmatism of the anarchist and syndicalist groups have something to learn here. We have a few things in common and a few differences in experiences as well. I am not so keen on the raging debate about vouchers and remuneration; by the time the differences are settled the basic questions will probably be irrelevant.

What has concerned me over the last 9 years or so is the problem of organization, which still remains as the basic question facing radicals. My own thinking was shaped early on by the IWW and remained so until I saw firsthand in Ann Arbor in 1977-81 how those ideas could be mishandled. The New York libertarian socialist movement, which I came out of, had been intellectual, isolated and subject to the shifting fortunes of the European groups and the ideas bequeathed by old timers. We joked often that we knew better what was going in Barcelona than in the Bronx. Our IWW groups, and later the Libertarian Workers Group and the WSA, would suffer from these influences. They helped to make us incompatible with libertarians in other parts of the country who might have been our natural allies, people who were in our age group and who had experienced something of the labor movement and the left. Without the ability to work out ideas, and cut off from the mainstream of the labor movement by tradition and circumstance, we got caught up in in-fighting and a sad viciousness. When we finally broke out of that the fresh air we were breathing intoxicated us and so we went to other extremes in a process which confused people who, again, were our natural comrades. Eventually what had come around also went around; the WSA could have been a new beginning, could have set a new balance with a new combination of ideas and activities, but instead met the same fate as every other anarchist group. We could not seize the moment because reality had (again) escaped us.

The toll taken by these events is enormous. Aside from money, energy and time, a large number of comrades fell by the wayside and remain disillusioned and inactive. The old fights continue between the same people and the imagined stakes grow smaller at each turn and twist. Or so it looks to me, at any rate. The real stakes, the chance to make a difference and turn things around, pass many of us right on by.

Again, the question of organization is still there. I wonder at the inability of anarchists, syndicalists and "third force" people to unite amongst themselves. What is it in our theory and in our numbers that makes this impossible? The problem stands out most dramatically at times such
as these, when the labor movement is so in retreat and working class communities so battered—and when libertarian socialists seem so out of synch with what is going on around them.

For lack of anything better, and because my sympathies remain with broad movements, I participate in our local Latin American Solidarity Project, the Rainbow Coalition, local union work and the like. I've found that the best way to keep a perspective on things and food on the table is to get out soon hunting with other working class buddies once in awhile and to participate as much as possible with my friends and neighbors in the things which make up daily life in semi-rural working class America in 1987. I wonder who else out there in DB land is doing stuff as a "third force" radical with people who don't share our ideas or assumptions but who instinctively are drawn to militance and direct action and some non-hierarchical form of socialism? What are you doing? What successes and problems are you having? How do you connect this up with socialism? Can we discuss this in the DB?

I worry when I don't read talk of failures and doubts, when discussion is over the nuts and bolts of the socialist future and not over the here and now of working class life. I liked the analysis of the SLP because it showed us what not to do, what we should not become. Can we now be more positive and talk about what we are doing to struggle along with our fellow workers? Let's not approach this as if we have the answers, but in a more open-minded and experimental way. Instead of laying out the line let's admit some of our past mistakes and questions. Let's give the same thought to our past work and present hopes that we saw in the discussion on the SLP.

Fraternally,

Bob Rossi

1281 Denver Avenue
Morgantown, W. Va.
26505

Fellow Workers,

I have been asked to explain the basis of the conflict between the Workers Solidarity Alliance and anarcho-syndicalists grouped around the Libertarian Labor Review. This conflict has been referred to in passing by various writers in the Discussion Bulletin (myself included), and recently in the letters pages of Workers Democracy where former and present members of WSA levelled groundless personal attacks against myself and our tendency.

There are two basic issues at stake—the WSA's opposition to revolutionary unionism and other basic tenets of anarcho-syndicalism, and their campaign of disruption and slander against the anarcho-syndicalist movement and the IWW. The IWW's statement summarizing WSA's hostile activities follows; I will briefly touch upon the first point.

The WSA, to quote from its report to the 17th AIT Congress, does not believe that "the conditions for organizing a
revolutionary labor movement in America exist," going on to assert that we "no longer live in an age when it is possible to organize strictly anarcho-syndicalist unions and federations." The WSA and its officials have repeatedly asserted that it is not possible to build or sustain revolutionary unions except during periods of revolutionary crisis. There is not space here to debate the merits of this position--whatever else may be said of it, it stands in complete opposition to the most basic tenets of anarcho-syndicalism.

Anarcho-syndicalism's organizational form is the revolutionary union, through which workers organize to defend their immediate interests and to ultimately seize control of industry and administer it in our own interests. (We aren't the only ones, of course, to advocate revolutionary unionism. Classical DeLeonism, as I understand it, takes a similar stand on the need for revolutionary unions; though DeLeon would have the unions subordinated to the political party.) There have been differences within the anarcho-syndicalist movement about how revolutionary unions can most effectively be built and structured, what form the revolution would take (insurrection or general strike), and on other points both major and minor. But there has always been agreement on the centrality of revolutionary unionism to our theory and our practice.

WSA's theoretical position is much more akin to that of the council communists, though combined with a somewhat incompatible practice of infiltrating the reformist business unions (which, WSA argues, give workers "what they want"). They have been able to pass this off as anarcho-syndicalism only because so few of our fellow workers have any familiarity with the traditions and principles of our movement, and because too many of our comrades do not look beyond official pronouncements. It's all too easy to label oneself anarco-syndicalist (or socialist, for that matter)--what counts is actual practice.

For a world without bosses,
Jon Bekken

NOTE: Readers can obtain the IWW statement on the WSA free from Jon Bekken, P.O. Box 2824, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820.

Cont'd from p. 24

of an indifferent public? Maybe. But we will never know until we try. Just maybe the working class will take to the idea of actually directly controlling their own places of work, communities, and society at large. So far, they are accepting centralist forms of socialism in this country as a genuine alternative to capitalism. Maybe it is time we tried something else--decentralist socialism.

-Donald F. Busky, Local Chairperson, Socialist Party of Greater Philadelphia, a Socialist Party, USA local, 2208 South St., Philadelphia, PA 19146.
Dear Comrades,

The ICC invites examination of its basic position (BB 25). In my view the ICC is closer to the Trotskyists than to people who stand for the immediate establishment of a classless, moneyless, stateless world society ("communism" or "socialism", as you prefer).

The ICC is committed to establishing in the immediate future not socialism but what it, like the Trotskyists, calls a "transitional society". Its pamphlet on The Period of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism is quite explicit on this point:

"To claim --as many revolutionaries do today-- that the proletariat's seizure of power will lead directly to the creation of a new society or that it will resolve all problems, is to imagine that problems can be eliminated by closing your eyes to them" (p. 23).

"Just as the Hebrew people had to wait forty years in the desert in order to free themselves from the mentality forged by slavery, so humanity will need several generations to free itself from the vestiges of the old world" (p. 27).

We are offered, then, a "transitional society" that will last for two or three generations. During this period will persist the State (a "workers' semi-State" in ICC jargon), a vanguard party (p. 29), exchange relationships (p. 24) and "remuneration" (p. 34). There will also be an "economic policy" (p. 29) aimed at developing industry while at the same time increasing the workers' "standard of living". One of the contributors to an internal discussion within the ICC on the nature of this "transitional society" goes so far as to argue that "the proletariat will no longer be exploited --but production will still be dominated by exchange and the law of value" (p. 52). So we are asked to imagine an exchange economy in which the working class is no longer exploited! All this, Comrades, has nothing to do with socialism.

It is true that the proclaimed aim is to try to gradually abolish money, wages, prices and all the other exchange relationships (as well as classes and the State), but it is logically absurd to imagine that these could be gradually abolished. Either common ownership (communism, or socialism) exists and these features, which imply separate owners (and hence non-communism),
don't exist or these features exist and communism doesn't.

Communism (common ownership) can only be established in one go.

So the ICC's so-called "transitional society" is clearly a "non-communist" society, but of what sort? Since money, wages, exchange, etc are to persist the only possible answer is that it would be a form of capitalism, the same sort of state capitalism that existed in the early days of the Russian revolution.

--Adam Buick

Dear Comrades,

Frank Girard's effort to write about the SLP's decline in the last couple of decades is worthy, and I will try to add to it. My consuming interest in socialism goes back to World War II, and I still have it. To put my finger on our weak spot made the SLP vulnerable since De Leon left a staunch revolutionary party, it was the Russian Revolution and its influence on us. Rosa Luxemburg, who I consider a socialist genius, correctly evaluated the Russia Revolution in 1918 soon before she was murdered. The SLP highly regarded her and mentioned that she was critical of Lenin and Trotsky, but it did not quote this gem said by her:

"With repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the Soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinions, life dies out in every public instution becomes a mere semblence of life, in which only the bureaucracy remain an active element.

Her Spartacist party became the communist party of Germany because its members were mesmerized by the success of the bolsheviks. They disregarded the above and other sage remarks she made about Russian developments. The SLP likewise made no effort to cast doubt on the basic "soundness" of the Russian Revolution. It based its hopes on remarks by Lenin that the Soviets are like the industrial unions that De Leon spoke of. Its road to doom was paved with good intentions.

To avoid being corrected from its hopeful and tolerant attitude towards the Soviet Union, it did not study people considered to be fascist or right wing. All other Soviet Union experts were pro Soviet Union. The SLP neglected to learn about phony communism as well as liberal capitalism from the right wing because it had the same prejudices against the conservatives that the leftists had. In addition to being spared anti-Soviet Union propaganda from the right wing, the SLP was also spared criticism of government efforts to make capitalism work. The New Deal raised the hopes of many that they can live a decent life under capitalism with only the conservatives to challenge that belief. In my opinion most people who lost interest in the SLP believed that the capitalism that Marx wrote about is stable and humane after a fashion because it can be controlled. The
conservatives are most opposed to government controls and even more so as they get more conservative. It took lots of education from the right wing for a Marxist like me to be assured that capitalism is vulnerable to collapse and basically not humane and that the democratic industrial government is the only goal to work for.

Monroe Prussack

Dear Comrades,

In DB24 Marin Dekovich was wrong to disagree with Comrade Girard that the organization of revolutionary unions will be part of the revolutionary act itself. The growth of the union movement and the popular aspirations for more and better unions is in reverse today. Smokestack industries are disappearing in this country today because of worldwide competition which puts a premium on low cost production as well as on rapid technological changes. Today we do not have the high protective tariffs that were common on De Leon's time. In fact it was the Hawley-Smoot Tariffs that induced foreign investors to withdraw money from this country's banks, bonds, and stockmarket and bring on the crash in this country in 1930. Today capitalism is even more international than national. In fact it is as unstable as it was in 1848 when the Communist Manifesto was written. This coming crash, however, will surely be international, and developments will guide our actions as DeLeonists.

Monroe Prussack

DIRECT DEMOCRACY AND DECENTRALIST SOCIALISM VS. AUTHORITARIANISM

By Donald F. Busky

Frank Girard's The Socialist Labor Party Revisited tells the story of the degeneration of the SLP and the rise of its authoritarian leadership which continues to censor and expel members with differing viewpoints. In his concluding article in the Discussion Bulletin, No. 24, July 1987, pp. 17-8 he places the blame for this on the overwhelming industrial worker and immigrant composition of the party and the lack of intellectual leadership after the death of Daniel De Leon. Girard does not place entire blame on the authoritarian leadership of Arnold Petersen and Nathan Karp that followed. The party membership wanted such leadership, as Girard explains: "Rather obviously they retained control in part because they reflected the temper of a membership that felt comfortable with isolation and authoritarian control."

I have some problem with his placing the blame on industrial workers and immigrants. Conservative political scientists have long viewed the working class as inherently authoritarian, for example, Thomas Dye and Harmon Zeigler's The Irony of Democracy. I find this to be a thoroughly
elitist, false, biased, and anti-socialist argument. To put the blame on immigrants smacks, unfortunately, of bigotry. Why should immigrants who "barely speak English" be any more or less authoritarian than native born Americans? It reminds me of the anti-immigrant arguments of the Know-Nothings of the last century.

But leaving these questions aside, it is not clear at all why having "few intellectuals with academic training" in the SLP as compared to the Socialist Party, USA, the Communist Party, USA, etc., would make the slightest difference as to whether the SLP became authoritarian. It only makes sense if you believe that intellectuals are inherently more democratic minded. Communist and fascist parties around the world have their intellectuals, and obviously they are no guarantee of democracy.

While Girard is correct to not place all the blame on the leadership, and to point out that the rank and file of the SLP wanted authoritarian control, it is not clear why he thinks this is so. If he is blaming working class people and immigrants, a position I reject, while it might apply for the rise of Petersen, it does not apply for the rise of Karp years later when the party was no longer overwhelmingly industrial worker or immigrant in composition.

The Founding Fathers who drafted the Constitution which we celebrate its bicentennial this year, feared the masses and having too much democracy. The Trilateral Commission representing the ruling class of today also fears "the excess of democracy." But we as socialists ought to reject such views and champion that the problem is not too much democracy but too little. And if the SLP became authoritarian, perhaps the fault lies not with its members or the masses it tried to represent, but rather an initial lack of democratic practice and democratic ideas.

There is a unity, thought and action, a praxis at work here. Authoritarian practices stem directly from authoritarian ideas. Even a party that starts out with many democratic ideas may have some which are not, that in time come to the fore and poison the democratic character of the organization.

Did not De Leon argue for the working class to take control of the means of production through socialist industrial unions? Is this not a democratic idea?

But wait. De Leon would not consider other forms of socialist ownership and management as valid, nor has his followers. Additionally, it is also a highly centralist form of socialism. Workers would elect others make decisions for them at higher levels, they would not direct make policy decisions themselves. Factories would
not have independence, put would be under the control of layers of bodies. These are centralist and authoritarian aspects of what is otherwise a democratic conception of socialism, certainly far more democratic than state socialism as practiced in the Soviet Union, China, Western European social democracies, etc. Yet, perhaps not democratic enough.

Girard writes, "'Eventually, like Arnold Petersen, Karp was forced to promote greater centralization of authority in the NO.'" (p. 16.) But why was he "forced?" Girard does not really explain, except to say it was necessary to Karp's dominance to have his ideas passed in the face of dissention. But why did not he insist on domination? Maybe it was not the domination which cause the centralization, but the other way around, that is, centralist ideas about socialism stemming from De Leon leading to attitudes of domination. Add to this De Leon penchant for dismissing all other ideas about socialism other than his as being correct, and it is not hard to see that the pattern would be set for future leaders with authoritarian attitudes.

What kind of socialism would be free of such centralist and authoritarian attitudes, that would give rise to and maintain a truly democratic socialist party? It would have to be a socialism in which people did not give up their rights to decide to elected representatives, but exercised them directly. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in The Social Contract: "Sovereignty, for the same reason as it makes it inalienable, cannot be reseentified. It lies essentially in the general will, and will does not admit of representation: it is either the same, or other; there is no intermediate possibility....The people of England regards itself as free: but it is grossly mistaken: it is only free during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing."

Rousseau did not believe that representative democracy was a true democracy. He advocated direct democracy. Why? Because only under a direct democracy would people actually get their ideas and wishes expressed. Only individuals could represent themselves - no other could truely do so. Rousseau tends to think that under a perfect democratic system the common good which he calls the General Will shall always win out. Today we would modify this and say that even under perfect conditions people could democratically make a mistake and vote for things fundamentally opposed to the common good. However, democracy has the advantage of allowing people to become involved and air differences of opinions, and if a wrong choice be made, the people can reverse it soon. Authoritarian systems repress differences of opinions, and do not easily admit mistakes and change course. Direct democracy has an advantage of representative democracy in that advances the airing of differences of opinion by allowing all to express ideas in a vote-taking situation, and also
facilitates quicker change from past policies in error. Since it involves larger numbers of people, it is harder to bribe than direct democracy, and thus less corruptible.

There are two many arguments against direct democracy. First, it allows the unruly mob to rule, rather than permit reflection by educated elites. Again, this is another conservatively biased argument - the working class is irrational, the capitalist class is rational. On the contrary, it is the capitalist class wedded to the fundamentally irrational capitalist system that permits starvation and poverty in the midst of tremendous productive social forces that is irrational. Elites have vested self-interests rather than the common good in mind. The Founder Fathers feared the direct democracy of the masses because it would insist that property be more equality divided in the new republic. Direct democracy is imbued with more political equality, a bulwark of greater economic and social equality, and the elites of 200 years ago and today know it, and fear it.

The second argument is that direct democracy is impractical except for small societies like New England town meetings. This argument, even if it were true, would not stop a direct democratic socialism from coming into existence and functioning. Factories are small enough to be run on direct democracy if their is a will to do so. Individual socialists industrial unions could democratically run their own factories. The factory could be either owned by the larger community or state, or it could be owned by the workers themselves as a producers' cooperative. If it was owned as a cooperative, the workers would be somewhat shielded from outside forces such as the local government or the nation-state's government. That may not be a bad thing, especially if these governments are controlled by people who are opposed to democracy and socialism, be they conservatives or socialists. The negative side is that although such a cooperative would very likely operate in the interests of its workers, it may not always operate in the interests of society at large. For example, it is conceivable that such an industrial cooperative could be polluting the air, water or land and generally lack any social responsibility or large forms of social cooperation.

How could the entire economy be made socially accountable and cooperative without abolishing direct democracy? Some would have the state with geographically elected representatives be in a position to regulate the actions of the cooperatives. This would combine direct democracy on the local level and representative democracy on higher levels. Or the national government could be elected by the workers based on occupation to an industrial congress, as De Leon envisioned, but with the individual factories run by a direct democracy.

But there is a third alternative. It is a fundamental mistake to assume that direct democracy can only function on a local, decentralized level. Initiatives and referendums
permit the exercise of direct democracy over large areas.
A national initiative is as feasible as today's existing
state and local initiatives and referenda. People could
vote direct on issues affecting the entire country. Voting
booths may not be necessary for this. It could be done
through the mail or electronically by television. Methods
could be worked out to permit people to offer amendments
and substitute motions in such a system. Voters might be
swayed by powerful interest groups with lots of money. This
only show that Rousseau and later socialists were right in
insisting that equality of opportunity is necessary in order for
democracy to work and for the rich to not be able to buy
the votes of the poor. In other words, socialism is necessary
for democracy, and vice versa. Besides, it is harder to
sway the votes of the multitude than the handful of votes
in a smoke-filled backroom of professional politicians. These
can be bribed, but it is more expensive and harder to bribe
an entire nation. This doesn't mean that under a direct
democracy of the purest form the people will always know
what is right and in the common interest, but it is a system
that is freer from corrupting influences. Under a direct
democracy it is more likely that society as well as individual
factories and businesses under its regulation will be
governed with the common interest at heart, and not that
of the self-interests of professional politicians, bureaucrats,
capitalists owners and managers, etc. Political equality
begs greater social and economic equality and vice versa.
This is a more advanced conception of democracy and socialism
which we ought to champion rather than fear.

What works for governments and industries could also
work for political parties. Imagine a socialist party which
operates by the principles of direct democracy. When National
Executive Committees are abolished and replaced with the
membership directly voting by mail or other means on vital
issues, the authoritarian influence of some comrades will
be checked. They may be able to pack an NEC or central
committee, but can they pack an entire party membership with
effective direct democratic control? It is doubtful, and in
that democracy can be preserved, and parties not suffer
degeneration. Discussion bulletins such as this could play
an important role in providing room for debate in such a
decentralized, direct democratic, socialist party.

One final ingredient is needed: The socialist party
must be willing to admit members with differing views and
refrain from censorship and expulsion. This is what we
in the Socialist Party, USA call a "multi-tendency
party." You are free to conceive of socialism or any other
issue as you like. It is a source of democratic strength,
not weakness as it tends to prevent resignations and expulsions
far better than does centralist parties such as
the SLP, SWP, CPUSA, etc.
De Leon was right in seeing that state socialism would be no socialism at all. The working class would not be in control. His was a revolutionary vision of an empowered and democratic working class society. His faults were that he tended to be to rigid, nor admit to any improvement or difference of his ideas. Marx complained about such authoritarian “Marxists” himself. Marx’s and De Leon’s followers tended to treat them like infallible gods, and be extreme in condemning heresies to the true faith.

Let us renounce such true believers and their ways. Let us earn the right to be called revolutionaries by revolutionizing our own ideas. To not admit that the faults of Lenin’s successor stem from the errors of Lenin himself and his ideas, as Trotskyists do, is as wrong for De Leonists to not see that the Petersens and Karps and their errors are root in the errors of De Leon too. De Leon was not always right? His ideas are not infallible? He was uniformly wise and all-seeing? De Leon is not a god, but a man, with strengths and weaknesses? What a radical heresy! But nevertheless truth.

Dare to be radical! Dare to criticize the past and all our fathers and mothers who came before us! Dare to be worthy to be called their children and revolutionaries and socialists. Dare to call for direct democracy and decentralized socialism and socialist parties! Idle gestures in the face

Cont’d on p. 16