

## Talkin' 'bout a *Working-Class* Revolution: The Gendered 'Turn' to Party Building, the Personal, and Perspectives Gained *from Within*<sup>1</sup>

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During an oral history interview at their northside Chicago condominium in 2006, Bill Roberts explained his and his wife Debra's decision to join the International Socialists of the United States (IS):

1970 — that's when party building exploded. You see, Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] had split before, and you had Kent State/Cambodia. I think there was so many people involved in movement activity from the Civil Rights Movement on to that time that... changed consciousness, which required at that juncture something more... We needed some theory that guided us.<sup>2</sup>

A now-defunct 1970s radical group, the IS had advocated, "party building," that is, "building self-conscious, self-described revolutionary organizations," as Roberts defined it.<sup>3</sup> Explaining how they were looking for an organization committed to overcoming the pragmatism and transitory nature of "movement activity," he continued: "We probably would have ... joined PL [Progressive Labor Party] ... or the RU [Revolutionary Union]. ... or any other group ... pursuing us at that time ... I don't know why we would have been immune to that?"

In explaining her motivation to join the IS, Debra instead recalled the importance of a female IS member who had stayed up all night with her to discuss the Russian Revolution. In reply to Bill, Debra stated matter-of-factly, "Well sometimes you're just very influenced by the people you meet who seem like they know what they're doing." Bill interjected, "Of courRRSE! — Some of *that* is totally incidental." The Roberts' memories suggest as much about gender and interpersonal dynamics as they do the reasons the two had joined a revolutionary organization in 1970. Bill stressed "theory" and Kent State, while Debra pointed to the "people you meet." Their exchange led me to consider the importance of personal relationships to political organizing and how these bonds informed 1970s radical groups and those who had joined them.

For a project that began in a graduate seminar, I conducted oral history interviews with seven former IS members on their experiences as former Sixties radicals who had made the "turn" to become Seventies revolutionaries.<sup>4</sup> In joining the IS, the Roberts' and the other former IS members had been among thousands of mostly white ex-students of the New Left and people of color influenced by the "Third World Left" who dedicated their lives to building both *the* party and *the* revolution.<sup>5</sup> Noting the different politicized atmosphere, Debra

recalled: “Everyone was a radical. You were swimming in a very friendly sea at that time. What I mean is you didn’t have to walk very far down the street to find some radical literature being sold. ... It was not seen as anything unusual to say you were a revolutionary or you were a feminist.”

Many New Left/Third World Leninists turned to Old Left/First World tactics as well, taking industrial jobs to organize and recruit workers, and drawing inspiration from an upsurge of rank-and-file militancy during the late 1960s to mid-1970s.<sup>6</sup> Postal workers and teamsters waged national wildcats in 1970; and the following year, over two and a half million workers took part in walkouts.<sup>7</sup> Black Power turned Blue Collar. In May 1968, Detroit-based Black autoworkers began organizing rank-and-file dissident caucuses within the auto industry, leading to the formation of the League of Black Revolutionary Workers, an explicitly revolutionary and independent Black workers’ formation.<sup>8</sup>

A growing body of literature is calling attention to these New Left/Third World party builders and their histories of radicalism during what is called the hidden and long 1970s.<sup>9</sup> However, a gender analysis of the former IS members’ oral histories calls attention to questions beyond the IS’s unique theoretical innovations or its organizational history. It uncovers even more deeply buried histories of radicalism in the Seventies, and the unique experiences of the IS women who took industrial jobs, in particular. In the analysis that follows, I note how the women and men’s memories diverged. While the men remembered details that emphasized “the political” and revolutionary theory, the women turned to “the personal” and transformative perspectives they had learned from others. Revealing how the ideas of the women’s liberation movement influenced 1970s radical groups, the women IS members recalled events that highlighted their commitments to both changing the dynamics between women and men, and to developing relationships with others. The stories and insights of the former IS members reveal how personal relationships sustained the activism of many in the party and on the shop floor. Friendships and bonds of solidarity were more important than party doctrine and theoretical abstractions for why some had made the gendered turn to Seventies revolutionary practice.<sup>10</sup>

### Leninism and the IS Legacy

Emphasizing sectarian differences, party builders turned to theory, including “Lenin, Mao and Che,” as radical scholar Max Elbaum notes, as well as Fanon, Marx, Stalin, Trotsky and others in order to generalize organizational perspectives and determine practice. Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done?* was the predominant theory that guided party efforts.<sup>11</sup> The IS was similar to other radical groups in claiming to hold the correct interpretation of theory and in having the program that workers needed. The IS’s lineage emerged from Schachtmanite

“third camp” Trotskyism, opposing both Moscow and Washington and characterizing the Soviet Union and China as class societies of “bureaucratic regimes.”<sup>12</sup> The Independent Socialist Club (ISC), the predecessor to the IS, was formed by eighteen members on 17 September 1964 in Berkeley, California, from a split from the Schachtmanite-led Young People’s Socialist League/Socialist Party (YPSL/SP), which at the time was engulfed in a bitter factional fight. Presciently, the organization threw itself behind the emerging, student-led Berkeley Free Speech Movement.<sup>13</sup> During the next five years, more local campus-based IS clubs emerged, notably in New York City and Los Angeles, and about 80 members joined as a result of the 1969 SDS split, bringing the ISC’s total membership to roughly two hundred by the late 1960s.<sup>14</sup>

On September 1969, 50 ISC delegates established the International Socialists at a founding convention in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with the aim of building a national organization.<sup>15</sup> The headquarters was moved from Berkeley, where the majority of its members resided, to Detroit in line with the group’s new orientation on working-class organizing. The IS’s most dynamic years of organizing occurred between 1973 and 1976, and including its youth affiliate the Red Tide, the efforts peaked in 1975 at nearly 500 members, just less than half of whom were women and a handful were newly-recruited black workers. However, as with nearly all of the radical groups of the 1970s, white male former students and intellectuals composed its majority and core leadership throughout its lifespan.<sup>16</sup>

In 1970, the IS adopted an “industrialization” policy at its second convention. According to the official “Tasks and Perspectives,” the organization aimed to become a “working class tendency” because “Our job as revolutionary socialists is to bring our politics and program to the working class.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the industrialization policy’s name captured the attempt to “workerize” both the organization itself and its majority white, middle-class members, who had no previous experience in industrial organizing.<sup>18</sup> Berkeley white-collar radicals were to become blue-collar Detroit revolutionaries. In so doing, they revived Trotsky’s 1940 advice to James Burnham, who was at one time a factional leader of the US Trotskyist movement: “Young intellectuals,” according to Trotsky, must be “sent out into the provinces for a few years, into purely proletarian centers, for hard practical work” in order to break with their “bourgeois milieu.”<sup>19</sup>

The IS was encouraging its members to find industrial work and begin “colonizing” worksites, particularly in industrial sectors with a high density of unionization, such as in auto, communications, steel, and trucking.<sup>20</sup> Ideally, they were to concentrate in groups of three at targeted factories, mills, and plants in what were called “priority” or “p jobs.” They were directed to form activist-based dissident “struggle groups” at their work sites and launch dissident newsletters as part of a rank-and-file strategy. Eventually, however, this strategy

shifted to forming local union reform caucuses so that members had greater job protection and could use the machinery and resources of the union when possible.<sup>21</sup> In addition to local initiatives, members helped found national union reform networks and participated in national union reform caucuses, notably the United Action Caucus of the American Federation of Teachers and the United National Caucus within the United Auto Workers (UAW).<sup>22</sup>

While drawing on strategies from the past, IS industrializers faced new challenges and opportunities. The restructuring of global capital during the post-war period, which accelerated in response to the recessionary crises, “stagflation,” and world oil shocks of the 1970s would pull increasing numbers of women into the US labor force as families’ living standards declined.<sup>23</sup> Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Affirmative Action programs further opened employment for women in heavy industry. These reforms were linked to and in turn inspired the women’s liberation movement.<sup>24</sup> Both the women’s movement and the labor shifts inspired many women to work “on the line,” a first for employees at heavy industrial work sites, or at least since “Rosie the Riveters” during World War II. IS women were among them, and they were also some of the first female organizers to likewise carry revolutionary politics along with them — a feat that was nearly impossible among previous generations of radicals.<sup>25</sup>

IS members helped win modest shop floor victories, participated in wildcat strikes, and talked with their coworkers about the possibility of revolution — as well as the necessity of a revolutionary party — and sold the organization’s newspaper, *Workers’ Power*.<sup>26</sup> However, in 1979, the group ceased functioning after a series of factional fights and splits. The employers’ offensive and the rightward shifting political climate had taken a heavy toll on its members. Yet despite its small size and short lifespan, the IS accomplished efforts that have had lasting impact, including initiating the union reform network Teamsters for a Democratic Union and launching “Labor Notes,” a national rank-and-file newsletter published continuously since February 1979.<sup>27</sup>

### **The IS Men: Touchstones, Tear Gas, and Tall Tales**

The former IS members whom I interviewed had been part of the organization in its formative years. Two of the men had been delegates at the IS’s founding convention, and the other had been active in the group for more than five years. Their memories often emphasized political lessons and party lines and were starkly different from those of the women. None mentioned friendships, emotional attachments, personal feelings, or — surprisingly — the memory of any women directly when they described what *most* influenced their politicization and decisions to join the IS. In drawing attention to this pattern, it is not an essentialization of gender relations. Rather it reveals new problems and wider possibilities in our understanding of the radical movements of the

1970s.<sup>28</sup>

The IS men described their lives in reference to political touchstones that traditionally defined the tumultuous Sixties. Marxist historian and founding IS member Bruce Levine referenced the struggle for civil rights and protests against the Vietnam War as events that made him realize “the system was rotten.”<sup>29</sup> Bill Roberts also touched on seminal events, albeit with notable understatement. He recalled the march led by Martin Luther King, Jr., in Marquette Park, in an all-white neighborhood on 5 August 1966 as “an eye-opener.” Of the protest activity outside the Democratic National Convention on 28 August 1968, he said it was “kind of exciting.”

Later during the interview, Roberts revealed what may have been an explanation for his dispassion. Debra and he remain card-carrying members of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which formed in 1977 out a split in the IS. Roberts mentioned that he had seen so many comrades come and go throughout his long career as a socialist that he was no longer bothered by resignations and member losses, noting that some might later rejoin. Debra felt otherwise. In a wistful tone, she reflected, “Many that were *important* to us, that we’ve known in our time in the IS, few of them are still active [in politics].” However, for Bill, the personal was tangential to a revolutionary organization anchored in theory and practice. If he had been sentimental during the interview, it would have changed the relationship established between the two of us, with him in the role of revolutionary pedagogue.

Further, his narrative style obscured discreet personal attachments to others, which informed his political identity. For example, he recalled rescuing activists from tear gas and police batons in his Volkswagen bus at the Democratic National Convention. He framed the event as a turning point. Liberals such as himself who had come to protest had, after “that night when the police went wild”, left as revolutionaries. “People were coming out ... with tear gas in their eyes and a lot of them didn’t know where they were going,” he recalled. “They were just sort of running. So I would drive my bus up ... and load a group in and then haul them off some place where they could get away.” He remembers himself as the masculine, individual political protagonist — one who remained cool and collected while saving others who were confused and running amok in the streets. Yet his actions also reveal qualities stereotyped as feminine, such as providing care and nurturance. It was also an indirect, but no less worthy, gesture toward the importance of solidarity with other activists that coexisted along with the political emphasis he chose to recall, but that he either chose not to or could not easily articulate in such terms.

While Roberts spoke of his activism, Joel Geier’s interview was a performance in itself. At the time of the interview, Geier was approaching 70 and remained a full-time committed revolutionary in what had been more than 50-plus years of building Trotskyist organizations and keeping “the *genuine* Marxist

tradition ... alive.” As the once-longtime National Secretary of the IS, Geier serves as the guardian of its past, a storyteller who keeps a particular version of the organization’s collective memory alive.<sup>30</sup> Through his commanding voice and astute ability to synthesize a sweeping narrative of his past, he presented both the IS and his life’s oeuvre as a progression of well-formed and well-argued “party lines.”

His overweening confidence and studied mannerisms were a style of grand-standing more common to radical organizations that he developed from his most formative political years in his twenties, a period in which he became “a total political activist.” As a student at the University of Chicago in the early 1960s, he joined the YPSL/SP and developed techniques and practices from older veteran organizers who had once been members of the Shachtmanite-led Workers Party (WP).<sup>31</sup> According to Geier, the YPSL/SP members were “educated, politically sophisticated ... some going back to the 1930s, some to the 1940s ... a very impressive political group”. Emphasizing his radical credentials and revealing a sense of self-importance, he boasted: “A group of people inside [YPSL/SP] spent a lot of time educating me. *I* was among the best thing that they had seen in some period of time. ... [A member] used to come to my house every day at around 9 or 10 o’clock at night to go over what ... I had read that day — ooOO-KAY! — It was *that* sort of education!”

Geier’s boasts went as far as to claim he was the originator of the “Free Huey” [Newton] slogan and helped influence Eldridge Cleaver’s decision to join the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, claims contradicted by the historical record.<sup>32</sup> But rather than dismiss Geier as unreliable, such inconsistencies, according to oral historian Alessandro Portelli, “are so very valuable. They allow us to recognize the interests of the tellers, and the dreams and desires beneath them.”<sup>33</sup> I surmised from Geier’s braggadocios and constant validations of his importance a likely internal conflict. I noted what seemed an obvious contradiction in his unwillingness to take any responsibility for the IS’s past failures and to instead boast of his role in formulating the always-correct tactics and party lines. To have instead reflected on a flawed strategy for which he had advocated and recruited several hundreds of followers would have meant admitting to having witnessed the entire process of both the collapse of the organization and the dashed dreams of many. His overly self-confident exterior and his masculine-gendered presentation of his memories and of himself as a correctly formed and well-performed political line to the very end masked any such feelings.

In an archival collection of internal IS correspondence, I discovered other significant inconsistencies in Geier’s memories and omissions. The IS faced difficulties far worse than Geier’s cursory mention of competing minority tendencies and factions. Latin American historian Daniel James argues that former leaders of political groups might emphasize heroic narratives to hide details that

“open old wounds, to expose the more unseemly underbelly” of their pasts.<sup>34</sup> The documents I reviewed revealed the very “unseemly” and contentious internal party culture that plagued the IS throughout much of its organizational life. Throughout its ten years, from 1969 to 1979, the IS comprised at least six different and competing political tendencies, had five factional fights that led to expulsions and splits, experienced two resignations by members en masse, and received numerous individual resignations.<sup>35</sup>

A packet dated 8 December 1976 circulated to IS members, written by “The Left Faction,” accused Geier as National Secretary and the Executive Committee of practicing “pseudo-Bolshevism.” It claimed the national leadership was stifling internal democracy, threatening members who were in disagreement with “suspension, expulsion, and ‘we’ll destroy you’” threats. The document further claimed that Geier generalized simplistic political analyses, spun the group’s failures as positives, and ultimately had “no strategy . . . [but] only false promises.”<sup>36</sup> On 12 March 1977, the faction—roughly one-third of the membership and including the Roberts — was expelled. Its members went on to found the ISO, rejecting the industrialization policy as practiced by the IS and becoming the US affiliate of the International Socialist Tendency.<sup>37</sup>

Levine discussed his involvement in the “Revolutionary Tendency”, a minority faction that composed nearly 100 members who were also expelled in 1973. They went on to form the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), which emphasized Trotsky’s Transitional Program.<sup>38</sup> He explained that his position at the time was that the IS did not practice Trotskyism and lacked discipline. He mocked the group for what he described as its idolization of a host of American radicals, and its inability to differentiate their politics from among them: “They were like — ‘Big Bill’ Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Eugene Debs — yippee!”

Levine would later reveal that at the time of the interview, Geier and he had not spoken in the 30 years since the IS split. His tone conveyed perhaps a hint of regret, though whether about his own past activities or in not having spoken with Geier, or both, was unclear. Nonetheless, it was a telling memory of how the period often drew sharp battle lines over sectarian divisions. Members of 1970s radical groups might find themselves comrades on one day and enemies on another.<sup>39</sup> It also exposed that “political” relationships between members often hid underlying suspicions and mistrusts that were personal in nature, leading to not only refusals to talk, but, as with Geier’s storytelling, an attempt to silence minority tendencies or dissenting individuals from the organization’s collective memory.

### **The IS Women — Tears, Love, and Rage**

While Levine, Roberts, and Geier remembered various political events and factional disputes that defined their political identities, the former IS women

revealed more personal reasons as turning points in their lives. Sara “Shaffer”, who at the time of our interview was a practicing physician and no longer involved in activism, requested that I use her former IS party pseudonym because of the conservatism in her profession. In describing her youth and the decision to join the IS, she emphasized how she had looked as much to her older sister, who was becoming politicized, as she did to the May 1970 student strikes at Ohio State University, where she had attended classes. It was soon after Shaffer’s sister joined the IS that she decided to become a member. They moved together to Detroit in 1973 with the intent of participating in the IS’s strategy of workplace organizing.<sup>40</sup>

Debra Roberts also turned to familial memories. In a pensive tone, she recalled her first political memory to be of the tears streaming down her mother’s cheeks on the day of the Rosenbergs’ execution on 19 June 1953: “I remember my mother was standing at the sink in our kitchen ... The radio was on, and she was crying. And I asked her what it was about, and she said, ‘They killed those people.’ I remember that.” Later in the interview, she described finally grasping the meaning of Marxism during her pregnancy with her daughter: “I remember when I read the *Communist Manifesto* seriously the first time was when I was pregnant ... reading it and thinking — *that’s* what that means.” Her reference to learning Marxism in relation to her body and womb highlights the gendered ways by which some activists remember their pasts and political memories.

Outraged by the Vietnam War, Roberts joined SDS, as did her partner Bill; however, she remembered her involvement in “the movement” differently, and those differences turned on sexism. Debra attended the infamous 1969 SDS convention at the Chicago Coliseum when the organization dissolved and split into rival factions. Yet Roberts’ memory was less about the specifics of the competing ideologies and more about the difficulty in entering the hall. With rising tensions and long-brewing factionalism, an SDS security detail scrutinized the credentials of delegates and participants entering the convention hall, and for the first time searched their bodies for possible weapons in their clothing. As Debra remembered bitterly, “I never had more [of] a ... full frisking in my life because of a bunch of sexist bullshit. They started feeling up me and our [female] neighbor, making sure we didn’t have guns on us, but really just to very slowly feel us up in an insulting way. That’s the main thing I really remember.” Roberts felt outrage at not just touchstone events of the New Left, but by chauvinist attitudes of some New Left men.

Wendy Thompson’s oral history was an outlier from the rest, one that was unconventional in both her challenge to traditional gender roles and because she remained at her “p job” for more than 32 years. Thompson had served on numerous union committees, organized women’s caucuses, and held elected posts in UAW Local 235, including in 1989, the highest leadership position, Shop Chair. At the time of the interview, she remained an activist fighting on behalf



of the UAW retirees and was also an active member of Solidarity, a socialist organization formed in 1986 by several former IS members who remained dedicated to the project of rank-and-file organizing.

During her recollections of touchstone events, many of which resembled the character of those of the IS men, she abruptly turned to the importance of her relationships with black women. When I asked about how she had felt in 1971 about the IS's encouragement that she leave Los Angeles, where she had been a student, for Detroit in order to become an autoworker, she spoke of her love for her newfound community. She recalled a group of women she bonded with. While she described them as "militant," she lingered on their group solidarity and their joy in sharing leisure time: "It was like, thank goodness! ... I just *looved* it. I'm finally able to bond ... There was a group of all African American women ... We started having parties together and going to bars together. ... It was such a relief to me, and I adored ... being around these women."

The reason for such closeness, she explained, was because as a teen, she had participated in the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) girls' social clubs, which were the only such groups that were racially integrated in Evanston, IL where she had grown up. "*All* of the white girls in our neighborhood were involved in the segregated groups," she explained, so her mother, a died-in-the-wool liberal Democrat, forbade her to join them. It was there that she met a circle of young African American women who "were such amazing outstanding leaders. I just learned sooOO much from them." Speaking with her by phone, Thompson's voice revealed an exuberance that was palpable. She confided, "I became a political leader and an outspoken person largely because of my contact with Black women. They sooOO tremendously impacted me."

It was a revealing point of comparison to Geier's interview. Thompson's privileged upbringing allowed her to attend the University of California at Los Angeles and travel to Europe as a foreign exchange student. In 1969, she encountered lectures on Marxist economics, and participated in both student protests and support for striking workers. Geier had made a similar voyage directly after the general strike and social upheaval in Paris during May 1968. He explained how his encounter with striking workers and Marxists in Europe, particularly Tony Cliff of the International Socialists of Great Britain, had transformed his life and led him to the conclusion that, after years of Cold War reaction, building a revolutionary party was now possible. Upon his return, it was a perspective he claimed to have convinced the ISC membership to adopt, and which led to the founding and working-class orientation of the IS.

Thompson instead credited her relationships with Black women for teaching her the most valuable lessons. Her organizing skills and political finesse did not develop from European Marxists, men whom she described as "male chauvinists" and "oppressive" toward women. They emerged out of the mentor-

ing and sense of belonging she felt with other women who had given her the skills by which she developed politically. Recalling memories of love for her community and admiration for her female mentors, rather than for “politically sophisticated” Marxists, she communicated what was an identity formed over the course of her life in which the personal and the political had always been intertwined.

While Thompson remembered feelings of endearment, Candace Cohn remembered misery. Fortunately, at the time of the interview, she was in a more joyful period of her life. Cohn was the longtime partner of Geier. Their budding romance and marriage evolved out of their initial political relationship. Citing health problems, she was no longer an activist but expressed her continued support for both the ideas and practice of revolutionary organizing. I could not help but note the irony as we sat in the kitchen of the couple’s spacious home on several acres of scenic countryside in Marengo, Illinois, a prosperous Chicago exurb.

But as she turned to her past, I was struck by the raw emotions she expressed in recalling memories of her childhood that were far less secure and protected. An early event that shaped her political consciousness was her parents’ often-erratic behavior as alcoholics. When her parents later divorced, Cohn lived with her mother, whose new boyfriend mentally and physically abused her. But the most painful memory was of her sister’s brutal gang-rape and murder. Suffering from depression while trying to make sense of the world, she found solace in the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). In our interview, Cohn elaborated on the movement’s emphasis on the politics of the personal, which had shaped her early years of activism at the University of Michigan in the early 1970s:

Our lives had been molded by political forces in a way we had not seen. They were influenced by the nature of the system ... and that was how women, in particular, first saw the personal as being political. It was women understanding that what they had always believed were personal defects were, in fact, shared social experiences; and as that occurred, there was an outpouring of rage, just rage.<sup>41</sup>

Although the touchstone events of the 1960s had influenced Cohn, even more important to her was the realization that she was fighting for her own liberation. She came to understand that her once private wounds were just as much a product of “the system” as was the racism that permeated society and the imperialism waged in Southeast Asia.

While New Lefters turned to 1970s revolutionary organizations for a variety of reasons, the women I interviewed had turned to radicalism for reasons beyond the narrowly political. From memories of carrying a child while reading radical literature, to following a similar path to a sister, and even reevaluating

one's own past suffering through consciousness of shared solidarities, these IS women took part in party building as a political, but also very personal, marker. They were also unafraid to reveal a spectrum of emotions toward their pasts. Their decisions to become revolutionaries were connected to feelings they associated with those they held dear. Rather than theory, electrifying speeches, or the party line, their attachment was both personal and political.

### **Who's Training Whom? Education from Without and Within**

After joining the IS, members were trained within a highly routinized and hierarchical organizational structure. As part of new members' integration, the IS organized study circles in which experienced members lectured on revolutionary theory and practice. The training sought to develop members' confidence as organizers at their priority jobs. Their ultimate goal was to successfully "win" their coworkers to revolutionary ideas in order to recruit them to the IS, thus putting Leninist theory into practice in bringing socialist consciousness to the workers "from without." "Once I joined," as Cohn remembered, "I was trained and educated. They were very serious about education." Shaffer recalled weekly branch meetings, day-to-day activities, and writing that she did for *Workers' Power*, which members sold at their worksites to their close collaborators and also at the factory gates to potential recruits.

The IS trained its membership in rank-and-file strategies that drew on the guidance of veteran union militants, particularly longtime socialist and former IS member Stan Weir.<sup>42</sup> Weir encouraged the IS to develop strategies based on what he termed "on-the-job unionism." Rather than union bureaucrats far removed from the work process, he advocated for workers' control over the point and pace of production. He insisted that unions be run by, for, and of workers who remained "on the job" and *did* the work.<sup>43</sup> Geier praised his contributions: "Weir taught us two key lessons: one, that you have to give your fellow workers a reason to defend you on the job, and two, that there should be a steward for every foreman in the plant."

While Weir's contributions were notable, he himself had learned tactics in the sex-segregated environment of the maritime industry from whom he called the "'34 men," seamen and longshoremen who had been involved in the historic 1934 strikes in the West Coast maritime industry.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Weir's knowledge of worker militancy could only extend so far in that he had neither experienced male chauvinism, nor had he been the victim of the sexual harassment or assault that was frequently directed toward women some 30 years after his time on the docks. As some of the first women to have ever entered their respective industrial worksites as radical organizers, Cohn, Shaffer, and Thompson were forced to invent, negotiate, and sometimes improvise new strategies and tactics.

At first, simply getting hired, and then staying hired, was often the tallest hurdle all IS members faced. Levine did not last long under the grueling pace on the line. Roberts was hired at a steel mill in Seattle, but was laid off.<sup>45</sup> The IS women experienced even more difficulty in finding work. Debra Roberts failed the telephone operator test required for a job in Seattle, represented by the Communications Workers of America that had been prioritized by the leadership. Shaffer landed work at the United Parcel Service (UPS) in Detroit driving a “big brown machine.” However, she laughed as she recalled, “Unfortunately, I cracked up my truck, and they fired me after one week. It was a tragedy!” Thompson recalled the obstacles that women faced finding work in the auto industry in the early 1970s:

Here’s the woman thing in regard to all this. They’d say to me, “Sorry we don’t have *ladies’* jobs.” ... There was a rumor that you had to weigh 145 [pounds] in order to get hired, so of course this would be geared against women, right? So I’m in line waiting to get a job, waiting to go in to see if I can get hired, and I’m stuffing myself with crackers because I’m not up to 145. ... So I’m getting myself so nervous stuffing myself ... at one point, I took my pulse. It was racing! I said to myself, “Oh my god, I’m not gonna get hired because of my pulse racing!” Sure enough, I did not get hired because my pulse was racing — that was truly awful!<sup>46</sup>

However, GM called and offered her a job the very next day, and Cohn, Shaffer, and she would all ultimately find “p jobs.” However, it was not their work on the line or in the party that made their contributions significant, but their ability to highlight the personal in how they framed their memories as lessons that they had learned “from within.”

Thompson was one of four women employed at Plant Six of Chevrolet Gear and Axle in Hamtramck, Michigan, in 1972. Built in 1919, the complex was one of the oldest Detroit auto plants. It was also, according to Thompson, “one of the first majority Black plants because of the work being so hard and dirty.” Since it had first opened its gate, Chevy Gear had operated under white foremen, and beginning in the late 1930s, under white union leaders. However, as a result of wildcat strikes and worker militancy in the 1970s, these positions dramatically shifted to incorporate, or what some described as “co-opt,” a racial composition more representative of its actual workforce on the line.<sup>47</sup>

In 1975, Cohn and Shaffer found jobs working with steel as well, but in its production, rather than in its assembly. They were among the first women to work at US Steel Clairton Works, the largest coke manufacturer in the United States. Stretching over three miles along the west bank of the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh, Clairton opened positions to women following a 1974 con-

sent decree. The terms of the settlement allowed workers of color, who had for decades been consigned to the most dangerous and physically demanding labor in the foundries, to join the once white skilled trades. It also changed seniority from department-based to plant-wide.<sup>48</sup>

Life in the auto plant and steel mill had its highs and lows, and IS women contextualized their experiences through their naivety and inexperience as middle-class and privileged ex-students. Thompson recalled the thrill in first witnessing the plant at shift change: "It was like thousands of workers crossing the street with their lunch pails. It was straight out of history. It looked so wonderful." However, while life outside the gates looked "wonderful," work inside would prove to be less cheerful, if not violent. In March 1972, she recalled how three other women and she entered the plant to first witness the strange, manly culture of the shop floor:

On the first day in the plant, I remember walking down the assembly line and hearing this roar ... It was all the men cheering like they had been on a desert island and not seen a woman in twenty years. ... So I was very frightened of the environment — a lot of clanking, a lot of noise, this metal hitting conveyor belts above the aisles going above your head. ... I remember the first couple of days I had to go and mop up some blood because there was a knife fight on the line, so that was interesting. It took some getting used to.<sup>49</sup>

Noticeably absent from Thompson's descriptions of her first weeks on the job was any mention of IS directives on how to build the correct type of union or on how to raise workers' consciousness. Old Left-style training failed to equip her with the stark reality of the new challenges she faced in merely surviving through one shift, let alone in successfully convincing her black male coworkers to join her majority-white radical group.

Shaffer recalled feeling a sense of empowerment from her experience at Clairton in simply having an industrial job with union benefits: "It was very exhilarating ... I just remember it being the most fun ... to be a working person. ... This was more money than I had ever earned." However, for Cohn, entering the mill was anything but exhilarating. The pace was physically exhausting. "So what they did with the women was to put us on the track gang," she explained, "heaving a sledge hammer over your shoulder all day long and securing railway ties. And if you're not prepared or in shape, it's a killer ... And that's why they did that. So, they gave it to us [women]."

Addressing the deeply embedded sexism of the male workers proved tougher than the physical labor. Thompson recalled how the men were welcoming at first, but as more women gained employment — and with black women increasing their numbers to roughly 10 percent on her assembly line — the older white men in particular complained that they were taking "all the good jobs." As

she recalled, “The white men would come up to me and the other women and say, ‘You shouldn’t be here. You should be at home.’” Lewd comments, whistles, sexual advances, and verbal assaults by both workers and foremen were constant reminders of the masculine claim to the industrial workspace. Cohn remembered, “You took so much shit all day long. It was like a conservative harassment everywhere you walked. The men would either ogle or come on to you — or just attack and say, ‘why are you here?’”

Taking on sexist attitudes placed IS women in a position that challenged their organizing skills. The IS encouraged their members to confront all forms of workplace harassment and oppression in order to challenge reactionary ideas and instill socialist consciousness. As Lenin instructed, “working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse.”<sup>50</sup> Cohn would soon learn that combating oppression in theory was one thing, while fighting sexist attitudes in practice was another. In her attempt to be a well-disciplined revolutionary, Cohn claimed that she challenged *every* sexist incident: “My attitude was to take on everything. It was to not let anything pass. It was that it had to be addressed.”

She found that her greatest allies and strength came neither from the mentorship of other IS members nor from reading socialist theory, but from the other women in the mill. “After work every day, the women sort of helped put each other back together. We would come, and we would just break down crying, and everyone would be supportive and that happened every day,” she remembered. Shaffer emphasized how they survived because of their strong bond of unity: “The solidarity among the women was just great. ... and we stuck together.” Moreover, as Cohn pointed out, her male comrades could not comprehend the sheer levels of daily harassment they faced as women: “I don’t think the [IS] men could begin to get it. I really don’t in those days. I don’t think they would have gotten it.” Debra Roberts revealed what she felt was a lack of understanding of women’s issues among the IS leadership, singling out Geier in particular: “Joel and the others [men] in the IS seemed to have an understanding of what the political situation was and the anti-war movement, but less so of the women’s liberation movement.”

Thompson likewise emphasized how it was the other female coworkers, rather than her male comrades, who became her source of strength: “The women felt a real identity with each because we were so few in number. It wasn’t very long before I really felt that I belonged ... So really in my entire life, I had never had a sense of belonging like I had at that time. ... So that had a lot to do with feeling good about what I was doing that was ... beyond just the political aspect of it.” That Cohn, Shaffer, and Thompson succeeded in “training” male workers, particularly the white skilled workers, to overcome their sexism is doubtful, a point which Cohn readily admitted in hindsight. But it was clear from

their interviews that their greater triumph and the real lesson learned was the importance of friendships, community, and solidarity in their relationships with other women on the job, a solidarity that went beyond simply militant unionism and revolutionary theory.

Yet even amid the hard physical labor and sexist attitudes, the women managed to form bonds of solidarity with some male workers, and make headway as political organizers. They did this, again, from key lessons learned from others on the job. While working on the track gang, several African American men befriended Cohn. She explained the important relationship that would shape her understanding of worker militancy:

I worked on the track gang, and it was just killing me ... And finally, some of the ... black guys said to me, "You know, even if you're on probation, so long as you're moving they can't fire you." ... I remember I went in one day, and I had my period, and I had cramps. I was just having a hell of time managing. And I decided to just try it ... It was kind of gutsy ... I had a really awful headache. The sun was really hot, and I just started moving in *sloooooo* motion [she drew out the word slow, as she spoke]. And the foreman kept looking at me and telling me to go faster, and I just kept moving in *slow* motion ... And a bunch of other people started moving in slow motion. They took me off the track gang. ... That really taught me ... that the guys who had counseled me were right. They were not particularly union activists, but they were really savvy. And they liked me, and we got to be friends and later, a lot of the work we did around ... other things — they were attentive. And they respected me, too, because it did take some courage to do that.<sup>51</sup>

Cohn's description reveals how the negotiation of gender interweaves throughout the narrative of radical organizing in nuanced ways, exposing the hidden record and complexities of day-to-day political organizing. She also pointed out that African Americans were not as active in Local 1557 of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) at Clairton, which should not be surprising given the union's long history of protecting the privileged positions of the older white skilled workers throughout the industry. As Ruth Needleman chronicles, a long tradition of black workers' activism existed in the USWA; however for some, worker militancy extended beyond the official union structure to include "infrapolitical" resistance, such as job-stinting, whereby workers, often informally, set the pace of their labor and movement to challenge the rate of exploitation.<sup>52</sup>

These workers taught Cohn in practice the ideas of “on-the-job unionism” that Weir had advocated in the IS. And yet, even though his tactics were supposedly the foundation of the IS policy of “industrialization,” as Geier had claimed, job-stinting was a practice that was indigenous to workers themselves. It was an example of what Weir would term in 1973 the “informal work group,” a small-group leadership model replicated in a variety of ways at worksites. He claimed radical organizers overlooked this form because of their rigid and doctrinaire belief in training workers.<sup>53</sup> Thus, ironically, Cohn’s coworkers had given her more of an education than the “serious training” outside the mill at the IS study circles.

### Reflections on Lessons Learned and Perspectives Gained

Cohn, Shaffer, and Thompson’s lack of success in recruiting workers to the IS at either Chevy or Clairton was an experience repeated throughout much of the IS’s industrialization efforts and priority jobs. Although Geier claimed that the IS had recruited at least 100 workers across its lifespan, he admitted that, in fact, few integrated into full and active, dues-paying members. Trying to put a positive spin on their difficulties and failure to have built a revolutionary party, Shaffer lowered the bar in judging their efforts. However, her ambiguous language revealed what seemed like skepticism, if not deep-seated doubt: “I was not successful in the sense of convincing any of them or recruiting them, but I at least opened them up to the ideas — I *guess* to some extent.” Cohn conceded that it was difficult to integrate workers within the organization owing to the dedication required to carry out and implement the branch’s rigorous routine:

We were not able to hold on to most of the workers we recruited, and I still don’t understand the solution to that issue ... the reason was that as a serious group there was a lot of time commitments, and people who had big families and lots of other commitments and working-class lifestyles ... could not manage that kind of time commitment. And we could not be having a group that was less serious, and I still know don’t know what that answer to that is ... We just couldn’t really transform it [IS] in a way that we could keep them.<sup>54</sup>

Cohn’s analysis of the IS’s inability to transform its organizational structure to better integrate workers also exposed the gendered framework at the core of the 1970s party-building agenda. The IS attempted to transform its previous student orientation to the working class, but had continued to function structurally with membership expectations and requirements that remained oriented to middle-class student radicals. IS members more easily negotiated between full-time jobs and their roles as full-time party builders. They tended to be single and unwed, able-bodied with youthful vigor. Moreover, they were privi-



leged not only in terms of race and class, but also in their intellectual self-confidence, which spilled over to public speaking at union meetings and rallies, and in their articles, leaflets, and newsletters.

Bill and Debra Roberts pointed out that as their small white-majority membership attempted to recruit within Detroit's black-majority auto industry — and I would add at the unique moment when the Black Power Movement was inspiring black nationalist sentiment among workers — the problem of race hampered their efforts. Bill reflected, “You recruit a worker . . . [the wife] may be home with the kids, ‘Why is he gone to meetings all the time? Why is he selling papers?’” Interrupting abruptly, Debra added, “Why is he out with *white women* if he's black?” To which Bill replied, “Exactly! So a big part of the problem is the bigger — *personal* — that magnifies itself in a small group.” The Roberts' critique of the IS strategy points to the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and also exposes how racial privilege underlined 1970s party-building efforts as whites attempted to “train” black workers and raise their consciousness. However, Bill's framing of the challenge of recruiting workers reifies division between political work and the politics of the personal. That is, Bill's notion of workers' personal issues undermining the IS's political ones undervalues and neglects the challenges faced by working people, including both men working on the line and women laboring in their homes. Surviving the day-to-day experiences of their lives are an inherent part of “the system” that is as “fundamentally flawed,” as were the Sixties protests in Chicago that Bill remembered as having awakened his consciousness.

Unable to recruit a mass following of workers or to integrate the majority of the small numbers who had joined, the IS was further stymied by outside forces. The irony of the 1970s turn to party building is that as radicalized white, middle-class ex-students entered industrial work sites to revolutionize, US employers were making their own plans to exit and deindustrialize. New technological advancements in shipping accelerated the shift to cheaper labor markets overseas. The “Rust Belt” of the Northeast and Midwest, the target of IS concentration efforts, had already been bleeding union jobs to the non-union South and Southwest. By the mid-1970s, it had become a full-blown hemorrhage. Moreover, as New Left radicals turned to tactics based on outreach to the working class, management devised their own strategies based on restructuring — an employers' offensive. The 1970s' economic and energy crises became the pretext for undoing the past partnership with labor, leading to what became a pattern of capital flight and concessionary bargaining by the UAW, as well as acceptance of no-strike clauses in the USWA.<sup>55</sup>

With union-busting on the rise, the restructuring of outmoded plants to increase workers' productivity and the rate of exploitation, and corporate investments in speculative markets rather than infrastructure, IS members found locating any job — let alone “p jobs” — increasingly difficult. Cohn and Shaffer

stayed at Clairton for almost two years and then moved on to other IS campaigns. Cohn became head of the IS national steel fraction and moved to Detroit to be with Geier. Shaffer continued to “industrialize,” eventually colonizing at Inland Steel in Gary, Indiana, where she worked for almost ten years as a union militant as a member of Solidarity. However, she too was eventually affected by the downturn in steel. According to Shaffer, “There were lots of layoffs, and I was bumped out of my job.” By the mid-1980s, Cohn and Shaffer had dropped out of active organizational membership, demoralized by the challenge of being a revolutionary during the Reagan years. “It was rough slogging ... there was no movement at all, things were very demoralizing,” Cohn explained.

Reflecting on the legacy of the IS and the lessons that they had learned, both remembered their years of activism with enthusiasm, but also with candor. “We had a misconception of the nature of the period ... We thought that revolution was on the not too far distant agenda, certainly internationally and hopefully domestically as well,” Cohn remembered. Yet despite the failure of socialist revolution and the “misconception of the nature of the period,” none of the former IS members characterized their pasts as either youthful folly or as misadventures that thwarted possible career aspirations. They still believed in the ideas of socialism and workers’ power. Shaffer reminisced about her experiences by mingling political *and* personal memories:

I still would love to see a society in which equality is real; everyone has economic opportunity; women are equal; everyone has healthcare; and everybody has time to flower in their pursuit of creativity. ... it’s a beautiful goal. ... But it was also the people. I thought the people in the IS were great, smart, dedicated, loyal and fun to be around. You know if it were [sic] a bunch of jerky people who would want to stick around. ... after I left Inland Steel, I would dream about the mill for years. It was really a rich experience for me. It took me a long time to really let go of it.<sup>56</sup>

Thompson’s experience stands out as an example of an ex-student from a privileged middle-class background who *did* successfully transform her class identity, albeit with some bumps along the way. She has continued to live in eastside Detroit for decades of continuous activism and bragged that she continued to pass out radical literature at the plant gates at least once a month for more than 30 years. However, as she reflected on the lessons she had learned, Thompson voiced bitterness at the passivity of her coworkers, particularly when General Motors sold its historic plant to American Axle in 1994:

They [her co-workers] would say, “Wendy you’re supposed to do it for us,” and I would say, “*NO!* — I cannot do it for you.” ... It’s always like, “Ohhhh Wendy, you were right —

after the fact the plant was sold and you had tried to get them to go down to the GM building to protest ... [raising the tone of her voice] but weeEE DIDN'T DO IT! ... that's a problem that exists within the working class as a whole, you know. Political activists can't do it for the working class. The working class has to do it for itself.<sup>57</sup>

Thompson's comments reveal more contradictions at the core of 1970s radical projects to bring consciousness "from without."

All of the IS interviewees remarked on the different zeitgeist of the time — that some workers they met would voice support for revolution, but would rarely act on it (by which they generally meant, few joined the IS). But in analyzing why, they looked for explanations beyond critiques of party building itself. Even though the women IS members emphasized and continued to highlight their personal relationships with others as essential to their politicization and their experiences on the job, they never suggested to me that a different method of organizing might have been more effective. Their inability to pierce deeper at first seemed to be an obvious flaw. But I then reflected how, at the same time, these former IS members were also sharing their own particular and gendered analyses of what had given their lives meaning. The women recalled memories of their years of dedication to building a better world through ways that highlighted what had given significance to *them* and what *they* valued — and continue to cherish. In so doing, they recast the 1970s party-building era and participation in radical groups through a nuanced view that looked beyond the narrow and judgmental terms of either failure or success. At the level of the personal, the stuff of more modest, but just as important, dreams and hopes was, in fact, realized and raised, though on a scale much smaller in size than a revolution or a workers' party. Their memories pointed to the importance of "educating," but by learning by experiences shared with others, and from perspectives gained by those *from within*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The title is inspired by singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman's "Talkin' 'bout a Revolution." For full lyrics, see Tracy Chapman, "Talkin Bout A Revolution Lyrics," MetroLyrics, <<http://www.metrolyrics.com/talkin-bout-a-revolution-lyrics-tracy-chapman.html>> (11 April 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Bill Roberts and Debra Roberts, interview by author, 3 hr. 22 min., digital recording, 21 October 2006, Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> The IS referred to itself as a "sect" and a "propaganda group", indicating that it did not have the size nor influence within the working class to call itself a

“party.” See “Tasks and Perspectives for the International Socialists, Adopted at the National Convention September, 1973” (September 1973), 21, box 1, folder 1, Russ Gilbert “New Left” Pamphlet Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Chicago.

<sup>4</sup> Candace Cohn, interview by author, 3 hr. 3 min., digital recording, 22 October 2006, Marengo, IL; Joel Geier, interview by author, 3 hr., digital recording, 22 October 2006, Marengo, IL; Bruce Levine, interview by author, 32 min., notes in author’s possession, 27 July 2006, Champaign, IL; Sara “Shaffer” [pseud.], phone interview by author, 1 hr., digital recording, 18 November 2006; Wendy Thompson, phone interview by author, 2 hr. 34 min., digital recording, 22 November 2006. The interviewees knew that I identified openly as a gay male graduate student involved in a variety of leftwing groups, including, at the time, the International Socialist Organization, a splinter group from the IS formed in 1976. My relationships to the majority of the participants grew out of these political affiliations and were built on personal ties of mentoring and comradely solidarity.

<sup>5</sup> On the “Third World Left”, see Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 4 (1999): 6-41; Estella Habal, “How I Became a Revolutionary.” In *Legacy to Liberation, Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America*, ed. Fred Ho (Brooklyn, NY, and San Francisco: AK Press and Big Red Media, 2000); May Chuan Fu, “Keeping Close to the Ground: Politics and Coalition in Asian American Community Organizing, 1969-1977” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005); Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> On the rank-and-file upsurge, see Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt From Below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso 2010); Burton Hall, ed., *Autocracy and Insurgency in Organized Labor* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Books, 1972); Stan Weir, *Singlejack Solidarity*, ed. George Lipsitz (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 294-337.

<sup>7</sup> “Major Work Stoppages in 2009”, Bureau of Labor Statistics U.S. Department of Labor, USDL-10-0170, (Washington D.C., 10 February 2009), 3.

<sup>8</sup> On Black Power and labor, see David Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, eds., *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 2010); Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-75* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009). On the League, see Kieran Taylor, “American Petrograd: Detroit and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.” In Brenner et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 310-33; Dan Georgakas and

Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998); Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 103-27.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Alonso, *The Patriots: An Inside Look at Life in a Defense Plant* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2011); Robert L. Anderson, "Voices of Steel: New Left and Worker Resistance to Steel Industry Restructuring, Western Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 2000); Dan Berger, ed. *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Brenner et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*; Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002); Kelley and Esch, "Black like Mao"; Michael Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969-1986* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012); Kieran Walsh Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class: The New Left, Black Liberation, and the U.S. Labor Movement (1967-1981)" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007); Young, *Soul Power*.

<sup>10</sup> For works that explore gender in relation to political activism, memory, and the method of oral history, see Daniel James, *Doña Marias's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> V.I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done: Burning Questions of Our Movement*, vol. 1 of *Lenin, Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 92-241. On the importance of *What Is to Be Done?* to the New Communist Movement, see Elbaum, *Revolution*, 56. On the context of Lenin's work, see Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? in Context* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006). Initially, the IS was not organized along democratic centralist lines and did not clearly define itself as Leninist. See Jim O'Brien, "American Leninism in the 1970s," *Radical America* 11, no. 6 (Winter 1977-78): 34. However, by its second convention in 1970, the IS shifted to what it described as the need for "a disciplined national line." See "Tasks and Perspectives Adopted by the International Socialists Convention," July 1970, 8, box 1, folder 4, *Gilbert*. In February 1974, the IS newspaper *Workers' Power* carried an article extolling Lenin's ideas to be "of vital importance to workers everywhere." See Tony Cliff, "Lenin's Road To World Revolution," *Workers' Power* 91 (15-28 February 1974): 14.

<sup>12</sup> "Final Stylized Version of International Socialists Program In Brief," *Forum: An International Socialist Discussion Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (26 September 1969), box 3, folder 18, *Gilbert*. On the lineage of Schachtmanite Trotskyism, see Robert Jackson Alexander, *International Trotskyism, 1929-1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 899-910; Peter Drucker,

*Max Schachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the 'American Century'* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999). On the theory of "bureaucratic collectivism," see Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 806-08.

<sup>13</sup> Geier claimed that long-time socialist and IS member Hal Draper's classic pamphlet "The Mind of Clark Kerr" was sold by the hundreds on the Berkeley campus and was later published by SDS under a new title. See Hal Draper, "Clark Kerr: The Liberal as Proto-Fascist," reel 36, *Students for a Democratic Society papers, 1958 through 1970* (Teaneck, NJ: Chadwyck-Healey, 1977), microfilm, 1-10, 4B79.

<sup>14</sup> In September 1967, the ISC changed its name to the Independent Socialist Clubs of America but retained the acronym ISC. For the ISC's organizational history, see Milton Fisk, "Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization," (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977), trans. Einde O'Callaghan, *REDS – Die Roten*, 1 January 2002, <<http://www.marxists.de/trotism/fisk/ch5.htm>> (28 July 2010); Geier interview; O'Brien, "American Leninism," 34-35.

<sup>15</sup> The IS name was taken out of encouragement by and fraternal relations that had developed with the IS of Great Britain. See Fisk, "Socialism from Below." For the IS's founding documents, see *Forum, Gilbert*.

<sup>16</sup> Elbaum, *Revolution*, 124; Geier interview; O'Brien, "American Leninism," 53; Roberts interview.

<sup>17</sup> "Tasks and Perspectives," July 1970, *Gilbert*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Numerous factional fights emerged over the IS's industrialization policy. See, e.g., The Left Faction, "The New Course for the IS," 8 December 1976, 13-15, box 1, folder 4, *Gilbert*.

<sup>19</sup> The Left Faction, "The New Course," 13; Leon Trotsky, "An Open Letter to Comrade Burnham," in *In Defense of Marxism: The Social and Political Contradictions of the Soviet Union* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1995), 164. In the 1940s, Burnham rejected Marxist dialectical materialism and shifted rightward politically, helping to found the conservative *National Review* and joining the Central Intelligence Agency to assist in fighting communism. See Daniel Kelly, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World: A Life* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002); Richard Seymour, *The Liberal Defence of Murder* (London: Verso, 2008), 124.

<sup>20</sup> On colonizing, see Sean Burns, *Archie Green, The Making of a Working-Class Hero* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 29.

<sup>21</sup> The "struggle groups" concept originated largely from longtime socialist and one-time IS member Stan Weir. See "Tasks & Perspectives," July 1970, 13-17, *Gilbert*; Thompson interview. For Weir's reflections on rank-and-file organizing, see Weir, *Singlejack*, 109-63, 235-77.

<sup>22</sup> Elbaum, *Revolution*, 123; Geier interview; Dan La Botz, "The Tumultuous Teamsters of the 1970s." In Brenner et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 214-220;

O'Brien, "American Leninism," 53.

<sup>23</sup> On the political economy and crises of the 1970s. See Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 53-70; Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 122-74, 279-311; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> On women and the 1970s, see Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 73-96; Dorothy Sue Cobble, "'A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm': Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women's Service Jobs in the 1970s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 56 (Fall 1999): 23-44; Kay Deaux and Joseph C. Ullman, *Women of Steel: Female Blue-Collar Workers in the Basic Steel Industry* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Mary Margaret Fonow, *Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Nancy MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Actions: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class," *Feminist Studies* 25 (Spring 1999): 42-78.

<sup>25</sup> While women radicals had been instrumental in numerous organizing efforts at industrial settings, they had been shut out of heavy industry except for the brief period during World War II. Former Workers Party member and once IS member Anne Draper is one of a handful of women who organized within heavy industry as a welder in the Los Angeles shipyards during the war. See Mike Parker, Yvonne Valery, and Bob White, "Anne Draper, 1917-1973," *Workers' Power*, no. 76 (13-26 April 1973): 2. Genora Dollinger organized the Women's Emergency Brigade in Flint, MI and then became a union militant in the UAW at Detroit's Briggs Manufacturing Company. See Wolfgang Saxon, "Genora Dollinger, 82; Aided Nascent U.A.W.: Organizing women to shield strikers during the formative years of unions" *New York Times* (14 October 1995): 27. Other rank-and-file female militants include "union maids" Vicky Starr [Stella Nowicki] and Sylvia Woods. See Alice and Staughton Lynd, eds., *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> Candace Cohn discussed a successful campaign to win women's washroom facilities that she participated in at Clairton Works. See Cohn interview. Wendy Thompson participated in a several wildcat strikes over mandatory overtime at plant six of Chevy Gear and Axle, Hamtramck, MI, during the summer of 1973. Thompson interview.

<sup>27</sup> On the history of TDU, see Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (London: Verso, 1990). For current organizing efforts, see *Teamsters for a Democratic Union* <<http://www.tdu.org/>> (14 July 2012). On the IS initiation of "Labor Notes" as an IS project, see *International Trotskyism*, 902. For the "Labor Notes" website, see *Labor Notes* <<http://labornotes.org/>> (14 July

2012).

<sup>28</sup> R.W. Connell argues that a range of masculinities exist in relationship to hegemonic masculinity, the dominant masculine ideal within the social organization of a given gender order. Nonetheless, even men who practice any of a variety of masculinities of dissent, by which I would include gay/queer-identified and radical men, still benefit from “the patriarchal dividend”. See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 79.

<sup>29</sup> Levine, interview.

<sup>30</sup> James, *Doña Mariás's Story*, 128.

<sup>31</sup> In 1949, the WP adopted the name of the Independent Socialist League (ISL) and then dissolved in 1958 as part of an entry strategy into the YPSL/SP. On the WP/ISL, see Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 46-59, 50-52, 53-56, 82-85, 105; Max Shachtman, “The Fight for Socialism: The Principles and Program of the Workers Party,” 1946, trans. Sally Ryan, *Marxists' Internet Archive*, 1998.

<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/shachtma/1946/ffs/index.htm>> (21 August 2012); Weir, *Singlejack*, 208-12.

<sup>32</sup> Floyd W. Hayes, III, and Francis A. Kiene, III, “‘All Power to the People’: The Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party.” In *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1998), 165-66; Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 178, 206-07, 221-26; Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 147-153; Huey Newton with the assistance of J. Herman Blake, *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973, reprint; New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 143, 205-6; Wallace Turner, “Negroes Press Nomination of Indicted Militant”, *New York Times*, 5 February 1968, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> James, *Doña Mariás's Story*, 129.

<sup>35</sup> See Boxes 1-7 of Russ Gilbert “New Left” Pamphlet Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Chicago. See also Fisk, “Socialism from Below”; La Botz, “Tumultuous Teamsters,” 219-20.

<sup>36</sup> See “The New Course,” *Gilbert*, 18, 17, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Fisk, “Socialism from Below”; Roberts, interview; Alexander, 909.

<sup>38</sup> On the history of the RSL, see Alexander, 903-07.

<sup>39</sup> For similar sectarian divisions common to the American Left of the 1940s, see Burns, *Archie Green*, 27-28.

<sup>40</sup> Shaffer, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Cohn, interview.



<sup>42</sup> Geier in his interview explained significant contributions to the IS. For a novel loosely based on the Workers Party, in which Stan Weir is the prototype for the character of Joe Link, see Harvey Swados, *Standing Fast* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970).

<sup>43</sup> Weir, *Singlejack*, 109-48.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-48.

<sup>45</sup> Levine, Roberts, and Geier interviews.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson and Geier, interviews.

<sup>48</sup> According to Ruth Needleman, "There were actually two Consent Decrees signed, the first in 1974 and a second in 1975. Both were the result of complicated negotiations and compromises among the three signatories: the union, the companies, and the federal government." The Decree had mixed results due to its complex written language that largely left the worst abuses of racial segregation in the industry intact through skilled trade hierarchies. See Ruth Needleman, *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel: The Struggle for Democratic Unionism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 47, 205-08; 290-91n1; Cohn interview; Deaux and Ullman, *Women of Steel*, 50-51; Casey Ichniowski, "Have Angels Done More?: The Steel Industry Consent Decree," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 36, no. 2 (January 1983): 182-98. Herbert Hill emphasizes the legacy of racism in the steel industry and USWA, debunking myths that black nationalism was to blame for racial division. See Herbert Hill, "Race and the Steelworkers Union: White Privilege and Black Struggle, a Review Essay of Judith Stein's *Running Steel*," *New Politics* 11, no. 1 (winter 2002): 172-205.

<sup>49</sup> Thompson, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Lenin, *What Is To Be Done*, 145 [italics in original].

<sup>51</sup> Cohn, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Needleman, *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel*; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 8-9.

<sup>53</sup> Weir, *Singlejack*, 235-51.

<sup>54</sup> Cohn, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Brenner et al., *Rebel Rank and File*, xiv-xix; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 211-369; Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 63-76; Richard Feldman and Michael Betzold, eds., *End of the Line: Autoworkers and the American Dream* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 8-13, 189-293; John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988); La Botz, "Tumultuous Teamsters," 220-22; Weir, *Singlejack*, 39-106.

<sup>56</sup> Shaffer, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, interview.