

Oct.25, 1956

Dear Olga:

You notice, I'm sure, your assignment to write a lead on stratification of workers. I want to give you the sense of the REP discussion on that. First, the note!) it should not be on miners, although you may mention that as one of the groups of workers which undergo stratification, but it must be more comprehensive than any one single trade. 2) it should not be a local assignment, although you of course can ~~you~~ ask the local to help you in any way you wish to have their help. It must however be you, not the local. 3) it should not be a series of sayings by others, whether they be housewives or workers, although of course you may use current or local incidents and persons to illuminate a problem.

Now then what should it be? It should be a political-theoretical analysis which, after taking some current situation as its point of departure, goes on to show how the stratification in the proletariat from 1914, that is, imperialism, which produced an aristocracy of labor, nevertheless was able always to continue the class as a class by eliciting the deepest and lowest layers its most creative energies. As a subordinate point, it should hit against the intellectuals who are all willing to say at one and the same time that the proletariat is "backward" and that it is "bourgeois in its wants", wanting cars and money, etc. etc. It should not fear to expose strike-breaker or "homesteaders" as if that opposite isn't the very thing that bring the proletariat to its highest point of development.

Naturally you can call upon me or anyone else at the center for anything you may wish, but on the whole the responsibility is given you not merely to saddle you with responsibilities of which you have plenty, but in order to let you leap forward as a political leader and once for all overcome your modest background role.

Yours,

Eae

12138

Dear Saul:

I am having an awful time with the front-pager on stratification. I've read the material you and Rae sent me - plus many chapters of the book, over and over. But the front-pager doesn't seem to take shape for me.

I've tried a few real rough drafts - and torn them all up. They don't move, and where they didn't sound stiff and cold, they were a garble of ten different points. As the time draws closer and closer to deadline, I'm beginning to get a little panicky. I thought it might help me to write a letter and just put down what it is I have been thinking, and maybe you can help me.

The ideas in my head are these: First, that labor is not "Labor" the way writers and politicians glibly use the phrase... that is, it is not one big homogenized mass. All workers are not the same. For example, the "homesteaders" and "strike-brakers" that every worker knows in one form or another. But these types are no serious problem to workers - they ~~XXXXXXXX~~ take care of them pretty easily in any critical situation - ~~XXX~~ and are easy to "spot" and isolate as well.

The real division in the working-class is the division between the labor bureaucracy and the "rank and file" workers, the handful of labor aristocracy and the mass of the working people.

It is a division which is ~~XXXXXXXX~~ not only apparent in every industry and part of the country - it is world-wide. And it is a division which everyone is aware of. The corporations certainly know the real difference between dealing with the union bureaucracy at the conference table during "negotiations" and dealing with the rank-and-file during a wild-cat strike. ~~XXXXX~~ The workers who write to N & L that "The unions seem to be more for the company than for the workers today" sum up their knowledge of the situation with profound simplicity and accuracy. (Or take the N.Y. Times headline that "Mine owners praise Lewis for understanding their problems" and the miners' statements that "Lewis is a coal operator" to illustrate how clearly both management and workers recognize the wide separation between the Labor aristocrats and the workers themselves.)

The appearance of a "labor aristocracy" is not "new" - it was born the moment the great imperialist powers were born. The labor aristocracy is of great use to capitalism, but only a country rich enough to bribe a portion of its working class can afford one. At the beginning of the century, when the "Great Powers" succeeded in dividing the world into their colonies - and the process of dividing and redividing by means of each subsequent war began - the wealth was established to permit the bribery of that portion of the working-class in each country. The era of imperialism became the era of the establishment of the "Labor Representatives". In countries such as England and France and Germany it was not only

In countries such as England and France and Germany, they succeeded not only in establishing an aristocracy in the Trade Unions, but in establishing a "respectable" leadership for the great Labor Parties which the workers formed, as well.

In the United States, no mass Labor Party has been formed to this day. In one sense, that is to the American workers advantage (I've took this up in a TW column). But the lack of a Labor Party, in no way prevented the same great division between a thin layer of privileged representatives on top and the majority of un-privileged, ordinary workers on the bottom, in the American labor movement.

The American workers amazed the world with the speed and thoroughness with which they organized the CIO in 1936. They sat down and seized control of the factories in which they worked - and succeeded not only in changing their conditions of labor, but their whole way of life. Yet the Union today and the union that the workers built 20 short years ago, are as different as night and day.

The experience of seeing what they built for their own purposes, transformed into the very opposite of its purpose is nothing new to the working-class. It happened to the only successful workers Revolution when the Russian workers saw the "workers state" transformed into the greatest tyranny the world has ever seen against workers. It happened to the closest thing the American workers have yet attained to "workers control" - the CIO - which they organized to control the corporations and now see doing its best to control them.

But not only has no bureaucracy, no matter how strong, been able to successfully or for long control the working-class as a class. Neither does history simply repeat itself. What may on the surface appear as the "same thing all over again" appears always on a new and much higher level.

The labor bureaucracy in this country has not one iota the strength and power over the workers, that the totalitarian bureaucracy exercises over the workers of Russia and the satellites. Yet the Hungarian events prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the fight for freedom cannot be suppressed by even tanks or secret police. On its own level the wildcat strikes that have been erupting with increasing regularity all over this country, have also shown that the workers cannot be controlled by their bureaucracy, and were also aimed as much against their own bureaucracy as the company.

(state-capitalism)

The age of automation and totalitarianism have not only produced a greater and greater bureaucracy. It has also produced a greater and greater separation between that bureaucracy and the mass of the workers themselves. The more necessary it is to control workers and the more the bureaucracy attempts to do it, the more the workers see the need to do something about the conditions of their labor, and the need to do it themselves. It is not the "same thing all over" - it is on so high a level that it means nothing less than a complete reorganization of society this time.

And just as with every step forward the workers have taken, the direction is coming from new and deeper layers. Just as the CIO was built not by the "advanced workers" or cub of the craft-unionism of the AFL, or organized by the "labor leaders", but by the "raw" unorganized and unskilled workers who threw up their own leaders and organized themselves from below, spontaneously. Just so the "wildcats" that are erupting from Detroit to West Virginia are being spear-headed by ~~XXXXXX~~ new layers. ~~XXXXXX~~ (I keep thinking of what Pete said here during the wild-cat, that he used to worry about the young guys who didn't know the union, but now he's not worried anymore - they knew what to do and everybody followed them and he was quite happy to give them the lead.) ("Youth" in Hungary, too.)

It is those on the very bottom who can see the clearest - for not only do they have the whole weight on their backs, but they have nothing to blind their vision. That is why the Negro has always played, and is still playing so important a role in the movement of America toward a new society.....

It is not only the rank and file "unionists" over whom the labor aristocracy cannot exercise its control. ~~XXXXXX~~ (To all extents and purposes, the majority of "union members" only pay dues, but are completely untouched by the machinations of the bureaucracy - do not attend meetings but organize wild-cats.) But there are the thousands upon thousands still "unorganized" - in the South especially.

What ~~XXXXXX~~ American workers will do only they can know. Only one thing is certain. What they do will be on a higher level than what has ever been done before, and what will come will come from those new and deeper layers that the "aristocracy" cannot touch.

You see what a mess I'm in, Saul? Where do I go from here? What do I develop out of that mess of abstractions? I sure need help!

One thing I keep having trouble with is this: stratification to me is world-wide, though it takes a different "form" in America, and in England,

where it appears as the labor bureaucracy in the Unions, and in England where there is the "Labor Party", and in the state-capitalist countries where it is the Communist bureaucracy, itself. ~~XXX~~ It seems to me that just as ~~XXXXXX~~ the stage of capitalism in Lenin's day was "Imperialism" and the stage today is "state-capitalism" - so the "stratification" has reached a new level commensurate with our age of totalitarianism. So that, even though there is a vast difference between the power of the bureaucracy over the workers between America and Russia, nevertheless ... well, I just can't help constantly thinking of Hungary everytime I begin to think of America.

I don't know if you know what I mean? I may be way, way wrong. But let me tell you something concrete to show you what keeps running through my head. I read a report in the papers during the first period of the Russian onslaught against the Hungarian revolutionists, about a speech that Gomulko had delivered to the Polish people. He was scared to death that the Poles would rise up again, as the Hungarians had. And they quoted him as saying (I don't have the exact quote here so I'll paraphrase): "I know that most of our Poles are responsible, sober people, who want only to live peacefully, and do not want to see the same thing happen to us as happened to Hungary. But there are among us some irresponsible elements, hot-headed young men who..... etc., etc., etc." As soon as I read it I thought: it was the same thing Lewis told the delegates to the UMW... the very same phrases almost! When I saw Andy, I didn't tell him the source, and left out the word "Poles", and just read the quote and asked him who it sounded like. He said it was almost word for word Lewis speech about the wildcaters.

Perhaps that is nothing important ... ~~XXX~~ and for certain a "wild-cat" is not a revolution! But I think I need to tell you no more to let you know I need some help!

I've put off writing another SOS ~~XXXXX~~ until now for two reasons: first, I knew the tremendous amount of work and pressure on you and Rae especially with the book; and second, I was hoping that just reading and struggling on my own would turn the trick. But I can't put off my SOS any longer. I'm stuck! Can you help me?

O.

P.S. I'm also getting worried about the check which hasn't arrived yet. If I don't hear something by tomorrow, I shall check with Otie by phone whether he got his form and sent it back okay. That is the only thing I can think of that could be delaying it.

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