

President Carter shakes hands with Deng Tsiao-Ping and the last illusion of the Cold War is shattered. Supposedly 'Communist' China allies with capitalist America against supposedly 'Communist' Russia.

Joe (the Jerk) Clark promises mortgage deductibility, lower unemployment, economic prosperity — but he can't deliver on any of these promises.

The miners of Sudbury strike against INCO. But they find that besides taking on one of the strongest corporations in Canada, they have to fight their own international union and even their own local leadership that they themselves elected. Against all the odds they win.

The world today is a confusing landscape where the friends of today become the enemies of tomorrow and all orthodoxies are shattered. To help chart a path out of this maze is Workers' Action — the monthly newspaper of the International Socialists.

Subscribe today.

One year subscription, \$5. (\$7 for a supporting sub, \$10 for an institution)

Send to:
WORKERS' ACTION
PO Box 339,
Station "E"
Toronto, Ont.

\$1.50

POSTAL WORKERS ON STRIKE:

By
Philip Murton

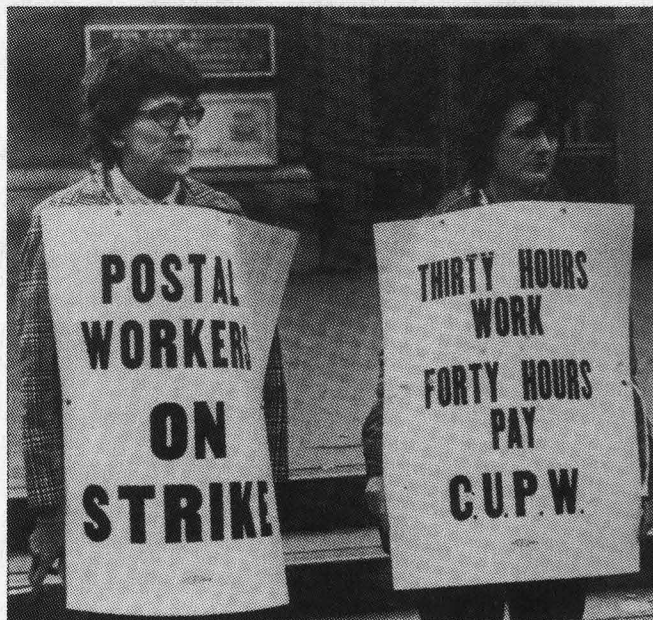


An
International Socialist
Pamphlet



THE NEED FOR A RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT





**POSTAL WORKERS ON STRIKE:
THE NEED FOR A
RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT**
by Philip Murton
An International Socialist Pamphlet

Produced by volunteer labour
for Workers' Action Books

\$1.50 per single copy
40 per cent discount on bulk orders
Mail orders, please include cost of postage

To order, write to:
Workers' Action Books
PO Box 339,
Station "E",
Toronto, Ont.

Contents

PREFACE

CUPW Since 1965, a Chronology

1 The Assault on CUPW

The Attack on Canadian Working People Since 1975
The Media Campaign Against CUPW
The Return to Work: October 25
CUPW: A History of Militancy

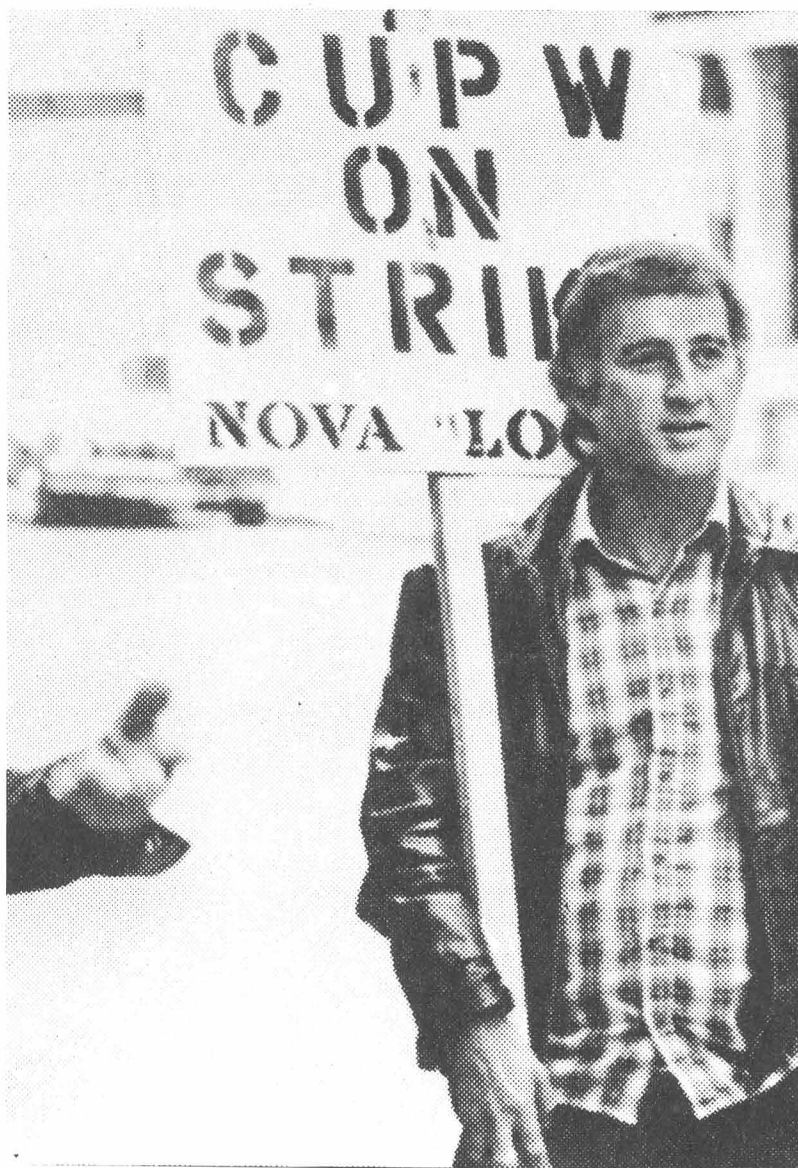
The Labour Bureaucracy

The Politics of the Bureaucracy:
Class Collaboration and Support for the NDP
Left-Wing Trade Union Leaders — an Alternative?

3 The Socialist Alternative

The Rank and File Movement
A Revolutionary Party
Why Socialism?

NOTES



PREFACE

"CUPW embarked on this course of action without consultation with the CLC. They have rebuked all efforts on the part of the CLC to change their suicidal direction. They therefore cannot reasonably expect the CLC to lend their support, or that of their affiliates, to a course of action which takes us down the road to anarchy . . ." (1)

THAT QUOTATION is part of a statement which Dennis McDermott, president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), had planned to release at a press conference on October 25, 1978, the ninth day of the 1978 Canadian postal strike.

The press conference was not held. On that day the RCMP carried out raids on several offices of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). In such circumstances, even McDermott had to realize that his planned statement would be poorly timed. Nevertheless, the fact remains, the CLC's Executive Committee was planning to abandon CUPW to the "justice" of the Trudeau Government.

In stark contrast to the actions of McDermott and the top leadership of the CLC stand those of rank and file postal workers. On the first day the strike was made illegal, they swelled the picket lines making it clear they were willing to defy Parliament. They were joined by many from other unions who came to show their solidarity with CUPW's struggle.

That struggle, with the attack on CUPW by the Government, and the sell-out by the CLC has raised many questions about the state of the labour movement today. Was there a winning strategy for CUPW? How do you explain the actions of the CLC? What was the role of the leaders of CUPW in the strike? These are some of the questions this pamphlet will attempt to clarify.

The pamphlet does not deal with the events in CUPW after the strike

do you explain the actions of the CLC? What was the role of the leaders of CUPW in the strike? These are some of the questions this pamphlet will attempt to clarify.

The pamphlet does not deal with the events in CUPW after the strike in October, although in some of the more general discussions information up to May 1979 is used.

Since October there have been two important events for CUPW. On March 30, the settlement imposed by the Mediator-Arbitrator was another attack on the union. In May, Jean-Claude Parrot was sentenced to three months in jail as a result of being found guilty on criminal charges.

The defeat of the October strike was a turning point for CUPW. The events that followed unfortunately flow from the logic of that defeat and the continued back-stabbing by the CLC leadership. Thus I have chosen to limit my analysis of events in CUPW to October 1978. The events of last October and since should be a clear warning for the Canadian labour movement. This pamphlet is a modest attempt to clarify why they happened; and, is an argument for a socialist alternative.

I should also thank all those who read the two earlier versions of this pamphlet and made suggestions.

Philip Murton
Toronto, May 1979



CUPW SINCE 1965, A CHRONOLOGY

1965 17 day national strike wins the right to strike and other important gains.

1967 Liberal Government passes Public Service Staff Relations Act (PSSRA).

1968 Three day strike by CUPW and the Letter Carriers Union wins first contract under PSSRA.

1970 Introduction of automation; CUPW responds with a series of rotating strikes. Government promises automation will not affect job security.

1972 Third contract, only one not preceded by a strike.

1974 April: National wild-cat starts in Montreal; ends with Post office withdrawing all firings.

1975 April: Wild-cat in Montreal over use of casuals; Widespread victimizations follow. **October 20 to December 2:** six week national strike.

1977 Post Office proceeds with automation, violating the contract at will. **April:** CUPW starts negotiations for new contract. **June 30:** contract expires.

1978 Negotiations continue, conciliation starts in April. **May 29:** Postmaster-General announces that the Government will not negotiate technological change.

October 12th — 1978 strike starts in Charlottetown; **15th —** Toronto local takes its strike vote, national vote is 78 percent in favour of strike action; **16th**

— CUPW meets with Labour Department, national strike called at midnight; **17th** — Government introduces Bill C-8; **19th** — Strike illegal; **20th** — CUPW leaders meet with the CLC, McDermott's telegram, Justice Minister goes to court to obtain injunctions against pickets; **23rd-24th** — Injunctions granted in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax, letters sent out to workers threatening firings; **25th** — RCMP raid CUPW offices, plan to charge leaders under Criminal Code, McDermott cancels press conference, CUPW mass membership meetings, back to work.

November 1978 to March 1979 Mediation-Arbitration under Lucien Tremblay. **March 30** — Imposed settlement reduces back pay and attacks union rights.

April Parrot to court for trial on Criminal charges, found guilty.

May Parrot sentenced to 3 months in jail, plus 18 month probation.



ONE The Assault on CUPW

CUPW STARTED the process of negotiating a new contract in April 1977. The old one would expire on June 30, 1977. It took until late July 1978 for Post Office management to come to the negotiations with any sort of proposals for a new contract, and then, these were a wage increase of less than seven percent over a one and a half year contract plus a poorer Cost-of-living Allowance. On technological change, they wanted to return to 1970, and eliminate any gains that the union had made out of the 1975 strike.

In October 1978 the Conciliation Board finally reported. Their report, however, accomplished very little in providing a basis for a settlement, although it had been the longest set of conciliation hearings since 1967 when the Public Service Staff Relations Board (PSSRB) was set up. Throughout negotiations the attitude of management was to delay and obstruct. The October strike was inevitable. Postmaster-General Gilles Lamontagne and Post Office management did almost anything to provoke it.

On October 12, the union was in a legal position to strike. In a statement to the press, Lamontagne indicated that the Federal Government "will not allow another strike" by CUPW. Later the same day, workers walked out in Charlottetown, to be joined by Montreal, Halifax, Windsor and Calgary within hours. The 1978 postal strike was on. The anger and frustration of thousands of CUPW members had come to the surface.

Still, on October 16, Jean-Claude Parrot, president of CUPW and members of the union's negotiating team met with Labour Minister Andre Ouellet in a last attempt to resume contract talks. The Government's final position was that CUPW submit to a government appointed mediator-arbitrator who would make binding decisions, or, face back-to-work legislation. Ouellet indicated that the Government had no intention of taking away CUPW's legal right to strike *if they agreed not to exercise it*. In response to this series of threats, CUPW called its legal strike across the country.

They did not have to wait long for the Trudeau Government to act: Bill C-8 was introduced in Parliament the next day. This back-to-work legislation set up a mediator-arbitrator to settle the contract and made CUPW's strike illegal as of October 19.

Parrot, on behalf of the leadership of CUPW, recommended that their members defy Bill C-8. The picket lines remained solid across the country. At Toronto's South Central Plant, there were around 300 pickets on the first morning of the now illegal strike. In the following days, the Government escalated its war against CUPW. Justice Minister Otto Lang obtained injunctions against picketing and the RCMP raided union offices for information so that they could charge Parrot and other leaders of CUPW under the Criminal Code. But most important was the threat to fire all workers not back on the job by October 26. The Government's offensive was obviously well planned and orchestrated. The reason why becomes clearer if this offensive is placed in a wider context.

THE ATTACK ON CANADIAN WORKING PEOPLE SINCE 1975

Since October 1975, with the introduction of wage controls, the government and employers have been on the offensive. Working people across Canada have seen their wages eroded, their social services cut back, and their trade union rights undermined. The press, armed with "facts" from Statistics Canada, have been trying to convince us that we are to blame for inflation, that it is workers' wages which cause rising prices.

Fairly typical is a front page article in *The Globe & Mail* (February 22, 1979). The headline runs "1974-78: Profits up 28.7 percent; wages rose by 50 percent. Pay also leads prices, Statistics Canada shows". The name of the game is "statistics". As in the old saying, there are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics. If you take 1975 the first year of wage controls as your base year, you find wages were up 31.3 percent and profits up 40.9 percent — a rather different story. The reason why Statistics Canada chose 1974 for their comparison is not hard to see. In that year profits were at a high point and wages at a low point, as expressed as a percentage of Canada's Gross National Product.

What concerns big business and their friends in government is that Canadian workers might try to catch up for what they lost during the period of wage controls. There should not be any doubt about the effects of the controls. In *The Globe & Mail* of May 18, 1979 we find:

"The anti-inflation program had a significant impact in restraining wage increases but considerably less effect on prices . . . the level of average weekly wages would have been about 7.7 percent higher by the third quarter of 1978 in the absence of controls, while the consumer price index would have been only about two percent higher."

There has been much speculation in the establishment press about a "wage explosion" and a new strike wave. To quote the Conference Board of Canada:

"It will be a year of continued uncertainty . . . and one of heightened expectations on the economic front as the anti-inflation program passes into history . . . since the fourth quarter of 1977, real earnings have been declining on an annual basis. This provides the basis for a renewed struggle over income shares. . ."

With the ending of wage controls in April 1978, it was clear that the Federal Government wanted a form of permanent wage controls for its workers. These took the form of proposed legislation, Bill C-22. The idea of C-22 was that the total compensation (wages and fringe benefits) of a group of public employees would be compared with the total compensation provided to persons doing similar work in the private sector; or, Average Comparability of Total Compensation (ACTC).

To implement proposals such as ACTC would be easier for the Government if it crushed CUPW, considered by many to be the strongest union in the public sector. Furthermore, the Trudeau Government obviously wanted to make an example of CUPW to help head off the possibility of a "wage explosion" or strike wave by Canadian workers in general.

But wage controls were simply the leading edge of an attack on Canada's trade unions. Over the last few years we have seen a good number of long and bitter strikes. Increasingly employers have been more willing to resort to the use of scabs, professional strike-breakers and massive police interventions. The Fleck strike in 1978 is one of the best known examples, and, in fact, one of the cases where the trade union movement was able to beat back the attack. More recently Dylex Ltd., one of Canada's largest clothing firms, was finally charged with conspiracy to break labour laws. Since 1976 Dylex has been doing its best to prevent unionization of its workers in Toronto. Its best has included violence, harassment and firings of its employees plus a lot of help from Centurion Investigations, a union-busting outfit.

In the long run, to decisively break the power of the working class movement the ability of workers to strike to improve their situation must be attacked. And two of the best ways to undermine the right to strike are the use of injunctions against picketing and the use of back-to-work legislation. In the weeks before the CUPW strike, the Tory Government in Ontario used back-to-work legislation against Toronto Transit workers; and the Federal Government was successful in getting the Letter Carriers Union to call off its rotating strike after just four days by threatening to use legislation. The climate had been indeed set for the government to teach the Canadian labour movement another "lesson" — and what better target than CUPW?

THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN AGAINST CUPW

CUPW has been the subject of much criticism in the press and on radio and television over the past few years. One effect of this has been to isolate them and destroy whatever sympathy other working people in the country have for

them. It started in earnest at the time of the 1975 strike, when the Postmaster-General argued that the strike was caused by a small group of "trouble-makers" in Montreal. He aimed to whip up hysteria in English Canada against Quebecois postal workers, to try to divide the union and to turn the public against CUPW.

Since then the establishment press has treated us to regular stories on the inefficiency of the Post Office. More important than this is the series of allegations of deliberate vandalism, destruction and waste in the Post Office. The *Toronto Globe & Mail* has played a key role in this campaign. As a result of articles in December 1977, the Post Office appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the charges.

A year later, in January 1979, the *Globe* ran an article that featured interviews with two people who worked at Toronto's Gateway Postal Plant over the Christmas period — again a series of charges about theft, vandalism and other criminal acts.

What is important about these articles and others is that CUPW was singled out for blame. In January 1979, Postmaster-General Lamontagne went so far as to equate militancy with criminality and to suggest that if you were a CUPW member you were guilty until proved innocent. The *Globe* (January 19, 1979) reported the following:

"The Postmaster-General defended management and supervisory staff and blamed the CUPW for defending militant workers."

It is very hard to over-estimate the effect of the government and the press in discrediting CUPW in the eyes of Canadians. When postal workers returned to work on October 25, they knew that the press was one of the big reasons that they had been beaten.

THE RETURN TO WORK: OCTOBER 25

In the first few days of the strike, CUPW had received several important messages of support; in particular, from the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Quebec region of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Probably the most inspiring was the one from a District Council of Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, which read in part:

"Thank God there are still some people in this country who recognize when their basic rights are being eroded. Keep on yelling — maybe you will wake up the rest of us."

But, as the attacks on CUPW continued, the silence of the CLC became more ominous. On October 20, after a meeting between CUPW leaders and the CLC's Executive Committee, McDermott sent the following telegram to certain, but not all, top union leaders:

"Suggest you refrain from commenting on merits of current postal strike, until such time as CLC has had opportunity to clarify its position." (2) According to an article in *Canadian Dimension* (January-February 1979) several unions did in fact withhold statements of support because of McDermott's telegram.

On the evening of October 25, CUPW held mass membership meetings

across the country. At this point, the National Executive Board (NEB) of the union instructed their members to return to work immediately.

The reaction of most of the membership was one of anger and confusion. Many felt betrayed by Parrot and the national leadership. Others placed most of the blame on McDermott and the CLC.

The role of the CLC was fairly clear; Parrot's was much more ambiguous. At times, at least by implication, Parrot's message to the membership was: "Stay united, follow the leadership of the National Office — and *we will win*." The events of October 25 destroyed that belief.

The explanation for the return to work, given by the NEB ran as follows:

"We could have tried to call the government's bluff when the post office said our people would be fired if they kept up the strike. But we didn't think it was a bluff . . . *We had to choose between destruction and salvaging their Union to fight again.*" (3)

Some would argue that the CUPW leadership should have anticipated the threat to fire their members. This obviously is true, but, it is too simple an explanation of the fate of the strike.

The point is that the options posed by the NEB were not the only ones. CUPW could have kept fighting if a militant strategy for building the active solidarity for its strike among Canadian workers had been adopted. But before we can look at a winning strategy, we have to be clear why Parrot and the national leadership of CUPW were blind to such a choice. To do this it is essential to look at the history of CUPW, but also we must consider how the leaders of CUPW fit into a general analysis of the trade union bureaucracy.

CUPW — A HISTORY OF MILITANCY

CUPW has an almost unparalleled history of militancy over the last 15 years. This plays a key role in the thinking of both the union's leaders and many of its rank and file activists.

In the summer of 1965, when they did not have the right to strike, postal workers went on a 17 day national wild-cat strike. It shocked the leaders of the Canadian Postal Employees Association (CPEA), the forerunner of CUPW, as much as the Government. What was even more shocking was that they won. Later in 1965, CPEA became CUPW and the leadership was replaced by those more willing to lead a fight against the Post Office management.

It took the Liberals until 1967 to pass the Public Service Staff Relations Act (PSSRA) which gave postal workers as well as other federal civil servants the legal right to strike. The right to strike was granted, but from the Government's point of view this was basically an attempt to channel the militancy of postal workers into a set of bureaucratic procedures. The PSSRA was designed to regulate and control a growing militancy. But, because of the 1965 postal strike, the Government had to give its workers the legal right to strike. Regardless of the bureaucratic restrictions, gaining the legal right to strike was a step forward.

The next important event and perhaps the high point of effective militancy was the national wild-cat of April 1974. It started in Montreal over the suspension of 20 militants for wearing their "Boycott the Postal Code" T-shirts. In response, the workers occupied the main post office. There was support from across the country as Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton and Hamilton went out. In Ottawa, the NEB was paralysed; and, in fact, came close to a total sell-out. Jim McCall, CUPW president, was in favour of a "compromise" with the Government. The Montreal local would have nothing to do with this and said that the only person they wanted to represent them was Parrot, then national chief steward. McCall considered this a challenge to his authority and resigned as president. Joe Davidson then became acting president.

The Government took McCall's resignation as a sign of weakness (in reality it was just the opposite) and struck harder. They fired the 20 in Montreal and had police clear the post office building. At this point the NEB called a national strike which lasted about a week. In addition to the defense of Montreal, the classification of coders, which management wanted to pay at a lower rate than postal clerks, became an important issue.

Out of the strike, the Government was forced to lift all firings and promise no reprisals. But the CUPW leadership backed down on the coder issue in agreeing to have it referred to a special arbitration committee.

During the 1975 national strike, CUPW was the first major union up against Trudeau's wage controls. They were virtually isolated as the CLC was quite willing to make tough speeches against controls but was not willing to organize any support for CUPW. This six week strike did not win CUPW any important gains on wages. And, although they did get some concessions on technological change, it was an empty victory as management violated them at will.

It was clear that the strike had been a turning point. It had been long and bitter with few gains. Next time it was going to take a lot more than the strength of CUPW alone to win *any* gains. Would that other strength be forthcoming?

For the answer, we must turn to an analysis of the labour bureaucracy and CUPW's relationship to it.

TWO

The Labour Bureaucracy

It is important to realize that the trade union movement of today is a product of the period of capitalist prosperity from World War II until the early 1970's. Trade unions were considerably different in the 1930's and 1940's when they had to fight for the right to strike and to win union security. Of necessity, rank and file members were much more involved in their unions than they are today.

Over the last 30 years of relative prosperity, union leaders were able to win real wage gains for their members without resorting to militant struggles. In exchange for labour peace and guaranteed high productivity, management was prepared to offer wage gains. But, in order to win these gains, the labour leaders had to trade off the shop floor strength of the union, such as democratic grievance procedures and strong and effective shop stewards bodies. The union structures became transformed from shop-floor organs of workers into "business unions" run and controlled by a small staff of highly paid, full-time officers and business agents. The labour bureaucracy is this group of people who work in the trade unions.

Another part of this transformation relates to the labour legislation brought in by various governments. Yes, unions got the right to strike and recognition, but the government set up complicated and bureaucratic rules and procedures to control conflicts. This happens in two ways. First of all, the procedures tend to delay and slow down a union's contract negotiations. A whole series of steps are necessary before the union is in a legal strike position; conciliation is the clearest example. Secondly, the settling of grievances, for example, becomes more and more the job of the union's full-time staff. And, as a result, rank and file workers have less input. Increasingly unions become dependent on advice of lawyers and other professionals. Furthermore, the trade union leaders begin to see themselves as "expert" negotiators who put forward the workers' case.

The leaders of the Canadian union movement have few direct ties to the day-to-day experience of their membership, have salaries usually far in excess of the average union member's and have very different working conditions. Moreover, governments offer bureaucrats numerous "honours" such as positions on government commissions, honorary university degrees, and so forth. Both the politicians and labour officials recognize that these privileges depend upon maintaining a "respectable" image. The militancy and the willingness to defy Parliament that CUPW members showed must have given them some anxious moments. Southam News columnist George Oake, gives a worthwhile description of Dennis McDermott:

"It looks as though the CLC chief is trying to put organized labour into a three-piece suit so it can play the boardroom games of its enemies with new-found sophisticated guile.

"This man . . . drinks Chivas Regal scotch and admits he enjoys breaking bread with the powerful and mighty . . .

"Two weeks ago McDermott toyed with a glass of cognac on the 34th floor of a Vancouver hotel . . . and talked of the CUPW affair.

"It would have been suicidal for the labour movement to support the strikers in defiance of the law' . . ."

These labour bureaucrats distrust their ordinary members. They fear that the rank and file will take action themselves, thus eliminating the importance of the leaders. They prefer to be in control. If there is going to be a strike or demonstration, they want to be in charge. Again the 1978 postal strike gives an example. Because Parrot and the leaders of CUPW refused to let the CLC dictate to them on how the strike should be run, the CLC gave them no support. The point of this argument is not that Parrot and the CUPW leaders are "ordinary members", but that the top leadership of the CLC felt it necessary that they be in control. It also illustrates another important aspect of the labour bureaucracy; it is not homogeneous. Parrot represents a "left" wing within the labour leadership.

What is it that Parrot has taken "left" positions in relation to most other top union leaders? Why was the national leadership of CUPW willing to recommend defiance of the law? The best explanation is that, within CUPW, there is considerable pressure from the rank and file, especially in the large locals. If only to retain any credibility with its membership the CUPW leadership had to take a militant stance. McCall, who resigned as CUPW president during the 1974 wild-cat, was one of a number of CUPW officers who were either not re-elected or were otherwise driven from their positions by the pressure of the rank and file. This lesson was not lost on Davidson, CUPW president 1974-77, nor Parrot. To quote Davidson:

"Like Les Hood before him, McCall had been unable in three years to persuade postal management to yield enough to justify his belief in reason and discussion as a satisfactory alternative to confrontation and the exercise of raw power." (4)

In general, the division within the labour bureaucracy can be related to pressure from below. The unions whose members are most under attack and where there is a tradition of a strong shop-floor organization and militant struggles are likely to have the most "left" or militant leaderships. This obviously is a generalization, but it does provide a useful starting point for discussion.

The labour bureaucracy is best seen as a social caste, between classes —

between the capitalist class and the working class. Their existence is based upon their ability to mediate and negotiate. The stability of their position depends on minimizing conflict. This helps to explain why their support for workers' struggles is inconsistent.

In 1969 the British socialist Tony Cliff in an article "On Perspectives" made a very useful comment on the bureaucracy:

"The vacillations of the trade union bureaucracy between the state employers and the workers, with splits in the far-from-homogeneous bureaucracy will continue and become more accentuated during the coming period. The union bureaucracy is both reformist and cowardly. Hence its ridiculously impotent and wretched position. It dreams of reforms but fears to settle accounts in real earnest with the state (which not only refuses to grant reforms but even withdraws those already granted) and it also fears the rank-and-file struggle which alone can deliver reforms. The union bureaucrats are afraid of losing what popular support they still maintain but are more afraid of losing their own privileges vis-a-vis the rank and file. Their fear of the mass struggle is much greater than their abhorrence of state control of the unions. At all decisive moments the union bureaucracy is bound to side with the state, but in the meantime it vacillates."

THE POLITICS OF BUREAUCRACY: CLASS COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT FOR THE NDP

In the 1950's and 1960's, the viewpoint of the bureaucracy was business unionism based explicitly on class collaboration. The logic of this position is that what is good for the company is good for the union, or, what is good for "Canada" is good for workers. Taken for granted is the continued existence of capitalism, in fact, a capitalist economy that is expanding. Now that it has become obvious to most that the economy is in trouble, the options of the bureaucracy have started to change. It is useful to look at their response to wage controls and to study these changes.

Since 1975, when the Trudeau Government introduced wage controls, the labour bureaucracy has been in a real bind. In order to protect the interests of workers, and keep their base of support, they had to be willing to lead a struggle against wage controls. But their problem was that they were afraid of the forms of struggle necessary to win, mass rank and file action culminating in general strikes. In order to protect their privileged positions in the hierarchy they had to limit the struggle. Thus we had a token one day strike on October 14, 1976 and a new CLC policy adopted at the 1976 Convention.

This new policy was spelled out in *Labour's Manifesto for Canada*. It was adopted; partly because the leadership orchestrated support for it. But it was also accepted because, as many delegates complained, they only received copies of it after the convention had started and therefore were unable to give

it serious thought or to organize opposition to it. This manifesto argues for "social corporatism". It states:

"Labour has always set the price at which it would support 'the system' . . . The price of labour's future support must be an equal share in the economic and social decision-making on a national basis with the other partners — business and government."

A business-government-labour "partnership" — that was the new face of the labour bureaucracy's class collaboration. The leaders of the CLC saw the "Day of Protest" — October 14, 1976 in two ways: first of all as a method of putting pressure on the government to agree to a "partnership"; secondly as a way of relieving the pressure from below, from the rank and file for action against wage controls. A tripartite arrangement with business, government and labour would mean permanent wage controls. Every year the government could convince the labour leaders that the economy could only afford so much in wage increases and remain competitive. Then the labour officials would have to force those guidelines on their affiliated unions. This would mean a more bureaucratic trade union movement. And, one integrated into the state machinery. It would mean the end of what little remains of democratic, membership-controlled unions.

The CLC's policy of social corporatism, or "tripartism" as it became known, was increasingly discredited in the labour movement. But the leaders of the CLC are rather persistent. They are firmly wedded to the concept of tripartism, whatever the name. In February 1978, McDermott was interviewed in the United Auto Workers' *Solidarity*. He said:

"What we are really trying to say . . . is 'meaningful consultation', and I see nothing wrong with that. Tripartism is a mancing-sounding word. When you come out with an "ism", it indicates an ideology or something, and it's scary. But I really see nothing wrong with approaching it as a long-term objective."

So far the CLC leaders have not been successful in their quest of tripartism but they still want a "piece of the action". Another very important reason for the CLC's refusal to support CUPW's strike is that they are urging "moderation" as part of their strategy for tripartism. Militant strikes don't fit into their game plan. What does fit their plans is "political action", specifically support for the New Democratic Party.

Because such support is another central feature of the overall strategy of McDermott and friends, they feared that strong support for CUPW would endanger the NDP's chances in the Saskatchewan Provincial Election on October 18, 1978. Near the beginning of the 1979 Federal Election campaign McDermott was quoted as follows: "Our necks are on the line". He outlined the CLC's plans for a massive campaign for the NDP and indicated that the congress had asked all affiliated unions to contribute money and manpower. (*Globe & Mail*, March 29, 1979)

During the debate on Bill C-8, the law passed against CUPW, the NDP showed its true colours. Yes, they voted against the Bill, but did so rather quietly. The strike wasn't popular. Many NDP M.P.'s must have thought that if they came out strongly against C-8, they might hurt their chances of being re-elected in the coming Federal Election. Their first priority is getting re-elected. They get shy about supporting militant strikes.

While it generally makes sense to vote NDP as opposed to the big business parties, the Liberals and the Tories, we must realize that the NDP in power

has been willing to use back-to-work legislation against strikers; thus, fundamentally challenging the basic principle that trade unions should be controlled by their own membership. There are examples from both British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Also, we should remember former NDP Premier of Manitoba Ed Schreyer's support for wage controls. It seems that he has got his reward with his appointment as Governor-General.

Working people in Canada should vote for the NDP because it is supported by the labour movement, but we should do so without illusions. The NDP and the trade union leaders discourage the active involvement of rank and file workers. They want people to vote and that is all. The last thing they want to see is workers going on strike during elections. Militancy and working class solidarity are things they fear the most. During the economic boom of the 1950's and 1960's, workers on strike rarely needed the support and solidarity of the rest of the labour movement to win. The rate of unemployment was considerably lower. And, most strikes were short and involved just one group of workers. They were *sectional* struggles. Now, in the late 1970's, it is increasingly the case that workers have to fight as a *class* to win or in some cases to keep what they have already got.

LEFT-WING TRADE UNION LEADERS: AN ALTERNATIVE?

But can Parrot and the "left-wing" lead the kind of struggle necessary to win today? There is some evidence for this view. At the CLC Convention in 1978, CUPW came prepared with its *Program of Action for the Labour Movement*, a set of alternative resolutions. Some of these proposals were quite good and they earned CUPW the hatred of McDermott, to quote:

"CUPW can't stand at these microphones pouring buckets of shit over the platform and not expect retaliation." (5)

Also, McDermott argued that opposition to the Executive Council's policies was the work of "communists, a small assortment of Maoists and Trotskyists" and he added CUPW in as the "new bible thumpers of Labour".

The month before the strike Parrot attempted to "mend fences" with the CLC. This could be described as "famous last words". He was interviewed by the *Financial Post* (September magazine):

"Some CUPW members have called former CLC president Joe Morris a traitor to the labour movement . . . But now that . . . McDermott is president, Parrot thinks the CLC will have a better image.

"McDermott," he says, "will be closer to the membership. I don't believe there will be any serious problems between me and McDermott."

The 1978 postal strike illustrates the limitations of "left-wing" trade union leaders. Being labour leaders, even the most apparently militant ones, they are limited by the very structures of the bureaucracy. Without challenging these structures they cannot or will not lead winning struggles.

Central to a strategy for the 1978 strike is the role of militancy of CUPW. Without the militancy shown by CUPW members in the strike, victory would

have been impossible. But the lesson of this strike is that isolated militancy is not a winning strategy. The strategy pursued by Parrot and the national leadership placed too little emphasis on the necessity of solidarity with the rest of the labour movement. For the most part a great many of the union's rank and file activists shared this viewpoint, which comes from the union's history of militant strikes.

When Parrot was faced with the betrayal of the CLC, what were his options? He may genuinely have wanted mass union support, but he balked at going "over the heads" of the CLC brass and, at appealing directly to the rank and file of the trade union movement. The nature of his bureaucratic position prevented him from doing so. The rules of the game for labour leaders is that communications between unions goes from official to official.

One important point is that trade union leaders' views of what is possible are restricted. Because of his position, Parrot could not see any alternative but an orderly retreat. Because he is a trade union officer, he necessarily placed undue emphasis on the militancy of *his* union, on a sectional struggle.

The leaders of CUPW have an ambiguous attitude vis-a-vis the capitalist state. They would prefer the government to be reasonable. Their problem is that the class struggle disrupts this vision. CUPW's Crown Corporation campaign illustrates their attitude quite well.

Shortly after the 1975 strike the CUPW leadership dropped the union's Boycott the Postal Code campaign. They thought they had obtained lasting gains on technological change in the contract. The union put its efforts into a campaign for a Crown Corporation. They argued that, with the Post Office as a Crown Corporation under the Canadian Labour Code, the union could negotiate technological change and other issues that are not possible under PSSRA.

One of the effects of this campaign was to tell workers to rely on the reasonableness of the Government rather than on their collective strength. And, if we remember, this was the same Government which had encouraged Post Office management to violate the contract on technological change. Wasn't it rather naive to expect such a Government to set up a Crown Corporation that would benefit the workers? The facts of the matter are that the union should have done a much better job of taking on the anti-union propaganda directed against CUPW since the 1975 strike, instead of begging the Trudeau Government to be "reasonable".

"Left-wing" labour leaders like those of CUPW are tied to the continued existence of capitalism. Although they are forced to lead militant struggles, their viewpoint is based on reformism, the belief that capitalism can be made "reasonable". Because they are trade union leaders, they see struggles from the viewpoint of "their" union. Because they are part of the labour bureaucracy, their options are limited by the structures.

These kinds of limits are not new, although the post World War II boom has made them sharper. The revolutionary socialist tradition has something useful to say. Writing in the early part of this century, Rosa Luxemburg put it quite well:

"The specialization of professional activity as trade union leaders, as well as the naturally restricted horizons which is bound up with disconnected economic struggles in a peaceful period, leads only too easily, among trade union officials, to bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook...

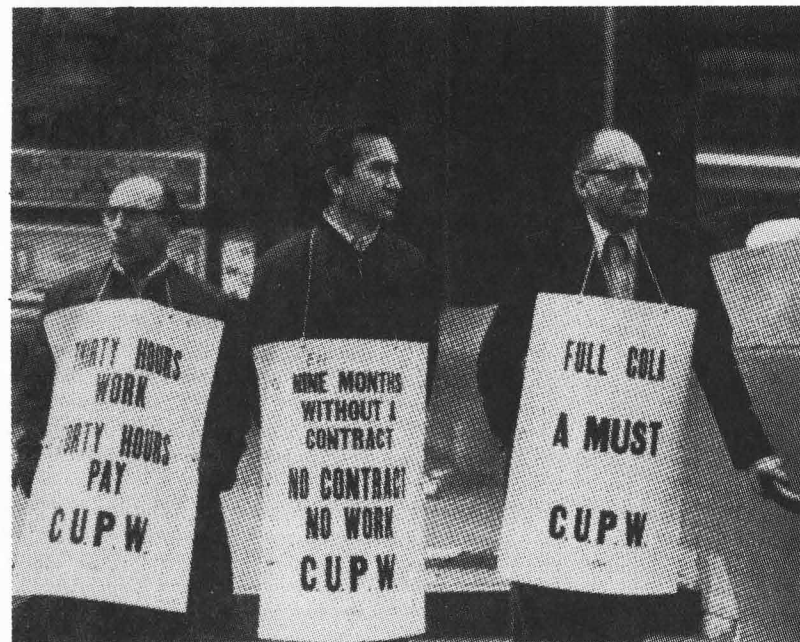
There is first of all the overvaluation of the organization...a means has

gradually been changed into an end...From this comes that openly admitted need for peace which shrinks from great risks and presumed dangers to the stability of the trade unions" (6)

The Executive Committee of the CLC confirms the validity of the second part of this statement. They described CUPW's strike as a course of action that would:

"...leave the labour movement in total disrepute and, at worst, create nation-wide havoc and possible destruction of the movement..." (7)

Rank and file workers cannot let the problems or limitations of trade union leaders stand in the way of our willingness to fight. For a winning strategy in 1978, postal workers needed the active support of the rest of organized labour. Mass pickets from other unions on their lines would have convinced the Trudeau Government that CUPW was not alone. There was sympathy for postal workers from many rank and file unionists across the country but that solidarity was not organized. That is why we need a rank and file movement in the trade unions — a movement that links together thousands of union activists at the grass-roots level — a movement **independent of the trade union brass** that will provide the push for action and organization when our leaders refuse to fight.



THREE

The Socialist Alternative

THE RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

The rank and file can only depend on their own united, militant action. Quebec workers have said this best of all with the slogan: "Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens" — We must rely only on ourselves. The only way of preventing future sell-outs by the trade union brass is the building of a movement that is **independent** and **organized**, that is based on the rank and file, and, that doesn't **rely** on trade union leaders, however "left". This movement in the unions must fight for militant policies.

It must be guided by the principle of class struggle and be opposed to all collaboration with the bosses and their governments.

A first step in the building of this movement would be rank and file caucuses in local unions. Through caucuses which meet regularly and through rank and file controlled newsletters, workers can start to counter the union bureaucrats' conservatism. These newsletters provide a way for militants to organize themselves as an independent force in the unions. It should be stressed, however, that the purpose of a caucus is neither to replace the union nor simply throw out the present trade union leadership. Instead, the key goal of a caucus is to turn unions into fighting organizations controlled by the rank and file.

In various unions, the key issues for a rank and file caucus will be somewhat different. CUPW provides a very interesting, but not typical, case. If there had been a rank and file grouping in CUPW during the recent strike, it would have launched the appeal for solidarity when Parrot backed down. But to be realistic, the success of this action would probably have depended on the existence of, at least, the beginnings of a rank and file movement in the major trade unions.

In CUPW there is another important issue. What is the relationship between the rank and file and a "left" leader like Parrot? In the long run, there is no fundamental difference between the "left" and the "right" trade union

officials. Therefore, our strategy must be based on the rank and file, organized and independent of **both**. But what is true in the long run may not necessarily be useful for tactics in the short run.

As a starting point for this question of tactics, there is a statement from the Clyde Workers' Committee, which was part of the revolutionary shop stewards movement in Great Britain during World War I, that is well worth quoting:

"We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately if they misrepresent us."

Being composed of delegates from every shop and untrammelled by obsolete law or rule we claim to represent the true feeling of the workers."

Thus, support for "left-wing" leaders in specific situations — for example, in the conduct of a strike or in a union election vis-a-vis the "right", does not mean uncritical or unconditional support for them. But, in spite of their real limitations, Parrot and others remain preferable to the Dennis McDermott's of the Canadian labour movement. The reason for this relates to the ability of the rank and file to take action independent of their leaders. In CUPW, the national leadership has generally been more "tolerant" of local wild-cat strikes (to be frank: in some cases they had little choice) than the leaders of many other unions. In some unions, the trade union bureaucrats are more eager than the boss to get the workers back on the job during a wild-cat. The important point here is that with "left" bureaucrats there are generally better conditions for the rank and file to organize and take action.

For a rank and file movement to grow and be effective it is necessary for those involved to become convinced of a consistent political viewpoint of **class struggle** and the **independent organization of the working class**. These two principles have been historically part of the working class movement. But, in the past 30 years, the dominant ideas have been class collaboration and reliance on trade union leaders, in short, reformism. Now the labour movement created in that period won't even defend workers' gains. All immediate struggles, in order to win, must transcend the horizon of reformism and move towards class solidarity and independent action. But to do this consistently requires the rejection of the ideology that there is a common long-run interest between bosses and workers. It requires a socialist perspective.

Because of the post World War II boom and the Cold War, socialists have lost the influence they once had or were driven out of the labour movement.

It is however, possible to look at labour's history for examples of this influence. In the first half of the 1920's, when the Canadian Communist Party was a revolutionary organization, it played a key role in the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), a union organization which fought for a program of militant trade unionism. In particular, one of their central demands was for the amalgamation of craft unions and the creation of industrial unions. At the 1923 Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress (the forerunner of the CLC), their proposals had the support of about a quarter of the delegates.

Today, in Great Britain, the Socialist Workers' Party and its supporters have been able to play an important role in taking some small steps towards the building of a rank and file movement. In a number of major unions, there are rank and file newspapers linking militants from different locals.

A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY

In the long run, to sustain a rank and file movement, especially at low points in the class struggle, revolutionary organization is essential; as only those committed to the key principles of class struggle and the independent organization of the working class can consistently champion the struggles of the rank and file. But it is absolutely essential that they work with anyone who is willing to fight; as a revolutionary organization depends on the independent self-organization of the working class.

The ruling class is generally able to organize its affairs according to a coherent strategy. It is itself highly centralized with a massive state apparatus at its disposal, as well as the help of the mass media.

Whenever workers' militancy becomes a threat, the ruling class turns to its institutions — Parliament, the courts and the police — as a first line of defense. The attack on CUPW makes this point clear enough. Reformers like the NDP and CLC bureaucrats would like to believe that workers can take part in such a state and use it for their purposes. Unfortunately, history indicates otherwise. The military overthrow of the Allende Government in Chile in 1973 is the most recent example.

The working class can only really win when it carries through the struggle all the way. But to do so the most militant leaders of the working class must join together under a common strategy, program, and democratic organization. In a common organization, these militants can help to provide direction for the working class movement and counter the propaganda of the employers and government. This must be done in order to defend our interests today and to lay the basis for a workers' revolution.

But a socialist group cannot simply proclaim itself to be "the Party" as many do. Rather, a socialist organization must earn the right to lead the working class over time through real struggles. Only after proving itself among working people by consistently fighting for their interests and by winning large numbers to its ranks and leadership can a socialist party emerge and grow.

WHY SOCIALISM?

The attacks on Canadian working people in the last few years are not going to end. Capitalism, internationally, is at the beginning of a long period of instability and crisis. It has not really recovered from the recession of 1974. The economic boom of the 1950's and 1960's is a thing of the past. Economists have had to invent a new word for the current situation, "stagflation" — economic stagnation with high unemployment and high inflation.

The only way the capitalists have of trying to keep their profit rates at an "acceptable" level is by driving our standard of living down. Working people

in this country are being forced to pay for an economic crisis we had no part in making.

Moreover, real social equality for all oppressed groups in society (for example, women, or blacks, or gays) is becoming a cruel joke as the reforms of the 1960's are under attack. As the economic crisis deepens, the capitalists and their friends in the mass media will more and more be looking for scape-goats — someone, anybody but themselves, to blame for the economic and other problems.

Finally, we in the International Socialists believe that working people of this country must take control of society and organize it for human needs and not for the profit margins of a tiny ruling class. Our vision of socialism and workers' control has nothing whatever to do with countries like Russia or China. These countries call themselves "Socialist", but they are not. They are state capitalist. A small bureaucratic class controls the state and through it the whole of society, and, everyone works for one boss — the state. We support any attempt by workers, through their independent self-organization, to overthrow these ruling bureaucratic classes.

In Canada, the International Socialists is a small revolutionary socialist group which sees the building of a rank and file movement as one of the central tasks for socialists. Where our members are in trade unions we attempt to encourage and participate in rank and file actions. *Workers' Action*, our monthly newspaper, carries stories of workers' struggles, as well as arguing for the ideas of a rank and file movement. The newspaper also features regular coverage on a wide range of issues: from the women's movement, international news and analysis, to the Canadian economic crisis.

As Marxists, we believe that the working class, organized at the workplace, plays the central role in any working class revolution. It then follows that the link between the work place and the revolutionary party is key. This question of the relationship between party and class is among the most misunderstood in the revolutionary tradition. People usually find themselves arguing either for the building of a mass movement in the working class, or, for the building of the party, but rarely both.

The importance of the rank and file movement to the politics of the International Socialists is that it provides a way of combining these two tasks. A revolutionary organization not only is built out of the movement but also sustains it.

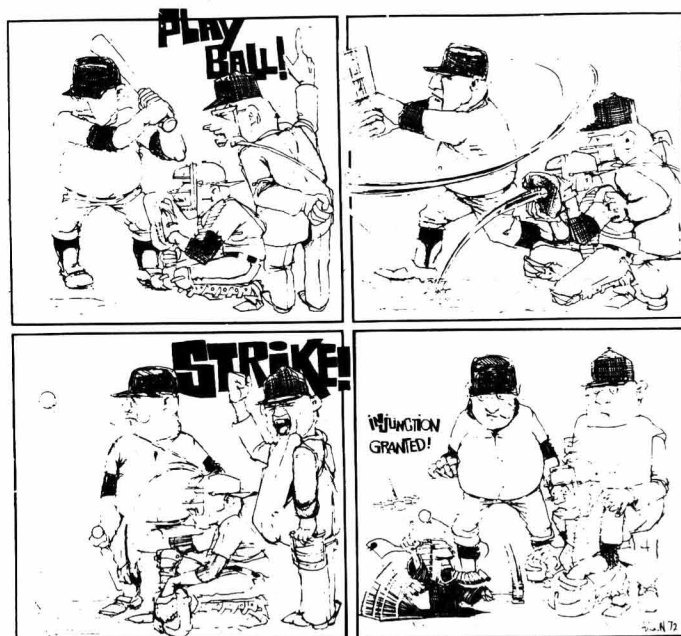
Because we see socialism as the self-emancipation of the working class, we have no separate interests from those of the working class, internationally, or those of the entire movement. In our view, socialism can only be won by working people organizing and struggling on their own behalf. Every time workers fight in their own interest against those of the employers, every time working people fight for the rights of an oppressed group, every time they fight for their class as a whole, every time they win battles the media promised would be lost, their self-confidence rises.

The activities of the International Socialists are directed to building a revolutionary party by fighting to strengthen the self-confidence and socialist consciousness of the working class.

If you agree with the views expressed in this pamphlet and would like more information, or, would like to join the International Socialists, write us at P.O. Box 339, Station "E" Toronto, Ontario.

NOTES

- 1 Full statement in *Canadian Dimension* Vol. 13, No. 5 (Jan.-Feb. 1979) p.20
- 2 *Canadian Dimension*, p. 19.
- 3 NEB Statement quoted in *Summary of Strike*, Toronto Local CUPW.
- 4 Joe Davidson, *Davidson & Deverell*, Toronto 1978, p. 147.
- 5 *Canadian Dimension*, p. 17.
- 6 Quoted in *International Socialism* No. 76, p. 8.
- 7 See 1 above.



JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

WE SOCIALISTS are not fanatics or armchair critics. We are socialists because we see the prospect which life holds out for all working people. We want the commitment of workers who laugh and love and want to end the wretchedness and despair which shuts love and laughter out of so many lives. We do not have to spend the rest of our lives, and leave our children to spend the rest of their lives, wrestling in struggle against a mean and despotic ruling class. Society *can* be changed, but only if masses of working people abandon the rotten shipwreck of the 'leave it to us' reformers, and commit themselves to change from below.

We are the infant of a revolutionary organization which must grow if the possibility of socialism is to become a reality.

Will you help us grow?

If you would like to join I.S.
or if you would like more information
fill in the form below
and send it to:

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS
PO Box 339, Station "E",
Toronto, Ontario.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

