

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, Number 20, February 5, 1971

Present: Barnes, Boehm, Breitman, Britton, DeBerry, Dobbs, A. Hansen, J. Hansen, Horowitz, F. Lovell, Novack, Ring, Sheppard, Stone, Waters

Visitor: Kerry

Chairman: Novack

AGENDA: 1. World Movement
 2. Administrative Committee Report
 3. Plenum
 4. Convention

1. WORLD MOVEMENT

J. Hansen reported.

Discussion.

Motion: The Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party voices the following opinion in relation to the facts made available in the correspondence between Comrade Pat Jordan, the national secretary of the IMG; Comrade Jack Barnes, the organization secretary of the SWP; a copy of the November 28, 1970, statement by Comrade Alan Harris to the Political Committee and National Committee of the IMG; and the memorandum by Comrade Joseph Hansen:

1. The majority of the National Committee of the IMG abused its authority in censuring Comrade Alan Harris. a) It failed to notify Comrade Harris in advance that he was to be placed on trial. b) It failed to grant him a hearing when his case came up for consideration. c) It notified the IMG of its disciplinary action against Comrade Harris in a way calculated to prejudice the membership against him.

2. The majority of the National Committee of the IMG further abused its authority by singling out Comrade Harris for disciplinary action in a field in which it does not at present subject the membership as a whole to disciplinary action; that is, the way in which they make their livelihood.

3. The majority of the National Committee of the IMG further abused the objective norms of democratic centralism by taking these organizational reprisals against a leader of a minority that has expressed political criticisms of the majority and argued for a different line from the one followed by the majority.

4. After the promising beginning earlier in the year, which appeared to represent a decided break with the antidemocratic methods that have plagued the British Trotskyist movement in the past, the majority of the National Committee of the IMG, by resorting to organizational reprisals against a leading member of the minority, has raised a serious question as to the possibility of conducting a genuinely free discussion in the IMG.

Carried.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

Sheppard reported.

1. Youth Representative

The youth NEC has elected Frank Boehm the youth representative to the Political Committee. He is a regular member with voice and vote.

2. Correspondence

3. PLENUM

Barnes reported.

Motion from the Administrative Committee: To recommend the following motion to the plenum: To invite as observers: Control Commission members; co-thinkers; heads of national departments (press, literature, finances); members of the youth NEC; branch organizers.

Carried.

Motion from the Administrative Committee: To recommend the following agenda to the plenum:

1. World Movement
2. Israel and the Arab Revolution
3. Political Report
4. Women's Liberation Report
5. Chicano Movement Report
6. Organization Report
7. Antiwar Report
8. Youth Report
9. Convention Call

Carried.

Motion: from the Administrative Committee: To assign the following reporters for the plenum:

1. World Movement - J. Hansen
2. Israel and the Arab Revolution - Horowitz
3. Political Report - Barnes
4. Women's Liberation Report - Stone
5. Chicano Movement Report - Britton
6. Organization Report - Sheppard
7. Antiwar Report - Siegle
8. Youth Report - (youth to assign reporter)

Carried.

4. CONVENTION

Britton reported. It is possible to obtain excellent facilities for convention August 8-12 in Ohio followed by a three day educational conference. A five-day convention will allow us to hold the delegated convention sessions in the mornings and afternoons and activist panels, workshops and fraction meetings in the evenings.

Scheduling the convention soon will allow comrades to put in for vacation time to insure maximum attendance of delegates and guests. Holding the convention the second week in August will minimize conflict with the traditional antiwar activities held around Hiroshima Day, August 6. There will be almost five months following the plenum to prepare for and carry out the pre-convention discussion.

The educational conference would consist of lectures by leading party educators.

Motion: To poll the National Committee on the Administrative Committee recommendation to schedule the party convention August 8-12 in Ohio.

Carried.

Meeting Adjourned.

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Copy of letter sent earlier by registered post to ICP address

The Political Bureau
Socialist Workers Party,
NY

Dear Comrades:

The following resolution was passed at the last meeting of the National Committee of the IMG (held over the weekend of 25/26 July 1970)

"The National Committee censures Comrade Alan Harris for his unilateral action re Leader Books and requests the United Secretariat to investigate the matter immediately because it will otherwise result in a serious deterioration of relations between two sections of the International. The NC empowers the Secretariat (IMG Secretariat) to carry out an amalgamation of Leader Books and Red Books under the control of the IMG."

N.B. Bearing in mind the legal position of the SWP it should be pointed out that this resolution in no way implies that the SWP is affiliated to the Fourth International.

We must explain that this resolution was passed after the committee had received a report of the informal discussions on Leader Books between Joe Hansen and comrades Ali and Jordan.

We cannot accept that there is any problem in "explaining to Pathfinder Books" that Red Books would be taking over distribution of its publications from Alan Harris. This being the case we are confronted with a position where the SWP refuses to supply publications to the official bookshop of the British Section, but instead insists on supplying them direct to a member of the minority tendency of the IMG.

We would ask you to consider a hypothetical case:

Suppose that the IMG, as publishers of a large number of books by Trotsky, etc., refused to supply them to the SWP but insisted that these be distributed in the United States via a minority tendency (which for instance might take the position that the YSA should advance the slogan "Victory to the NLF" on mass demonstrations).

We think that in a case like this that you could be understood if you thought that the IMG was trying to support a minority -- politically and with resources -- of the SWP. We think that you could be understood if you considered this to be a gross violation of the democratic centralist norms and an attempt to get round the democratic procedures and processes of the SWP.

We do not accept the argument that a book distribution centre (we do not want to get into semantic arguments about bookshops and import/export agencies) is not a political centre. Selling books, having an address list and a manned office amounts to having a political centre. This has always been recognised as such by the movement. This is why the IMG national committee resolved -- just prior to its National Conference -- that its bookshop would be completely under democratic centralist norms (it should be added that this position was approved by the conference).

We ask you to fully co-operate with us in implementing the above resolution. We want to avoid confusing political issues with an organisational wrangle and would ask you to help us to remove this organisational difficulty. We would point out that such affairs as the creation of Leader Books is in complete violation of the decision of the National Committee of the IMG makes more difficult an objective political discussion. We hope that no one thinks that the minority tendency of the IMG will be strengthened by such actions. Quite the reverse: this tendency will become even more isolated the more it appears to be trying to circumvent the democratic norms of the IMG.

We should point out that this tendency is widely considered to be in solidarity with the SWP's criticisms of the majority position in the International. We would recall to your attention that this tendency first manifested itself when its leader, comrade Susan Williams, appealed to the British delegation at the last world congress to be seated for the discussion on China in order to cast her vote against the majority. Furthermore it is well known that: a) about half the members of the tendency are ex-members of a section which supports the minority position in the International; b) that leading comrades sent from North America to participate in the work of the International played the leading part in founding the tendency; and c) that Alan Harris is a member of the United Secretariat designated by the previously mentioned section. Taking into account all these circumstances we think it would be in the best interests of a clear political discussion to avoid any action which could be construed as using organisational means to support a political minority.

We should add that we are going to pursue this matter in the United Secretariat because relationships between Trotskyists in different countries is involved.

We would ask for the earliest possible reply to the questions we have raised in this letter. We are going ahead with plans for the amalgamation of Red Books and Leader Books under the political control of the IMG. An early reply from you could help clarify things but we will be obliged to operate our democratically decided decisions as soon as possible. We cannot procrastinate because of the serious state of affairs (our political opponents are well aware that Leader Books operates independently from our organisation).

We intend to pursue this matter in an extremely serious manner: The British Trotskyist movement has suffered in the past from lack of understanding of the meaning of democratic centralism as applied to the task of building a mass section of an international revolutionary party. We would be failing in our duty of helping to construct a mass section of the FI in Britain if we did not take immediate and decisive steps to nip this situation in the bud.

We ask you to give us an undertaking that you will supply our bookshop with your publications without insisting that we purchase them from a concern which has been set up in violation of our democratically decided decision.

Revolutionary greetings,
s/ Pat Jordan

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873 Broadway
2nd floor south
New York, N.Y. 10003

September 14, 1970

Dear Comrade Jordan,

I just received the copy of your letter addressed to "The Political Bureau Socialist Workers Party." We had learned of the existence of this letter but were in the dark as to its content. We note that the copy you sent us is undated.

In accordance with your request, I will place the motion passed by the National Committee of the International Marxist Group, along with your comments, on the agenda for consideration by the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party.

To help the Political Committee properly weigh the questions you have raised, I would appreciate clarification from you on the following two points:

1. You maintain that the private wholesale export-import book agency set up by Alan Harris constitutes a "political centre," that this center was opened up by a minority tendency in your group, and that this was in "gross violation" of the norms of democratic centralism. You imply, moreover, that the Socialist Workers Party played a key role in inspiring the formation of this minority tendency in the IMG "politically and with resources," and that the establishment of Leader Books by Alan Harris is in reality an attempt by the SWP "to get round the democratic procedures and processes" of the IMG.

In face of such allegations, am I correct in drawing the conclusion that in your opinion the Socialist Workers Party has departed from the traditions of Trotskyism; that it has, so to speak, "degenerated" and can no longer be regarded as a fraternal organization so far as the majority leadership of the IMG is concerned?

2. You state that Red Books has been named as "the official bookshop of the British Section," that "the creation of Leader Books is in complete violation of the decision of the National Committee of the IMG," that "selling books, having an address list and manned office amounts to having a political centre," and that your National Committee has empowered the IMG Secretariat "to carry out an amalgamation of Leader Books and Red Books under the control of the IMG," with which you ask us to "fully co-operate." Does this mean that you have placed

a ban on any of your members, except those that meet with the political approval of the majority of your National Committee, from making their livelihood by selling books and other literature, particularly the books and literature generally regarded as "Trotskyist"?

An early reply from you on these points, so that they can be considered by the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party in conjunction with the organizational complaint registered in your letter, will be greatly appreciated.

Fraternally,
s/ Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary
Socialist Workers Party

cc: United Secretariat

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September 26th, 1970

Jack Barnes,
Organisational Secretary,
Socialist Workers Party,
873 Broadway,
NY 10003.

Dear comrade Barnes,

The Political Committee of the IMG decided yesterday (25/9/70) to refer the question of your letter to me, dated 14th inst., to the next National Committee which will meet over the week end of October 17/18. We are to mimeograph copies of it so that members of the NC can study it beforehand.

In the meantime you could perhaps furnish me with a piece of information: Barry Sheppard told me yesterday that the Pathfinder had made a big loan to Alan Harris in the form of books (this was the first I had heard of this); could you please tell me how much this was for?

Comrade Barry also referred to a debt we have incurred for international bulletins. Could you please arrange for us to receive an account? It would be useful to separate the 1969 ones from the 1970 ones; and also to list postage (in both cases separately).

Some time ago we wrote to MILITANT suggesting an exchange ad with RED MOLE -- apart from a brief word from Joe we have had no response. Would it be possible to look into this? We would also like to arrange exchange ads between ISR and INTERNATIONAL. You could perhaps arrange to let me know the procedure for arranging this. We are convinced that many readers of ISR would be interested in reading our magazine.

Comrade Barry also made reference to the question of votes of censure being covered in your constitution (if I understood him correctly). Could you please arrange for a copy of your constitution to be sent to me, at the above address, please?

Revolutionary greetings,
Fraternally,
s/ Pat Jordan
(National Secretary IMG)

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873 Broadway
2nd floor South
New York, N.Y. 10003
October 6, 1970

LONDON

Pat Jordan

Dear Pat,

This will acknowledge your letter of Spetember 26.

* * *

Pathfinder Press has continued to maintain the same commercial relations with Alan Harris that were initiated when he first opened a bookshop in London. During the period Alan was in Canada, Ernest Tate handled the bookshop, still on a private business, and then turned it back over to Alan upon his return. Throughout these years, Pathfinder found Alan Harris completely reliable in business transactions. It welcomed his decision to open an import-export wholesale service, since this coincided with its own plans for expansion. Consequently it has acknowledged his orders on the basis of the credit rating he established over the years. Outside this framework there have been no unusual financial transactions.

* * *

Judy White, our National Financial Director, is sending you the information you desire concerning IMG's debt for International Information Fulletins.

* * *

I spoke to Joe about his discussion with you on the exchange of advertisements between The Red Mole and The Militant. He said you had not yet responded to suggestions he made to you on this. If you would drop him or me a note indicating your agreement with his proposals, we could proceed.

* * *

Write directly to the ISR on exchanging ads with International. I am sure they will be happy to cooperate.

* * *

Separately I am airmailing several copies of the SWP constitution in which you can check the points you are interested in. Also I am sending you the statutes of the Fourth International in case you do not have them readily available.

Comradely yours,
s/ Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

cc: Ernest

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10/12/70

Jack Barnes,
Socialist Workers Party,
873 Broadway,
New York,
NY 10003

Dear comrade Jack,

In reply to your letter concerning Leader Books, I have been instructed by the National Committee of IMG to reply along the following lines:

(1) If we considered that it was necessary to raise the question of the "degeneration" of the Socialist Workers Party we would do so in another manner: through the appropriate international committees.

(2) At its last meeting (October 17/18, 1970) the NC of the IMG passed the following:

"(1) that this NC reaffirms the previous decisions of the NC to have any bookshop and/or distribution service under the political control of the IMG.

"(2) that we would guarantee Adair a job in a unified company" (i.e., in a merger between Red Books and Leader Books)

"(3) that we would take over the financial responsibilities of Leader Books to ensure that any money invested by Adair in Leader Books should be refunded over a viable period.

"(4) that the NC set up a commission of 3 consisting of George, Adair and Peterson to report to the next PC in a form that will allow it to take a definite decision on the form of the fusion. Comrade Adair and George to make available the account books of Leader Books and Red Books for inspection of the commission" "(each section passed -- 17 votes for, 1 against)"

(3) In light of this decision we ask the comrades of the SWP to collaborate with us in implementing the decisions.

Revolutionary greetings,
s/ Pat Jordan
(for IMG)

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Statement to the National Committee of the International Marxist Group presented to the Political Committee on November 28 by Alan Harris

Dear comrades,

This statement is to re-affirm the nature of Leader Books and to motivate my position as outlined to the commission set up by the NC to carry out the amalgamation of Leader Books and Red Books. The commission met on November 2nd/70.

In a report to the NC on 27/3/70 I offered to work full time for the IMG in order to promote out literature. Following the rejection of this offer I initiated Leader Books which involves me in a number of legal and financial responsibilities.

Leader Books is a import-export wholesale book service dealing almost exclusively with Pathfinder Press publications. In my opinion it is a big asset to the IMG and the FI to have such an operation located in Britain. It means that Red Books and other bookshops can obtain Pathfinder publications quickly and efficiently. As you know these publications can also be obtained direct from New York by anyone not wishing to take advantage of the services that Leader Books provides.

I reject completely the concept that the circulation of Pathfinder literature is in anyway harmful to the IMG and the FI. If you think otherwise then you should take the matter before the appropriate body of the FI.

I earn my living through Leader Books. I consider this to be a legitimate, valuable and honourable way of securing a livelihood. In no way does my means of livelihood violate proletarian democracy, socialist morality or harm the work of the FI and its sections. The NC of the IMG by instructing me to carry out a merger with Red Books (Oct 17/18 mtg) exceeds its authority and responsibilities. I reject the concept of merger as instructed by the NC as it means the liquidation of Leader Books and denies me the right to earn a living in the way I have decided. I therefore reject the political and moral authority of the NC in instructing me to carry out an amalgamation of Leader Books with Red Books.

The motion of censure passed against me by the NC (July 25/26) is a violation of democratic centralism and is contrary to the constitution of the FI. I was not invited to attend the relevant part of the NC meeting in order to explain why such a motion should not be passed. I was not even informed that such a motion was to be considered by the NC. No charges have been levelled against me. The manner in which I was informed of the decision and the way in which the leadership presented the motion to the entire membership of the IMG makes the matter even more shocking.

I formally learned that the NC had passed such a motion on August 12th when the Letter to Members was distributed to the London

branch meeting. Leader Books and the motion of censure was placed on the agenda of the London branch on two occasions by leading members of the IMG for a "discussion" (see my statement of protest August 26/70)

The motion of censure passed in my absence, without me receiving written charges, without my knowledge and distributed to the entire membership of the IMG has created a situation where I have been pilloried before the whole membership thus making it almost impossible for me to get a truly democratic hearing throughout the organization.

I made a formal appeal to the last meeting of the NC (24/25 Oct) requesting that the motion of censure be withdrawn. This was rejected.

I therefore give notice that at the next national conference of the IMG I will appeal the motion of censure and request the conference to call to order the NC for usurping its authority through interfering with my democratic right to earn a living by distributing Pathfinder publications.

with comradely greetings,

Alan Harris

MEMORANDUM ON CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO LONDON BOOK SERVICE

By Joseph Hansen

January 20, 1971

An undated letter from Comrade Pat Jordan, the national secretary of the International Marxist Group, which was received by Comrade Jack Barnes, the organization secretary of the Socialist Workers Party, on September 7, 1970, stated that the National Committee of the IMG had passed the following motion at a meeting held over the weekend of July 25-26, 1970:

"The National Committee censures Comrade Alan Harris for his unilateral action re Leader Books and requests the United Secretariat to investigate the matter immediately because it will otherwise result in a serious deterioration of relations between two sections of the International. The NC empowers the Secretariat (IMG Secretariat) to carry out an amalgamation of Leader Books and Red Books under the control of the IMG."

Several issues in my opinion, are involved in this motion:

1. A disciplinary action; i.e., censure of Comrade Harris.

This action was taken against Comrade Harris because he opened a book service in London in order to gain his livelihood after he turned the assets of Pioneer Books over to the IMG in view of the stated inability of the IMG to provide him with a living wage as a full timer and its unwillingness to permit him to continue the operation of Pioneer Books in the headquarters on the same private basis upon which he had founded and operated it for a number of years.

According to Comrade Harris, he was not informed that such a motion was to be considered; he was not invited to explain why such a motion should not be passed; no charges were levelled against him; and both he and the rest of the membership were informed of the disciplinary action in an irregular way.

2. An appeal to the United Secretariat "to investigate the matter."

No violation of the statutes of the Fourth International concerning operating a bookshop or gaining a livelihood is alleged. Thus it would appear that no grounds for an investigation by the United Secretariat exist, and the United Secretariat has not instituted any investigation.

3. An assertion that a "serious deterioration of relations" with another section could occur.

This issue is referred to more directly in a subsequent explanation by Comrade Jordan and will be considered more fully further on on.

4. An order issued to Comrade Harris to submit to "amalgamation" of his book service with Red Books "under the control of the IMG."

This, if carried out, would amount to liquidating the book service opened by Comrade Harris and denying him the right to make a living in London in accordance with his skills and experience.

In justification of the extraordinary resolution passed by the majority of the National Committee of the IMG at its July 25-26, 1970, meeting, Comrade Pat Jordan stated:

"We must explain that this resolution was passed after the committee had received a report of the informal discussions on Leader Books between Joe Hansen and comrades Ali and Jordan."

This refers to conversations which I reported on at the time to the Political Committee. As I told the committee, the conversations appeared amicable to me and I could see no reason why, given goodwill on both sides, a comradely resolution of the differences on this point could not be reached. Evidently I was mistaken.

To recall briefly the main points I made in the conversations with Comrades Ali and Jordan in connection with this particular dispute:

It was my view that Comrade Harris acted within his rights as a loyal member of the IMG in seeking to make his livelihood through selling books and that in providing a wholesale outlet for Pathfinder Press in Britain and for the export of books of all kinds from Britain to other countries, the operation, even though private, could prove to be of positive value to the world Trotskyist movement. I stated my opinion that the IMG stood to make direct gains by this expansion.

I maintained that it was incorrect to conceive of Leader Books as being in "competition" with Red Books. I said I could envision the possibility of other retail outlets besides Red Books being opened, particularly in the book area of London, and that it would be very good, in my opinion, if the IMG leadership would discuss these possibilities with Comrade Harris, explore concretely what might be attempted, and seek to utilize his know-how in expanding in the retail field.

In response to queries from Comrades Ali and Jordan about the Socialist Workers Party getting Pathfinder Press to cut off relations with Comrade Harris, who has handled Pathfinder, Merit, and Pioneer books satisfactorily for many years, I explained that Pathfinder Press has no connection with the SWP so far as its business affairs are concerned, being a completely independent corporation although it concentrates on publishing material expressing a socialist point of view and receives strong moral backing in this from the SWP.

My efforts to improve the situation obviously did not meet with the positive response that seemed to me best calculated to reduce tensions and lead to restoration of comradely relations. In his letter, Comrade Jordan wrote with regard to the conversations:

"We cannot accept that there is any problem in 'explaining to Pathfinder Books' that Red Books would be taking over distribution of its publications from Alan Harris. This being the case we are confronted with a position where the SWP refuses to supply publications to the official bookshop of the British Section, but instead insists on supplying them direct to a member of the minority tendency of the IMG."

The facts are that the SWP has never refused to supply its publications to the British Section. Its publications consist of internal bulletins, educational material, and similar items.

In response to an inquiry, the management of Pathfinder Press affirms that it has never refused any orders from either the IMG, Red Books, or anyone else in Britain or anywhere else in the world. It has only insisted upon payment for orders.

To be noted in Comrade Jordan's explanation is the category of an "official bookshop of the British Section," plus the implication that this "official" bookshop exercises a monopoly on the sale of Trotskyist literature in Britain, one so tight that to supply Trotskyist books "direct to a member of the minority tendency of the IMG" will "result in a serious deterioration of relations between two sections of the International."

In arguing for this standpoint, Comrade Jordan continued:

"We would ask you to consider a hypothetical case:

"Suppose that the IMG, as publishers of a large number of books by Trotsky, etc., refused to supply them to the SWP but insisted that these be distributed in the United States via a minority tendency (which for instance might take the position that the YSA should advance the slogan 'Victory to the NLF' on mass demonstrations)."

As noted above: 1) The SWP and Pathfinder Press are not identical, although the SWP favors and supports the aim of Pathfinder Press to publish a large number of books by Trotsky, etc. 2) Pathfinder Press has not refused to supply the IMG with books by Trotsky or any other author listed in its catalog. 3) If the IMG were in position to supply the American market with books by Trotsky or any other author of interest to the reading public in the United States, and wished to do this through an agency of its own choice, the SWP would certainly not stand in the way. To the contrary, the SWP would seek to facilitate such an operation.

As an example, there is the case of Comrade Ernest Mandel's book Marxist Economic Theory, which the author decided could be most advantageously printed in London and distributed in the United States by the Monthly Review Press. The SWP did everything it could to assure the success of this arrangement, including distributing literature describing the book and inviting comrades to purchase it.

The argument about hypothetical American cothinkers of the IMG majority taking the position "that the YSA should advance the slogan 'Victory to the NLF' on mass demonstrations" suggests several variants.

If they wanted to argue for this position within the SWP, their democratic right to do so would be guaranteed.

If one of them wanted to open a private bookshop to make a livelihood, the SWP leadership would help him or her to the fullest extent, doing everything possible to make it a success.

As to the possible connection of the slogan "Victory to the NLF!" and such a bookshop, Comrade Jordan drags this in by the hair. It is not the purpose of a bookstore to advance political slogans. The purpose of a bookstore is to sell books. It is to be noted that in the antiwar rallies in the U.S. the most extreme slogan used by comrades associated with an SWP headquarters bookstore has been: "Get Your Trotskyist Literature Here!"

The inappropriateness of Comrade Jordan's analogy is shown by the fact that Leader Books has never displayed a banner in its windows reading "For Mass Antiwar Demonstrations!" Moreover, despite the political differences that the minority in the IMG has expressed, in all public activities it has scrupulously adhered, so far as I know, to all the positions taken by the majority; and from all I have heard, the comrades of the minority are not among the least active militants of the IMG.

Comrade Jordan, one is forced to conclude, is mixed up on the function of a bookstore and the function of a political party.

The accuracy of such a conclusion is shown by the following contention made by Comrade Jordan:

"We do not accept the argument that a book distribution centre (we do not want to get into semantic arguments about bookshops and import/export agencies) is not a political centre. Selling books, having an address list and a manned office amounts to having a political centre. This has always been recognised as such by the movement. This is why the IMG national committee resolved -- just prior to its National Conference -- that its bookshop would be completely under democratic centralist norms (it should be added that this position was approved by the conference)."

To be noticed first of all, is Comrade Jordan's position that nothing more substantial than "semantics" is involved in the difference between a wholesale and retail outlet. It can only be concluded from this that the majority leadership of the IMG has rejected Comrade Harris' offer to provide a wholesale service for Red Books. This is the reality of the situation described earlier by Comrade Jordan as being one "where the SWP refuses to supply publications to the official bookshop of the British Section...."

As to the argument that "selling books, having an address list and a manned office amounts to having a political centre," the following observations can be made:

The experience of the radical movement is that a bookshop, as an adjunct, can make the headquarters of a party local more attractive; but a bookshop is by no means an absolute requisite to maintaining a headquarters. In fact, experience is not lacking in which bookshops have become liabilities.

On the other hand it is true that a bookshop can be utilized as an initial point in establishing a political center. Experience shows, however, that such a development can lessen the attractiveness of a bookshop and even stand in the way of its becoming a successful financial enterprise. To survive, an "official" bookshop may in fact require a regular subsidy in one form or another.

Whether a weak local should try to underwrite an "official" bookshop must be carefully weighed. In this respect a private bookshop has often proved to be the best arrangement. The experience in London itself since 1963 would seem to bear this out -- at least up to now.

Comrade Jordan argues that the identity of a bookshop and a political center "has always been recognized as such by the movement." The truth is that his contention echoes the position taken by the Grant group when they sought to take over and destroy the bookshop established and built up by Comrade Harris following the Reunification Congress.

When the Grant group attempted their raid, accompanying it with all kinds of slanders of Comrade Harris, the United Secretariat came to the defense of Comrade Harris and argued against the way the leadership of the Grant group was abusing its authority as a majority.

Comrade Jordan asserted in his letter that no delays in resolving the situation in the way decided upon by the majority could be brooked. "We cannot procrastinate," he stated, "because of the serious state of affairs (our political opponents are well aware that Leader Books operates independently from our organization)."

It is not within the tradition of our movement to cite the opinion of our political opponents in settling a matter of internal concern. For those who know this, another argument was offered by Comrade Jordan in his next paragraph, i.e., the lack of understanding in the past in the British Trotskyist movement "of the meaning of democratic centralism as applied to the task of building a mass section of an international revolutionary party." To emphasize his point, Comrade Jordan stated: "We would be failing in our duty of helping to construct a mass section of the FI in Britain if we did not take immediate and decisive steps to nip this situation in the bud."

A sister section of the world Trotskyist movement, understanding what is involved, would be failing in its duty if it did not call the attention of the leaders of the IMG majority to the difference between democratic centralism and abuse of authority.

Of greater concern is the following contention advanced by Comrade Jordan:

"We think that in a case like this /the imaginary situation of the IMG distributing books in the U.S. via a minority tendency that advocated the slogan "Victory to the NLF"/ that you could be understood if you thought that the IMG was trying to support a minority -- politically and with resources -- of the SWP. We think that you could be understood if you considered this to be a gross violation of the democratic centralist norms and an attempt to get round the democratic procedures and processes of the SWP."

In view of the implications, Comrade Jack Barnes in a letter dated September 14, 1970, asked Comrade Jordan for clarification:

"1. You maintain that the private wholesale export-import book agency set up by Alan Harris constitutes a 'political centre,' that this centre was opened up by a minority tendency in your group, and that this was in 'gross violation' of the norms of democratic centralism. You imply, moreover, that the

Socialist Workers Party played a key role in inspiring the formation of this minority tendency in the IMG 'politically and with resources,' and that the establishment of Leader Books by Alan Harris is in reality an attempt by the SWP 'to get round the democratic procedures and processes' of the IMG.

"In face of such allegations, am I correct in drawing the conclusion that in your opinion the Socialist Workers Party has departed from the traditions of Trotskyism; that it has, so to speak, 'degenerated' and can no longer be regarded as a fraternal organization so far as the majority leadership of the IMG is concerned?"

In a letter dated December 10, 1970, Comrade Jordan stated that he had been instructed to reply to this question along the following line:

"1) If we considered that it was necessary to raise the question of the 'degeneration' of the Socialist Workers Party we would do so in another manner: through the appropriate international committees."

This reply can only be characterized as an equivocation. Asked if he believes that the SWP has departed from the traditions of Trotskyism, Comrade Jordan says nothing. Asked if he believes that the SWP can no longer be regarded as a fraternal organization, Comrade Jordan again says nothing. He is even equivocal on the term "degeneration." His reply can be interpreted as meaning that the IMG majority leaders do not consider it necessary to raise this question at the present time; if they did consider it necessary at the present time, then they would do so in another manner

Comrade Barnes, in his letter of September 14, 1970, asked another question in his effort to obtain clarification from Comrade Jordan:

"2. You state the Red Books has been named as 'the official bookshop of the British Section,' that 'the creation of Leader Books is in complete violation of the decision of the National Committee of the IMG,' that 'selling books, having an address list and manned office amounts to having a political centre,' and that your National Committee has empowered the IMG Secretariat 'to carry out an amalgamation of Leader Books and Red Books under the control of the IMG,' with which you ask us to 'fully co-operate.' Does this mean that you have placed a ban on any of your members, except those that meet

with the political approval of your National Committee, from making their livelihood by selling books and other literature, particularly the books and literature generally regarded as 'Trotskyist'?"

In his reply of December 10, 1970, Comrade Jordan did not reply at all to this question.

From his silence, it can be concluded that had he answered, he could have answered only in the affirmative, and he found it embarrassing to state the bald truth that the majority leadership of the IMG has indeed placed a ban on any of its members, except those meeting the political approval of the majority, from making their livelihood by selling books and other literature, particularly the books and literature generally regarded as "Trotskyist."

In fact in his reply of December 10, 1970, Comrade Jordan quotes a resolution passed by the majority of the National Committee at its October 17-18 meeting reaffirming its previous position insisting upon the liquidation of the book service set up by Comrade Harris.

The way in which Comrade Jordan and those who agree with him regard the minority in the IMG has an important bearing in this whole matter.

In his undated letter, Comrade Jordan said the following:

"We should point out that this tendency is widely considered to be in solidarity with the SWP's criticisms of the majority position in the International. We would recall to your attention that this tendency first manifested itself when its leader, comrade Susan Williams, appealed to the British delegation at the last world congress to be seated for the discussion on China in order to cast her vote against the majority. Furthermore it is well known that: a) about half the members of the tendency are ex-members of a section which supports the minority position in the International; b) that leading comrades sent from North America to participate in the work of the International played the leading part in founding the tendency; and c) that Alan Harris is a member of the United Secretariat designated by the previously mentioned section. Taking into account all these circumstances we think it would be in the best interests of a clear political discussion to avoid any action which could be construed as using organisational means to support a political minority."

The context is different from this presentation. At the Reunification Congress in 1963, the development of the British Trotskyist movement was considered to be of special importance. At

the same time, the difficulties and obstacles were recognized as considerable in face of the sectarian course of the Socialist Labour League, the refusal of its leaders to participate in the reunification of the world Trotskyist movement, and the divisions among those who favored reunification -- the Fourth Internationalists being divided into two warring groups, one centered in Nottingham, the other in London.

Outside aid was badly needed. The United Secretariat therefore did what it could to provide this aid. An appeal was made to the English-speaking comrades in North America. The Canadian Trotskyists responded as true internationalists and sent various top-level cadres at some cost to their own work in an immediate sense. In collaboration with the United Secretariat, they worked in model fashion, not without personal sacrifice.

To round out the picture, it should be noted that most of these cadres -- as happens to be the case with a substantial number of Canadians generally -- were not born in Canada. They were born in Britain. They were "Canadians" only in the sense that some of them had been won to the movement in Canada, or had had the opportunity -- as in the case of Susan Williams -- of working for a time in the Canadian Trotskyist movement.

Comrade Jordan leaves this out. Instead, even in a letter to the SWP he stresses that "about half the members of the tendency are ex-members of a section which supports the minority position in the International."

A sharp factional line is thus projected by Comrade Jordan, extending beyond Britain and tying in with the differences expressed at the last world congress. This goes counter to the efforts of the most responsible leaders of the world Trotskyist movement to avoid the crystallization of factional formations on an international scale.

Comrade Jordan's stress on the alleged "Canadian" origin and ties of "about half the members of the tendency" is cause for concern. It suggests that a bad factional atmosphere has been whipped up within the IMG. It is only too remindful of the factionalism that has repeatedly been such a problem to British Trotskyism in the past.

The assignment of aiding the British comrades in strengthening Trotskyism in their country was not ended on the initiative of the Trotskyists in either Canada or the U.S. It was ended unilaterally primarily on the initiative of the majority of the IMG leadership after the IMG was recognized as an official section of the Fourth International.

This was connected with a change in the orientation of the IMG that was challenged by some comrades in the IMG and that led to a political discussion of considerable interest as can be judged by reading the contributions made by both sides.

Contrary to the conclusion implied in Comrade Jordan's letter, the current differences within the IMG originated from a change in orientation undertaken by the majority leadership. The appearance of a minority tendency was not at all the result of unprincipled intervention by a "degenerated" section, seeking "to get round the democratic procedures and processes" of the IMG.

To summarize: Comrade Jordan, speaking for the IMG majority, does not give a true picture of the role played by those sectors of the world Trotskyist movement that responded to the appeal of the United Secretariat to help the British comrades. He presents a tendentious account of the origin of the minority, implying that it was instigated by the leadership of the SWP for unfathomable reasons, that it consists to a large degree of persons coming under the general heading of "foreign agents," and that it therefore has no basis in principle for existence.

In resorting to organizational reprisals against a loyal minority, the leaders of the majority in the IMG have embarked on a course that could have serious repercussions within the Fourth International as a whole. It is to be hoped that they will reconsider this course and recognize that members of the minority have the same right as members of the majority to seek to make a livelihood doing what they are most skilled at -- in this instance selling books.

If the majority leaders weigh more carefully the fact that the enterprise undertaken by Comrade Harris aims at concentrating on books of greatest political importance to the world Trotskyist movement and to the IMG, perhaps they will decide that the best policy is to give it the support it deserves.

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POLITICAL COMMITTEE MOTION

adopted February 5, 1971

The Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party voices the following opinion in relation to the facts made available in the correspondence between Comrade Pat Jordan, the national secretary of the IMG; Comrade Jack Barnes, the organization secretary of the SWP; a copy of the November 28, 1970 statement by Comrade Alan Harris to the Political Committee and National Committee of the IMG; and the memorandum by Comrade Joseph Hansen:

1. The majority of the National Committee of the IMG abused its authority in censuring Comrade Alan Harris.

- a) It failed to notify Comrade Harris in advance that he was to be placed on trial.
- b) It failed to grant him a hearing when his case came up for consideration.
- c) It notified the IMG of its disciplinary action against Comrade Harris in a way calculated to prejudice the membership against him.

2. The majority of the National Committee of the IMG further abused its authority by singling out Comrade Harris for disciplinary action in a field in which it does not at present subject the membership as a whole to disciplinary action; that is, the way in which they make their livelihood.

3. The majority of the National Committee of the IMG further abused the objective norms of democratic centralism by taking these organizational reprisals against a leader of a minority that has expressed political criticisms of the majority and argued for a different line from the one followed by the majority.

4. After the promising beginning earlier in the year, which appeared to represent a decided break with the antidemocratic methods that have plagued the British Trotskyist movement in the past, the majority of the National Committee of the IMG, by resorting to organizational reprisals against a leading member of the minority, has raised a serious question as to the possibility of conducting a genuinely free discussion in the IMG.