I first met Jack Barnes in Chicago in the late summer of 1961. He and his first wife, Betsey Stone, had come to live in Evanston, just north of the city, where they were newly enrolled graduate students at Northwestern University. I had moved to the city from Boston a year before, and was in my junior year at the University of Chicago.

Betsey, if I recall correctly, was a teaching assistant in history. Jack had a prestigious Woodrow Wilson fellowship to study economics. I had started college at MIT along with Peter Camejo (we were freshman dormitory roommates) and got my degree in mathematics from the University of Chicago.

Both Jack and Betsey had just graduated from Carleton, a prestigious liberal arts college close to Minneapolis. Jack had been the leader of a group of young socialists at Carleton and had organized an exceptionally vibrant Fair Play for Cuba committee on campus. As a result, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) had a strong chapter there for several years after Jack graduated. Many of these Carleton students, like Jack and Betsey, went on to become national leaders of the YSA and Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

We were just a handful of YSAers in Chicago back then, so Jack, Betsey and I spent a lot of time together. We were good friends as well as comrades. It was so many times that I made the long trip by elevated subways from the south side of Chicago to their student garret in Evanston for dinner and discussion, sometimes continuing overnight and into the next day.

I'm sure that everyone who met Jack Barnes was struck by two things right at the outset.

First, Jack's left forearm was missing from a point beginning just below the elbow. I didn't know whether he was born with the handicap or whether he had suffered an accident or disease in childhood. Nor, strangely enough now that I think back on it, did I ever seriously inquire. So in all the years I knew him, I never learned what had happened. Nor do I recall any of my other comrades, some of whom knew him very well, ever mentioning the cause. It was as if no one dared think about it. I learned later that the cause was congenital.

Jack seemed to have mastered the situation well. He drove an old stick-shift automobile that had a knob fastened onto the steering wheel to provide leverage and control by the remaining portion of his left arm so that he could shift with his right hand. Rather than being a cautious driver he was, at least in my recollection, rather madcap about it. He also liked sports; I remember tossing a bit of football with him in Evanston and also attending a couple of Northwestern football games, a treat for me because we poor folks at the U.of Chicago didn't have a college football team. Years later I learned to my chagrin that Jack was an exceptionally good tennis player. I had been on my high school tennis team, but
he beat me easily. That's when I found out that he had once been a state or local champ back home in Ohio.

The second striking characteristic about Jack was how forceful he was in both private conversation and in public speaking.

Privately he could be charming. He had a gift of for banter and could connect with people in a personal way. He might touch or joke with you, or say something meant just for you, something that would make you feel important, part of the group. He showed these skills early on, but honed them over time. Within a few more years he had truly mastered the stereotypical politician's arts. I felt myself to be rather clumsy in these respects, and was awed by these talents of his. Later I came to regard some of it as patronizing, deep down.

Publicly he seemed articulate and convincing on the podium, and he certainly wasn't diffident about speaking out in rough and tumble gatherings.

I remember a meeting of the Chicago SWP, one of the first that Jack attended after he arrived in town. He had no acquaintance with our branch and barely knew anyone in attendance, yet he didn't hesitate to speak up, at length, on several topics. I was initially taken aback and thought his boldness inappropriate, but as he spoke it seemed to me as if I were listening to one of our long-standing branch leaders. As Jack developed into a mature political leader he would become one of the dominating speakers at nearly every SWP discussion or meeting in which he participated.

Jack’s natural leadership abilities were so apparent that a few months later, at the convention of the YSA held over the 1961-1962 New Years holiday, there was a move made by some people around the Weiss group, to induce Jack, a relative newcomer, to contest for YSA leadership in opposition to Barry Sheppard and Peter Camejo, a proposition that Jack rejected. The proposition was motivated, no doubt, by two factors. First, when Jack first joined the movement at Carleton College, he had worked closely with Carl Feingold of the Weiss group, and perhaps Carl and the others thought that Jack might still be influenced by them. Second, they surely had misgivings concerning Barry and Peter who had been recruited in Boston by Larry Trainor, a vocal adversary of the Weiss group. Jack told me about the incident at the time.

Years later, working in the national office of the SWP in New York, I discovered that Jack wasn't as articulate as I had thought just from listening to him. Like Barry Sheppard before me and Steve Clark afterwards, I for a time was given the job of taking his speeches, transcribed from tape recordings, and turning them into articles for publication. Discourse that had seemed so sharp and limpid when punctuated by Jack's gestures and punchy phrases usually turned out to be garbled when transcribed from tape. It was really a lot of work to turn those transcripts into reasoned written form. Several former SWP members who still occasionally attended SWP gatherings in later decades told me that it had become increasingly difficult even to make sense of Jack's discourse.
These rewrites were necessary because, in contrast to most other top-level political leaders in the socialist movement, Jack seems to have had some sort of writer's block. He was an excellent editor and could find just the right turn of phrase to enhance someone else's work. But he could not himself write consistently at any length. In the entire twenty years that I knew him, he never wrote a book, or even a long essay, although he certainly had the intellectual capacity to do so. He did publish collections of articles in book form but few of his articles originated as written texts. Almost all were edited transcriptions of speeches. Jack's writer's block was so severe, in fact, that on several occasions it became necessary to postpone party resolutions that Jack had been assigned to draft - which raised objections from critics of the party leadership from time to time, but unfortunately raised no more than a few eyebrows from fellow party leaders.

Decades later, following the SWP press from afar, I noticed that the party’s newspaper, The Militant, was sometimes silent for weeks or months at a time while major news unfolded (the meager coverage of Gorbachev and the breakup of the Soviet Union being the most egregious example). These lapses occurred most often when events departed from the standard party formula, and I often wondered whether the long delays in the party press reflected the writer's block of its central leader. In the early years, when Jack was surrounded by a strong leadership collective, he only had a problem with writing, never with verbal communication. He was always quick-witted and expressed himself readily on all new events. He would risk making errors and he could backtrack when he started off on the wrong foot. Perhaps later, when he was virtually alone at the top, Jack just couldn't figure out what to say at first. In any event, no one else dared take the initiative.

We were young then in the early 1960s, new to radical politics, and open to other ideas. We discussed all sorts of socialist views without prejudice and devoured a whole range of left wing journals. We read, with respect, Studies on the Left, an intellectual magazine of the new left that was put out at the University of Wisconsin. Occasionally we mused over the idea of putting out a similar journal, though this was never really a serious thought. Although it's such a small thing, I can still recall how enthused Jack was over Ernest Mandel's new book, Marxist Economic Theory, then available only in French. While the book was respected in academic circles, it was still the work of a man that most people in the SWP considered a leading “Pabloite.” The Fourth International, led by Michel Raptis (Pablo), had split in 1953 and to some of us on the other side, primarily groups in France, Britain, and the United States, Pablo was Satan incarnate and Mandel his Beelzebub, the devil’s right hand man. Later, of course, after the reunification of the Fourth International, reading the works of Ernest Mandel became quite respectable in the SWP, even de rigueur for some. In later years, while on assignment for the SWP in Europe, I got to know Ernest Mandel fairly well and I even met Pablo once for a lengthy conversation. Both were engaging personally and quite impressive politically.

Jack was more open-minded than me at the time. I suspect that given my previous recruitment and training in Boston, under the tutelage of the grizzled proletarian veteran Larry Trainor, I may have conveyed a hard-line image to Jack in those days. He, after all,
had only lived politically in a small college town and had not yet experienced the homogenizing effect of life in a party branch. I had been in the movement all of nine or ten months longer than he, with a full 18 months experience in the party units in Boston and Chicago; and so I already felt myself to be, at least in some respect, a "cadre" type, as we called ourselves. Over time Jack came to view himself the same way, though I don't think he had at first.

Jack’s formation, in short, was much like most other middle class radicalizing students of the time. Decades later he sometimes suggested having had a working class upbringing. But I don’t recall ever hearing him say so in the early days. Having a real working class background would have been a cachet, impressive to us all. It was certainly the type of thing that would have been remarked upon and remembered. So, I always had the impression that he was from a lower middle class background, perhaps one that bordered the working class – middle class, yet in no way well to do or professional. In any event, this is not important and I could be mistaken on this point.

In the 1960s, when most of us were recruited as students, we confronted and rejected the notion that one’s family origin was of any significance. What mattered were the political ideas, policies and actions that a person pursued. Larry Trainor, a printer and my first mentor from the older generation, had a penchant for “workerist” views of family background. But Ray Dunne, a real model of the lifelong “worker-Bolshevik” and a prominent leader of the famous 1930s Teamsters’ strikes, cast a cold eye on such notions when he visited us in Boston, where I had returned for graduate school and party work.

I also remember the general tenor of a conversation I had over this issue in the mid-1960s with Farrell Dobbs, the former Teamsters’ leader and Tom Kerry, an ex-seaman, the two main SWP national leaders at the time. I had commented admiringly on their proletarian background. “I haven’t worked for a capitalist in twenty-five years,” said Farrell, disparaging the idea out of hand. “What about you, Tom?” I asked. I don’t remember exactly what Tom said in reply, but I know that he said it gruffly.

Jack soon proved to be a superb YSA recruiter at Northwestern, repeating his earlier success at Carleton. He and Betsey won over several talented students. Within a year we had a solid YSA chapter of about 15 people in Chicago, quite a respectable size for the time. That little group in the fall of 1962 included eight or nine people who later became National Committee members of the SWP.

Along with Jack, Betsey and me there were Lew Jones and Joel Britton, both of whom were recruited from Northwestern. The five of us went on to become long-time members of the SWP Political Committee, the party’s top leadership body. Together with Barry Sheppard and Peter Camejo, my old pals from Boston, and several others from Carleton/Minneapolis, including Mary Alice Waters, Larry Seigle, Doug Jenness and Charlie Bolduc, these people formed what in my opinion was the central core of young SWP leaders that built the party in the 1960s and early 1970s. Charlie Bolduc dropped away in the early 1970s, and several others came to prominence by the mid-1970s, including a very capable group of women and Black leaders, Malik Miah in particular;
but those whom I have just mentioned were certainly the main component of the younger national leadership team in the early days, through the anti-Vietnam-War movement and beyond.

We came from diverse regions and backgrounds, mostly from the East and MidWest. Only three of us, Peter Camejo, Barry Sheppard and I, came from the New York area, but not the city proper. I don’t think any of us had radical politics in our family history. In the late 1970s Steve Clark also emerged as one of the main party leaders. He joined at the beginning of the 1970s, and was just one of a group of capable local branch leaders in Chicago. I barely knew Steve Clark until the latter part of the 1970s when he came to New York to work on the editorial side of things. Another of the Chicago leaders in the 1970s was Suzanne Haig, my companion of over thirty years.

Our critics and opponents sometimes suggested that it was strange or even sinister that little Carleton College produced so many young SWP leaders, those mentioned above and others as well. Actually, most of the Carleton people were not classmates of Jack Barnes, but were two or more years younger. Some did not even enter college until Jack had left. What did exist was a strong and vigorous organization on campus that continued to attract young socialists for several years. The specific weight of this group in the YSA was higher than usual primarily because the size of the YSA was so small nationally.

The older party members in Chicago, working class in background for the most part, were loyal and dedicated to the cause and full of encouragement for the youth. But they did not really have the stature to help Jack or the rest of us along in the best possible way. So the SWP national office decided to send in to Chicago two of its precious few top-flight organizers to show us the ropes. They were Bea and Al Hansen. Bea was the younger sister of Genora Johnson, an important figure in the auto strikes of the 1930s. Al, an ex-seaman, was the younger brother of Joe Hansen, a top leader of the SWP and Fourth International.

Bea and Al were older in our eyes, but they were really only in their late thirties or early forties at the time. They were active, working class role models for us all; and so we set about to build a serious branch unit of the SWP. Jack dropped out of school in 1962-63, became party organizer, and with the help of Bea and Al turned the Chicago SWP branch into an exemplary party unit.

Politically we were quite active, though I do not think we were in any way exceptional in comparison with other SWP branches at the time. We engaged in solidarity activities around Cuba, in support of the Black struggle for civil rights, in civil liberties actions against the vestiges of McCarthyism, including our own Bloomington case, and in some peace activities within the Student Peace Union. Jack and Betsey, like all of us, were active participants in all of these activities.

Where we shone was organizationally and administratively. In all of these activities - finances, bookstore, sales of the paper, public forums, and education - we were the proverbial "well-oiled machine." We learned well the minutia of organization building.
The party was changing, and the Chicago branch was representative of the change. We were breaking out of the routinist, complacent, defensive mindset that had developed during the cold war witch-hunt years of the 1950s, in which opportunities for action were limited and membership had declined precipitously. Young people were now joining the party again, and we wanted to be active, militant, engaged participants in the struggles of the day. We wanted an organization that took itself seriously and was organized accordingly. The French left had coined a word for this concept that I learned later. They called it “militantisme.” That’s what we wanted to be – real militants and cadres.

I was the Chicago YSA organizer in 1962-63. But it was not until I moved back to Boston for graduate school in 1963-1966 that I became skilled as an organizer, first in the YSA, then the SWP. The job of organizer, despite the name, is not really an administrative position. The organizer is the main political leader of the work of the party branch. The main skills are knowing what to do next politically, and how to motivate and inspire people to give their best. An organizer should lead by example and should encourage the branch members to contribute suggestions of their own on the work to be done. Organizers who do their jobs well help to create a highly motivated team of activists.

The main figure in Boston from the older generation was Larry Trainor, who worked as a printer and whom we all looked up to as a model “worker-bolshevik.” He had a striking personality, was a great speaker and educator, showed us all the ropes, and he helped attract young people to us. I had known Larry back in 1960 when I first joined the SWP, but it was only in this return stint that I got to know him well.

(I had joined the YSA and SWP in Boston in 1960 because of our active participation and leadership in support of the civil rights sit-ins taking place in the South at the time. Barry Sheppard, in his *The Party: A Political Memoir (The Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988)*, gives a good description of our activities in Boston then, and also of Larry Trainor during that time. I have written elsewhere about Peter Camejo and Barry Sheppard, my friends and comrades from my earlier stay in Boston.)

Throughout most of my second period in Boston I worked very closely with Larry, consulted him frequently for his advice, and enjoyed his support for my role as the main younger leader of the Boston branch. In fact Larry promoted my election to the SWP National Committee in 1965.

The Boston SWP and YSA grew strong during that period, which included the beginnings of the anti-Vietnam-War protests. We had members and chapters on nearly all the important Boston area college campuses, and we stood toe to toe, or were at least competitive with SDS everywhere, except Harvard. We led the antiwar movement in the city, and we were well respected by many people on the left. We developed a strong group of capable women comrades, especially Judy White, my companion at the time. This was still well before the women’s movement grew to prominence.
Because of our strength in the anti-Vietnam-war movement Boston was chosen as the site for the national office of the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter*. This was the publication we supported and set up to promote the immediate withdrawal position in the antiwar movement. I became editor of the newsletter, and later, after we moved to New York, we merged into the new Student Mobilization Committee Against the War in Vietnam.

It was during the time when I was in Boston, that Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam and set out on an independent course that had the potential to appeal to a broad section of Black militants (and whites, as well).

I remember how impressed and encouraged I was by Malcolm X. We all were. This set us apart from other groups on the left, most of which were lukewarm, cool or even hostile to Malcolm’s politics. Boston did not have a very large Afro-American population, but Malcolm X had a big impact there – speaking on the radio, TV and at public meetings. One of the factors behind his support was that his half-sister, Ella Collins, lived in Boston and actively organized support for him and his ideas.

We were stunned and outraged when Malcolm was assassinated in February, 1965 and we determined to do something. We called a public meeting just three weeks later in commemoration and appreciation of Malcolm X. With the approval of Ella Collins and the Boston Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU, Malcolm’s organization) we obtained agreement from Leon Ameer, one of Malcolm’s top lieutenants, to speak at our meeting.

It was an overflow crowd, and a newsworthy event in the city. Ameer held nothing back in his accusations. He charged the US government with being involved in Malcolm’s death and predicted that he too would be subject to attack. He told the meeting, “this will probably be the last time you’ll see me alive.”

As Ameer spoke I gazed at the audience and noticed two or three tough looking Afro-American guys glaring fixedly at him. Were they, I wondered, a possible hit squad? Several Nation of Islam thugs had already attacked Ameer in Boston just a few weeks earlier, beating him so severely with pipes that he was laid up in the hospital for two weeks. Now, here we were, remembering the assassination of Malcolm X, where shooters had stood up from among the audience and gunned Malcolm down as he was speaking. At the podium on this night in Boston, alongside Leon Ameer, was I, chairing the meeting. I had grown accustomed by this time in my socialist career to standing up in public, and I was normally not nervous at the prospect, but on this occasion I most certainly was.

The meeting finished without incident. On the next day, however, the newspapers announced that Leon Ameer was dead!

We were all perplexed by what had happened. The medical examiner ruled afterwards that Ameer, who suffered from epilepsy, had died in his bed either from a seizure or an
overdose of medication. But some people ever since have questioned that judgment, even suspecting foul play. It is quite possible that the effects of his earlier beating were a cause. He had been in a coma for three days and suffered dizzy spells and blackouts ever since.

I left Boston in the spring of 1966. The precipitate cause was a big fight in the branch, initiated by surprise by Larry Trainor in the spring of 1966. There were no overt political issues in this fight, which lasted for several meetings. It consisted almost entirely of a series of personal complaints against me. The result was a poisonous atmosphere and my being deposed from leadership of the branch. In the subterranean background, however, encouraged by Larry, was a tendency towards workerism, a disparagement of our work among students, and a deep distrust of Jack Barnes and the national YSA leadership. This caused the Boston branch to change its focus and set it back for over two years, until Peter Camejo moved back to Boston and led the effort to once again assert leadership in the Boston student and antiwar movements. I hope to write a fuller appreciation of Larry Trainor elsewhere.

After Boston most of my work in the next several years centered on the anti-Vietnam-war movement. But I also had occasion to be a branch organizer in New York and Chicago.

After a stint in the Student Mobilization Committee (SMC) I became organizer of the New York branch in the latter half of 1967. As the largest unit of the SWP the New York branch was a complex organization. There were many more personalities and areas of work to coordinate, and there were many more activities taking place than in other branches. So it was a difficult job. I think I did OK at it, but I have nothing memorable politically to report.

I do, however, have at least some fond memories from that time in New York. We had a large headquarters, and in the main hall we had room for a ping-pong table that could be set up when nothing else was going on. I was pretty good at the sport, and spent more time at it than I should have. But I wasn’t as good as my favorite opponents: Jeff Mackler and Rod Holt. Jeff, a leader in our local antiwar and teachers work, was expelled from the SWP in the 1980s and became a leader of the Socialist Action group. Rod was a highly skilled electrical/electronics engineer. The party didn’t have need for a top-flight engineer, so all it could do with Rod’s talents was to assign him to manage tape recording, audio and similar technical tasks at party gatherings. After Rod left the SWP he also linked up with Socialist Action. But along the way he went on to become one of the handful of original founders of Apple Computer. Steve Jobs is quoted paying tribute to Rod Holt in the biography of Jobs by Walter Isaacson.

After New York, I was called upon early in 1968 to return to Chicago.

The Chicago branch in 1968 comprised mostly different people than when I was last there in 1963. The branch had a lot of potential, but the leadership needed some help. I was welcomed immediately and elected branch organizer soon after my arrival. Together
with an active and enthusiastic team of party and YSA members, we set about to turn things around. We built up our presence on the campuses, ran a vigorous election campaign, strengthened our organizational functioning, and participated actively in the city-wide antiwar group.

Within a few months we had become capable enough to organize a national Student Mobilization Committee conference and to host the national office of the SMC. Moving the SMC office from New York had become desirable for a period, due to a split in that organization. As a former SMC leader I also was available to help out.

It was quite interesting to be in Chicago that year. Big events in 1968 had a big impact on Chicago politics, in particular the assassination of Martin Luther King, which brought the city into turmoil in April, and the demonstrations at the Democratic Party convention in August, which had a nationwide impact. The development of the Black Panther Party was also important in Chicago at that time. Fred Hampton, leader of the Black Panthers, had built a pretty strong group. He was killed by the police during a raid of his apartment a year later.

I left Chicago at the end of 1968. The branch, I think, was much stronger then than it had been earlier.

The most well-known events in Chicago that year were of course the demonstrations during the week of the Democratic Party convention. There were a wide variety of activities, some of them quite colorful. These included the Yippie nomination of Pigasus the pig as their presidential candidate, various musical events, a "Meet the Delegates" march, an "Unbirthday Party" for Lyndon Johnson, a demonstration against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, civil rights marches, Eugene McCarthy rallies and many other activities.

The big activity, which we supported, was the scheduled rally at Grant Park, to be followed by a march down to the convention center, several miles away. This was held under the auspices of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. This was the event that ended with the infamous police attack in front of the Conrad Hilton hotel, where, as was said, "The whole world is watching."

The police and National Guard were mobilized, exuding an aura of tension and threat in Chicago throughout the entire week.

Many confrontations with the police took place at Lincoln Park, somewhat north of the central Loop area, in the days preceding the Conrad Hilton confrontation. As I recall, the Lincoln Park confrontations went late into the night, with people playing music, sharing food, dancing, drinking, doing drugs, and trying to sleep and socialize in the park – while the police tried to impose a curfew on the assembly. The police were quite brutal in breaking up the crowds.

It was in response to those earlier Lincoln Park confrontations that we held discussions in
the SWP about participating on a civil liberties basis. It was decided that while we defended the right to assemble, there was no clear political purpose to the activities at Lincoln Park. So we decided not to organize a political participation. It was unstated, but understood, that our energetic young people could not be kept away. We hoped they would show good sense. It was generally known to the SWP leadership that some YSA and SWP members were taking part on their own in a variety of events. My friend Guy Miller, who was a young YSAer at the time, wrote later that he and others "were on the street all week anyway, discipline be damned." That was no secret, and there were no steps taken to put a stop to it.

The big political day was Wednesday, August 28, where the rally at Grant Park and march were scheduled. We were critical of the way it was organized, but we supported that action, and we organized our contingent to be there.

There was a serious incident at the Grant Park rally, when some people (a police agent among them) lowered the American flag. The police attacked them and clubbed demonstration leader Rennie Davis unconscious. But the rally had a permit, and the police allowed it to complete.

The demonstrators, still in Grant Park, then assembled for the parade, the SWP contingent among them. There were several thousand people prepared to march. However, the city had not granted a permit for the march, and the police were insistent on preventing it from taking place. There followed a negotiating impasse lasting for an hour or so, but the police would not budge. During this long and tense standoff the assemblage began to dissipate, with its numbers much reduced as time passed by. Finally the assembly dispersed, with the remaining demonstrators leaving. Dave Dellinger and the other demonstration leaders announced that the march could not take place.

It was toward the end of the impasse, when it was quite clear that the demonstration would not occur, that we decided to end our organized participation. However, we assigned three people to stay with the crowd. These were Syd Stapleton, Carl Finamore and I. The rest of our contingent left. It was expected that everything political was over.

What happened next was largely accidental, and was due in some part, to misjudgments by the police and the serendipitous location of the main offices of the press and television.

Grant Park, where the demonstrators had assembled, was at that time separated from Michigan Avenue and the Loop by the Illinois Central commuter railroad tracks. To get from Grant Park to Michigan Avenue required crossing bridges over the tracks. Rather than allowing an amorphous group of dispersing demonstrators to cross at various points, the police blocked the southerly bridges and forced everyone to cross at a more northerly bridge, further away from the Conrad Hilton hotel, where the Democratic Party had its convention headquarters. The unintended effect, however, was to create a sort of funnel so that a couple of thousand people, although dispersing, were still more or less together in an ad hoc sort of group.
It was just at that moment, when we reached Michigan Avenue on the other side of the northern-most bridge, that we encountered a demonstration by the Poor People's Campaign, a group that had been founded earlier in 1968 by Martin Luther King. That group had a "mule train" and they were marching down Michigan Avenue. So, the dispersing antiwar demonstrators fell in behind the mule train on the march down Michigan Avenue.

The Poor People's Campaign had the imprimatur of an organization carrying out Martin Luther King's work. What is more, it had a permit for its march! So, here we were, carrying out our forbidden march under the banner of the respectable Poor People's Campaign. It took a few minutes for the police to figure out how to respond and to assemble their attack forces. In the meantime, we were still marching.

If the police had allowed the march to proceed, we might well have continued as originally planned - down Michigan Avenue, past the hotels, out of the Loop, and down towards the convention center. The police could have broken it up in some out-of-the-way location. But they made what was, from their point of view, a very stupid decision. They decided to allow the mule train to pass, but to stop the rest of the march right at the corner of Balbo, opposite the Conrad Hilton hotel, the very site where all the press, TV and radio was concentrated.

Syd, Carl and I were right at the front of the march, directly opposite the hotel. We had been halted, time was passing, and we were wondering what was happening at the other parts of the demonstration. So we stepped off onto Balbo in order to circle around towards another part of the march. Just at that moment the police busses arrived at Balbo and Wabash, just a short block from the hotel. The cops rushed forward, passed us by on Balbo and proceeded to wade into the crowd. Syd, Carl and I circled around and got back into the melee.

The media was easily able to cover the whole thing, and indeed, "the whole world was watching."

In the aftermath, the Chicago events stayed in the public eye due to the trial on conspiracy and incitement to riot charges against the Chicago Eight: Abbie Hoffman, Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, Rennie Davis, John Froines, Jerry Rubin, Lee Weiner, and Bobby Seale. After much public outrage they were acquitted of conspiracy, but the judge gave them stiff sentences for contempt of court. These convictions were eventually reversed.

In Chicago, immediately after the demonstrations, the local antiwar people stepped in to reassert our right to protest. Together with many others we helped build another Chicago demonstration one month later, around the themes of opposition to the war and police repression. Some 25,000 people took part, the largest protest action in Chicago up to that point.
The Chicago demonstrations of at the Democratic Party convention were among the most well-known of the entire 1960s. Unlike most of the other anti-Vietnam-war actions they were not very large, only ten thousand or so, compared with hundreds of thousands on other occasions. Nor did the Chicago activities encounter much more violent police repression than some others. But Chicago 1968 was certainly the most dramatic and gained the most publicity. This, as I have described, was to a large extent due to accident and police blundering.¹

In retrospect I think that we should have made more of an effort to participate in a leading role in order to try to shape the course of events leading up to these demonstrations. This would not have been easy. I had participated earlier in some of the planning meetings of the National Mobilization Committee (the Mobe), and it did seem unlikely to me and other SWPers that we could have much influence over the Mobe leadership at that time. Groups like SDS, the Yippies around Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, and the radical pacifists around David Dellinger were determined to have their way in the months leading up to the action, stressing a confrontationist style over politics. Others associated with the Mobe were wrapped up in support for the Democratic Party candidacy of Eugene McCarthy and shied away from calling any action. Even the local antiwar group, the Chicago Peace Council, was kept in the background by the national Mobe leadership. Yet if we persisted, we might have had some effect, as we usually did in almost all the other big national actions.

Following the demonstrations, SDS veered much further off into a confrontationist direction and within a year had split into pieces and collapsed. We, on the other hand, maintained our focus on trying to organize mass actions. We succeeded in rebuilding the Student Mobilization Committee, the New Mobilization Committee, and later the National Peace Action Coalition - the groups that were to lead the largest antiwar demonstrations ever.

Turning back to earlier developments in the 1960s, the administrative and organizational skills that the SWP youth learned in branches across the country was built upon and enhanced in the following years.

First, in the mid-1960s the national offices were moved from their historic headquarters at 116 University Place, a creaky old building that smelled of musty newspapers, to a large well-lit loft shared by the national office of the SWP and the New York City branch. Our new headquarters on Broadway were a big step up, and we were justly proud of the site. But the environs were really no different. The new office was only a few blocks away on the other side of the run-down Union Square area - quite different from the gentrified site that it is today. Across the street, alongside cheap delicatessens and discount drugstore outlets was a small bookstore with used books piled up in stalls outside - a flagship store for the fledgling Barnes & Noble.

A little later, in early 1971 or thereabouts, we moved to the upper floors of an old rundown factory building on the Hudson River waterfront. Teams of party volunteers, led by members with construction experience, remodeled the building and turned it into efficient modern offices. Within a couple of years we had bought the rest of the building and turned the ground floor into a well-run, modern print shop. It remained the party headquarters for the next thirty years.

Ironically, the building was situated on the far west side of Greenwich Village in a neighborhood of homosexual “butch” bars and streetwalkers, at a time when the party’s position on gay rights, though in flux, was still woefully backward and wrong, as it had been for many years. (In fairness, though, it should be noted that most other groups on the left were also backward on this issue.) In any event, the party changed its position as the gay liberation movement developed. Once, the display sign on the headquarters building even came out with a gay cast to its coloring and design, though I believe this was due to the individual initiative of the sign painter. The sign itself stayed that way for only a short time. The neighborhood, like our previous one, has since become quite desirable – another tribute, an unkind wit might suggest, to the party’s prescience in matters of real estate.

By late 2002 the west side waterfront area had become so attractive that the Anchor Foundation, which owned the Pathfinder building, was able to sell the property for the almost unbelievable sum of $20 million! This bonanza was combined with scandal, however, when it became known that Jack Barnes and Mary-Alice Waters took huge fees for themselves out of the sale – a corruption that would have been unimaginable in the earlier years. Then, in 2007 it was learned that these two SWP leaders had personally owned a luxury co-op that sold for nearly $2 million – whereas for years they had demanded great financial sacrifices from the party membership. When news of that real estate sale made the mainstream press, the hypocrisy was so egregious that it became an international incident on the left.

At first, the large new offices seemed much more than we needed. The combined membership of the SWP and YSA in 1971 was only 1,000 or so, and at the high point in the latter 1970s hovered around 2,000. Yet by the late 1970s we had a full-time staff of over 100 people, a professional print shop, an active publishing house and various other institutions, “an infrastructure for a party of about 100,000,” George Novack told interviewers in a noted 1976 article for the Nation magazine. George was inclined to exaggerate, but he did convey the spirit. At the time we considered the Nation article as an important symptom of the respect we had gained in the general left. By the late 1970s we really thought we were poised for substantial growth and we had the structure to prove it, not only in the New York center, but also in the new party units that had been established in many other cities throughout the 1970s.

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The organizational strength of SWP was disparaged by many, by our political opponents and by some of our international comrades as well. But we were quite proud. It showed that we took ourselves seriously, that even though we were small we had the vision to try and act like the party that we wanted to become. The older party leaders, Farrell Dobbs, Tom Kerry and Joe Hansen, clearly admired what we had built and backed us to the full. George Novack, the gentle spirit and philosopher, was also one of the party’s most effective fundraisers. Jack Barnes earned well-deserved credit for his part in turning the party around and building it strong during this whole period.

Yet there was a side to this organizational strength that I now regret, the fact that information about the finances and legal ownership of the party enterprises was kept close to the vest. Only a handful of people, literally a handful, knew the facts in detail. Most of us simply acquiesced in the secrecy. I, for one, did so. In the early 1970s, for example, I was officially responsible for Pathfinder Press for several years, yet I knew far less about its finances and ownership structure than one would expect.

I knew enough to realize that Pathfinder was clearly not a profit-making enterprise. Pathfinder later on set its book prices much higher than they used to be, causing some of the SWP’s critics to infer that Pathfinder must have been making a profit. I would be very surprised if that were the case. It is a political error, nevertheless, to keep the book prices high, no matter what the costs are. The print shop, however, was commercially viable.

The usual rationale for the secrecy, I suppose, was that we had to keep the government from finding ways to victimize us. On further reflection, however, this could not have been the real reason. We in the SWP leadership always assumed that the capitalist state kept close tabs on us and that the government police forces knew pretty much everything we did. Our very wise policy was to speak and act in a way that would never cause embarrassment or facilitate persecution. Indeed, the validity of this assumption came to light through the exposure of the government surveillance operations, as well as in our legal suit against the government in the 1970s.

I doubt that the secrecy originated with Jack Barnes. I don’t know for sure, but I think it began during the witch-hunt years of the 1950s, and was carried forth since then, certainly into a period in which it was no longer even seemingly necessary. In any event, whatever the origins or purpose of the secrecy about finances and ownership, it now seems to me that it sidestepped accountability before the party membership.

I don’t mean by taking up time with these organizational achievements to disparage or play down the importance of our political work. On the contrary, political activities were at the center of our attention, and the political activities were what enabled us to grow.

Turning back to 1961-1963, defense of the Cuban revolution was one of our most important activities. I remember how enthusiastic I was after reading Listen Yankee!, the pro-Cuba book by C. Wright Mills. So were most of my comrades. I also remember hearing Fidel Castro speak a couple of years earlier at an outdoors meeting in Boston. That was an experience!
We held all sorts of meetings and educational forums defending the Cuban revolution during those years, the most important events being the demonstrations and meetings around the time of the April 1961 invasion and the October 1962 missile crisis.

Support for Cuba was unpopular in those days, even among people who opposed US government policy towards Cuba. I still retain an image in my mind of the April 1961 demonstration in Chicago’s Loop, called by the old-line peace groups, which were led predominantly by liberals or social-democrats who were antipathetic towards the Cuban revolution. We were still too small in Chicago to play much of an organizing role. As we paraded in a circle there was peace leader Shirley Lens standing on the side of the march with a bullhorn, her foot clamped down on a stack of “Hands Off Cuba” signs that the peace leaders had confiscated from unwary demonstrators. But this was an exception, and as the YSA grew we were able to stamp a more militant cast onto the demonstrations and other activities in defense of Cuba.

(Shirley Lens’ husband was Sidney Lens, a local labor official who became a prominent leader in the anti-Vietnam-war movement. I got to know him in 1968, when I was living again in Chicago, and also later on in the national antiwar movement. He was an older man, and it turns out that he had once been a Trotskyist, and a leader of the 1930s group known as the “Oehlerites.”)

At Indiana University in Bloomington the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, led by the local YSA, was also very active in defense of Cuba. The Bloomington chapter of the YSA was started up by George and Ellen Shriver, whom I had known in Boston. They moved to Indiana for graduate school in the fall of 1960. The YSA chapter there grew pretty strong and included some talented people. The grapevine later had it that some of them thought that Ralph Levitt, the local YSA leader and one of the Bloomington defendants, might have been more qualified for national YSA office than the then-current leaders, and there was a bit of underground grumbling on this point over the years. Ralph eventually became a leader of one of the workerist oppositions in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Fair Play committee in Bloomington organized a demonstration during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. They were attacked by a large right wing mob. In the aftermath, the local authorities brought subversion indictments, carrying three-year prison sentences, against three YSA leaders there: Ralph Levitt, Jim Bingham and Tom Morgan.

We immediately launched a major defense campaign. We formed a nation-wide defense committee that eventually took the name, Committee to Aid the Bloomington Students. We generated a lot of publicity, ran national speaking tours, and got support from a broad range of people who supported civil liberties. Barry Sheppard, the YSA national chairman in New York, and Jack Barnes, then the Chicago SWP leader and living not too far away from Bloomington, took the lead. The fight lasted several years, until the witchhunt law was eventually found to be unconstitutional. We gained solid support for our efforts far beyond our own immediate political circles. We were honest and scrupulous in handling the donations and statements of the committee supporters. This was the first
really major defense campaign for our generation and was a model for many others to come. I believe that our principled approach to defense struggles of this sort won us wide respect on the left during that whole period. Both Barry and Jack handled themselves admirably in this fight and in the other civil liberties struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the most disturbing developments in later years related to the SWP’s handling of the Mark Curtis case. Curtis, a lower level SWP leader, was charged with sexual assault against a teenage girl in Iowa. He was beaten badly by the police and convicted in 1988, with burglary charges tacked on. Curtis maintained his innocence throughout his prison term, despite being offered earlier parole if he admitted guilt. The SWP, still enjoying a good reputation around civil liberties issues, was able to mount a vigorous defense. The Mark Curtis defense committee gained widespread support, including international support and labor endorsements, on the grounds that Curtis had been victimized for his political views. Curtis was released from prison in 1996 and moved to Chicago. But in late 1997, Curtis pleaded guilty to a new charge of soliciting a prostitute and was expelled from the SWP for lying about it. This, of course, had no bearing on the earlier frame-up charge against Curtis. But given the wide support and publicity around the original case, the later developments should have obligated the SWP to at least report the new developments honestly and openly. Instead the party swept the issue under the rug, even passing motions requiring party members to keep silent about the matter. Not a word appeared in *The Militant*.

The most important and effective civil liberties fight that we waged occurred when we took the initiative in the 1970s and sued the government for its entire panoply of spying operations against us through the years. The government spying operation generally went under the rubric, COINTELPRO (acronym for Counter Intelligence Program) and was directed not only against us, but against every organization on the left. It was an unprecedented idea to sue the government, and our campaign won really wide respect and support. Eventually, after many years and to the surprise of many observers, the SWP won the case. The government had to pay some money to the SWP and was enjoined from doing some of its dirty tricks. Of course government spying and dirty tricks continue, but this case made it more difficult for them to do so and made it easier for the victims to fight back. The case raised the curtain on many dirty deeds that the government had previously been able to keep hidden. It was not until after the events of September 11, 2001 that the government was able to take major steps to turn the clock back.

Several of the party leaders gave extensive testimony at the trial. Many more of us had to testify at pre-trial depositions, under subpoena from the government. My own deposition lasted a full day. I had always supposed that they kept close watch on us, but it was still a shock to find out just how much information they had. They asked me all sorts of obscure questions about people and events that I had completely forgotten about. They could only have learned some of the information through clandestine surveillance and wiretaps.

We launched our lawsuit in the mid 1970s, in the political context of the Watergate scandal that led to Richard Nixon’s resignation. We had been talking for months of the
desirability of launching some sort of action to intervene in the hot Watergate political process, but no one could come up with a good proposal for what we should do. It was certainly not obvious that we should launch a lawsuit. Up until then all our civil liberties activities had been defensive, responses to government attacks like the one in Bloomington. This time, however, we would be taking the initiative. So, I vividly remember the leadership discussions we had, informal discussions at first, followed by a regular Political Committee (PC) meeting, at which the idea for the lawsuit was taken up. I always thought it was a brilliant, creative political move.

For most of the time Larry Seigle was our main leader in that campaign. Jack Barnes also played an important role at the beginning. On balance, the political fight around the lawsuit was conducted well. There were, however, some sectarian streaks that arose from time to time, including dismissal of Leonard Boudin, one of the country’s first-rank civil liberties lawyers. I, for one, was disturbed when Jack Barnes and other SWP leaders had to give testimony about some of the party’s unorthodox financial and organizational procedures. Jack testified with a straight face, but it was embarrassing to read some of the rationalizations he gave. The case went on into the 1980s, well after I had left the SWP, so I do not have any first-hand experience with its later evolution.

Our most important activity by far in the 1960s radicalization was our participation in the anti-Vietnam-war movement. The antiwar movement in the years, 1965-1973, dominated our political life, shaped our party, taught us how to operate in a mass movement, and enabled us to grow and become influential on the left. Most important, our tiny group was able, in at least some respects, to contribute to the victory of the Vietnamese revolution and to shape and influence the course of politics in the United States for years to come. We were a key part of the leadership of some of the largest demonstrations in American history. It was our shining glory.

We made some mistakes, of course. We were often rigid and sectarian towards others in the antiwar coalitions. We didn’t always take advantage of all the opportunities that presented themselves. On balance, however, I thought we did pretty well, certainly much better than any other group on the American left during that period. We numbered only a few hundred members when the antiwar movement began, and just over 1,000 at the time of the largest demonstrations. Those numbers should certainly underline how remarkable it was for a group of our size to play such a big part in these events.

We were able to achieve these results, not because of our energy or special organizational skills (which we did possess), not because of packing meetings or dirty tricks as our opponents charged, but because we were the most consistent advocates within the antiwar movement of mass action policies that corresponded to the approach favored by most people who participated in the demonstrations. Our political opponents, particularly the pacifists and confrontationists, berated us for being unrepresentative but they were never able to organize a single truly large demonstration based around their viewpoint for the movement – not because they were unskilled, but because their policies and proposals did not represent what most people wanted to do.
There is no need to tell the story here. Fred Halstead’s book, *Out Now!*, does that in exemplary fashion. Tall and heavy set, “Big Red Fred,” as he was known affectionately by us and by many other activists, was our most prominent figure in the antiwar movement. He was involved in almost every activity that mattered, he knew everyone who was important, and he was respected far beyond our own circles. His book tells the whole story, albeit from the vantage point of an SWP partisan.

Fred was a middle generation party leader, fifteen or twenty years older than most of us. He had been a young sailor at the end of World War II but the cold war reaction set in before Fred and the others of that generation could really gain much mass movement experience. So, Fred’s work in the antiwar movement was really his political blossoming. Other SWP leaders from Fred’s generation also played important parts in the antiwar movement, mostly on a local level. Harry Ring, whom I have written about elsewhere, was for a time part of our national antiwar leadership.

Fred’s book is a history of the movement, so he must have felt that it wasn’t really appropriate to discuss how the antiwar movement had shaped and transformed the SWP. I sometimes wish he had written on that subject too, because immersion in the antiwar movement was truly a sea change for us.

The war in Vietnam was the center of world politics for eight years, from 1965-1973, and the movement against the war was the center of all our activity during that time. We lived and breathed the movement. We were respected activists, and many of us became quite skilled as movement leaders.

I am very proud to have been an active participant in those events. I was present at all the important national demonstrations, almost all the national antiwar conferences, and many of the smaller national antiwar leadership meetings as well. I was one of the founders of the national Student Mobilization Committee and helped lead the party’s work in the antiwar movement for several years, particularly in the important years 1969-1970, when I was the SWP’s national antiwar director. So, I got to see and affect a lot of our work first hand. I also gave most of the reports on various issues related to Vietnam at the party’s national conventions from 1969-1979. But I was only one of an entire group of SWP leaders who played a big part in these activities.

Fred Halstead was the main leader of our antiwar work. Jack Barnes was also central to our involvement, especially at the beginning, although his role is less well known. In fact, the two of them had complementary responsibilities.

Fred Halstead had a natural talent for the mass movement. He was as much a movement person as he was a party person. He was usually on the staff of one of the antiwar committees and got along well with almost all the other people from other groups. He was very sensitive to others and had a good sense of timing for making compromises (too good a sense, some of us thought, on occasion).
Jack Barnes functioned as leader of the party as a whole in the antiwar movement. He played the main part in working out party policy on the big issues and he coordinated, inspired and mobilized participation by the party members in all the antiwar activities. He also knew how to handle coalition work, but he had a better feeling than Fred for when to stand tough and for how to lead the party members. In the early years, I think, the young party leaders in the antiwar movement looked a little more to Jack than to Fred for guidance on what we should do, while they turned to Fred for guidance on how to do it.

In the early years Jack participated in the important conferences and national leadership meetings of the antiwar movement, and his participation was critical in the coalition agreements we reached. I saw him in action many times and really admired how well he handled himself in dealing with the leaders of other groups and tendencies, how he combined toughness with diplomacy and compromise. He was a natural politician.

Many of the rest of us were at first somewhat callow and insecure about coalition work. Our reservations led to a bit of stiltedness towards others, often mistakenly taken by them as sectarianism. We knew how to call and organize demonstrations, of course. But we really had very little experience working in coalitions where compromises of all types had to be made among the disparate participants, where the agreements were often a bit vague and one had to have a sense of what would likely happen, rather than what was actually said.

I remember an awkward moment of my own that illustrates this point. It occurred at one of the 1966 Cleveland conferences that led to the first really representative national antiwar coalitions. I was then only twenty-four years old. After much argument we had finally hammered out a compromise. But like most compromises it was somewhat murky, not at all clear-cut. I don’t remember the issue anymore, but I know that I felt uneasy, raised my hand in the plenary session, and said something along these lines: “We have to be clear about this agreement, it really means such and such, and we should spell it out precisely.”

A.J. Muste, the highly respected 80-year-old pacifist, was chairing the session. A.J. had been a mass leader, with experience in the 1930s labor movement, including a short stint as a Trotskyist. He looked down at me and said, in avuncular fashion, words to this effect: “You know, there are some artists who will paint a picture of a horse, put a nice frame on it, and then hang it on the wall for all to admire. Then there are others who will paint the very same picture and hang it on the wall, but underneath it they feel compelled to write: ‘This is a horse.’”

Fred Halstead tells another story, again with me as a bit of the goat, of how coalition agreements can be murky and how you must have a feel for the likely dynamic rather than the precise wording of the agreements. The story relates to the founding of the New Mobilization Committee, which organized the huge November 15, 1969 demonstrations. See the relevant chapter in Fred’s book, Out Now!
Like many others, I learned the ropes over time. But people like Fred a natural feel for the movement. So did Peter Camejo and a few others of our leadership generation. I felt that the people who joined us in the later 1960s and early 1970s were, on average, much better at it than the earlier 1960s generation.

Jack was national antiwar director for the SWP from 1965-1967, when all the major SWP policy decisions were worked out. He attended all the important antiwar conferences and many antiwar leadership meetings during that time. But then he stopped. He still participated in the SWP leadership shaping antiwar policy and tactics. But I don’t remember him attending a single important national antiwar meeting after 1967. He may have even missed some of the demonstrations. I thought that was a mistake on his part. It kept him from obtaining a first-hand sense of what was going on.

After Jack, the post of national antiwar director, while still very important, was not groundbreaking. Those holding this position were Lew Jones (1967-68), Gus Horowitz (1969-70), Larry Seigle (1970-71) and Wendy Lyons (1972-73).

Ed Shaw, who was at one time the National Organization Secretary for the SWP in the 1960s, was the other prominent party member from the middle generation, along with Fred Halstead. Ed was a very likeable, down-to-earth working class guy, much sharper than some people thought. Anyone who doubts that should read his testimony when he was called up by the red-baiting House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC). He flagrantly held them in contempt, without giving them any grounds to hold him in contempt. I got to know Ed much better later on, when we were both posted to international work.

Some critics have berated the party leadership for allegedly stifling the so-called “Weiss group” in the early 1960s. It should be noted, though, that Fred Halstead had originally come out of Los Angeles where he had been associated with the Weiss group there. He remained close friends with Murry Weiss when then two of them were in New York later on. Fred never renounced his past associations and was certainly not stifled in the SWP.

In 1968 we launched the first of our modern national election campaigns, running Fred Halstead for President and Paul Boutelle, a young Black leader in the party, as his running mate. I remember our earlier campaigns in 1960 and 1964; they seemed so routinist in comparison. Now, however, we were able to run a very vigorous and attractive campaign, featuring a prominent movement leader, and gaining all sorts of opportunities to get our message across. This model was followed all through the later 1960s and 1970s on a local and national level, culminating in the very popular presidential campaign by Peter Camejo in 1976 – the best socialist campaign since Eugene V. Debs, many people have observed. Jack Barnes was the initiator of the new style approach to SWP campaigning and should be given credit for those efforts.

The precursor of our new style election campaigns was the New York gubernatorial campaign of Judy White in 1966, when Jack Barnes was organizer of the New York City
branch. Judy was not old enough to serve in the office, but we ran her anyway as representative of the new generation of radicals. Such flouting of convention caused quite a stir, gained us good notoriety, and caused the New York State authorities to pass the "anti-Judy White law" to prevent ineligible candidates from running. But we brushed that aside. Many of our other campaigns later on also ran youthful, though ineligible, candidates.

Judy and I were a married couple at the time. She died in January, 2001. Although we had separated over thirty years before, and hadn’t been in touch for twenty years, her passing still affected me deeply.

Another important tradition we started in those days was the big national gathering, usually held for nearly an entire week in the summer at the Oberlin College campus in Ohio. The first of these began in 1970. We alternated, one year holding a party convention, the other year an educational conference. The party membership mobilized to attend, and there were usually many international guests. These gatherings, which reached a peak attendance of about 1,500 people, exhibited spirit and solidarity, brought us together personally and were a source of great educational value and political cohesiveness. They served as major fund raising affairs, as well. I was a plenary speaker/reporter at several of these gatherings. It was quite a thrill to speak before such a big crowd.

One thing we were never strong enough to contemplate, however, was the European-style fair, like the great fête rouge of 1976, organized by our French comrades, which I was lucky enough to attend. The fête (festival), attended by 10,000 or more over several days, was a potpourri of political discussions, rallies, food and fun in a county fair type of venue just outside Paris. There were discussion booths, music and other entertainment, games, raffles, and all sorts of food, including – only in France! – a tanker truck from the south, filled with wine! The fête tradition originated in the big labor movements over there. I don’t think that any group in the United States ever held anything like it on a national level, probably because our geography is just too vast.

Our greatest focus during those years was towards young people – students and the young generation still greatly affected by their experiences on the campuses. As a socialist workers party, we never lost sight of our ultimate goal of recruiting from and organizing the working class. But the road to that goal lay in immersing ourselves in those movements that at the current moment were raising the vital challenges to capitalist society. These challenges were, after all, part of the class struggle even if they were not necessarily focused on economic issues.

So, we were attuned to and looked for opportunities to participate in all the different movements that arose and developed during this time. In addition to the Black struggle, which had of course developed much earlier, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the growth of a strong women’s’ movement and various Latino movements, as well as environmental struggles and the emergence of a gay liberation movement. Some people have criticized us for a tardy response to some of these developments, but on the whole I
think we responded pretty well to most of the new struggles and brought to bear the lessons we had learned in the antiwar and student movements. Many SWPers became leaders and prominent activists in these movements, mostly on a local level.

We were also involved in labor activity during that period. We sold our papers with significant success at plant gates, and there were in fact, strikes and other labor struggles of various kinds in which our members participated. We also recruited workers to our organization and some of our people became respected rank-and-file leaders in their local unions, particularly among public sector workers like teachers. But for the most part, we attracted workers to our cause in the same way we attracted students. It is absurd to think that working people of that time were unaffected by the political turmoil around them. There were large working class contingents at most of the antiwar and other demonstrations. It is just that the specific focus of most activities was not around labor issues per se.

Our participation in the 1960s and 1970s movements helped change the SWP as well. An entire layer of women, Black and Latino leaders developed in our party. Mary-Alice Waters, who was already a party leader from the 1960s generation, developed her potential much more fully as a result of the rise of the women’s movement, as did many other women comrades. Malik Miah, of the 1970s generation, was just one of several very talented Black leaders who were attracted to our party and who, in turn, helped attract other militant young Blacks. José Perez, also of the 1970s generation, was one of several capable, talented Latino leaders.

Many of the 1960s struggles posed new issues for Marxist theory. They didn’t fit the traditional mode of class struggle that we had learned about when we first joined the movement years earlier. So, throughout the 1960s we gave a lot of thought to these new issues, and by 1970 we had pretty much reached a consensus on how to incorporate our new experiences into the corpus of Marxist doctrine that we had been taught all along.

The summer of 1970, at the first of our Oberlin, Ohio national gatherings, was the occasion for our first comprehensive analysis of all the main issues posed by the new radicalization. We collected the main speeches from that gathering into a book, Towards and American Socialist Revolution: A Strategy for the 1970s. I edited the book and wrote an introductory essay pulling the various themes together. In it I said:

“The mass movement against the Indochina war, an unprecedented development during a shooting war, is an illustration of this trend. There is questioning and rejection of the myriad social institutions and forms of ideological backwardness and prejudice serving to prop up and outmoded order. This is a feature, to one degree or another, of the women’s liberation movement, the movements of oppressed nationalities, the student movement, the revolution in culture and many other aspects of the current radicalization…These struggles are part of, forms of, or potentially allied to the general class struggle of the working masses against the capitalist system. The ability to see this feature of the current radicalization, to see it within the framework of basic Marxist concepts, and to orient to it on that basis demonstrates the richness and viability of the Marxist method…”
“Social reality is complex and uneven. In the United States as elsewhere, there is no such thing as a theoretically ‘pure’ form of capitalism, and thus no ‘pure’ form of class struggle. Under capitalism, side by side with the exploitation of the working class, there also exist new forms of long-known oppression, the reactionary institutional and ideological remnants of a precapitalist era: the oppression of women and nationalities, religious superstition, the persecution of homosexuals, reactionary social morality, restrictions on civil liberties and human rights are but a few examples. These have become instruments for upholding the present system and cannot be eliminated within its framework. As a result, the coming American revolution will have to accomplish an entire range of historically overdue democratic tasks, as well as socialist tasks, such as nationalization of industry under working-class control.

“With this is mind, we see that movements such as the women’s liberation movement, the struggles of oppressed nationalities for self-determination, the gay liberation movement, and the revolution in culture are a part of the general struggle against the outmoded capitalist system…

“Thus these new movements are not unimportant or peripheral to the socialist revolution, but at the center of its advance.”

In retrospect, the *Prospects* book was marred by an over-optimistic triumphalism towards the real prospects for revolution in the United States. But over-optimism is not the worst sin that can develop in a revolutionary organization. Later in the 1970s the SWP also wrote better appreciations of the dynamics of working class struggles. But I still believe that the essays in this book best captured the spirit of the time as well as a deep appreciation of the new aspects of class struggle that had come to the fore in the 1960s radicalization.

In later years the SWP made an effort to keep in print some of the party resolutions from previous years. But it allowed this book to fade away. Despite a major effort to put other books into digital form for easy reprinting, there has been no effort to reprint this one. The reason, no doubt, is that the ideas presented in this book do not correspond to the “workerist” bent that the party adopted later on. The SWP of today has forgotten or has simply chosen to ignore an important part of its own history.

So, it seems, the new generation of revolutionary fighters will have to re-conquer these Marxist analyses on its own. I hope that they will look at the documents of the past with an objective eye, no matter what they may think of the SWP of today.

In the summer of 1970, after seeing through the antiwar conference that formed the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) my work in the SWP shifted course dramatically, towards writing and international work. First, I was assigned to direct our publishing and educational departments.

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Working with Pathfinder Press put me in touch on a regular basis with the “four Georges” – George Breitman, George Weissman, George Novack and George Shriver (pen name Saunders). The first three were old-timers, while George Shriver was from my generation. (I knew him as a student in Boston, way back in 1960 when I first joined the party.)

George Breitman and George Weissman attended editorial committee meetings regularly and their witty and intelligent repartee was always a high point of our discussions. They argued, for sure, but both were soft-hearted and sensitive types. Some people who didn’t know him well may have found George Breitman’s personality to be a bit acerbic. I think the main cause was extreme arthritic pain. George suffered constantly and often had to lie down for relief – on a cot or even on the hard floor. I liked George immensely and several times invited him and Dorothy for dinner – which I would cook at their apartment, because George couldn’t travel well. The other three Georges had all been schooled at Harvard, but George Breitman, who had no college education at all, was the most productive.

A little earlier in the 1960s George Breitman had been a pioneer in understanding the importance of Black nationalism and in particular, the role of Malcolm X. Back then Malcolm was by no means a popular figure even in the Black movement, and certainly not on the left. George understood early on that the nationalist aspects of the black struggle were vitally important for the class struggle, and led the effort within the party to turn our attention to that movement and to look favorably upon it. As a result the SWP stood out among groups on the left in the early 1960s in defending Malcolm against his detractors and in popularizing Malcolm’s ideas. George also led Pathfinder’s campaign to publish books and pamphlets by and about Malcolm X.

Later in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s George turned his attention to the works of Leon Trotsky and led our major publishing effort to get the works of that great revolutionary leader into easily accessible format.

Pathfinder in those years developed into a serious publishing house. We all had the hope of making Pathfinder more than just an SWP shop, but rather one that could attract a broad left audience. Enhancing our reputation along those lines might, in turn, help attract people to the material that promoted our specific point of view. As a result, we published works on jazz and black nationalism, surrealist art, the mideast and other topics by leftist authors who had no connection whatever with the SWP. I think that this approach helped Pathfinder significantly and won us respect throughout the left in the United States and in other countries as well.

Like all publishers, we copyrighted our books. But our main goal was to get the word out. Whenever any other publisher asked for permission to reprint excerpts, even entire essays that we had published – and this happened many times - we always said yes. We had no thought whatsoever of preventing others from printing material that spread our views. Today, however, Pathfinder Press has acted in opposite fashion, even threatening legal
action against any Internet site that would reprint works by SWP authors, even though Internet publication would reach a vastly larger audience than Pathfinder ever could – and would probably even help Pathfinder sales of the hard copy editions. The later Pathfinder approach defies all logic, in my opinion.

Pathfinder publications were of course the backbone of Marxist education for our members. But we also had a separate education department that published material of more specialized interest – primarily collections from past and contemporary internal party discussions. We put these out in a simpler, staple-bound or pamphlet style format. I headed the education department for a while, with the help of Fred Feldman. Fred subsequently took on the whole responsibility and did a yeoman’s job at it. We normally included both sides of the internal debate when we published material on controversial topics.