

INTERNAL BULLETIN

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SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY
116 University Place
New York 3, N.Y.

June 23, 1944

Local New York:

Dear Comrade Grant,

It was called to my attention that members of Local New York have been meeting with Workers Party groups, without the authorization of official party committees.

If this information is correct it is, as you know, in violation of the party constitution and party procedure. The last convention elected a Control Commission, specifying its authority in Article VI, as follows:

"Section 1. The Convention shall elect a Control Commission of three members with full authority to investigate any individual or circumstance which it may deem necessary; and shall have power to delegate any of its authority to representatives.

"Section 2. The Control Commission, on completion of its investigation in each case, shall present its findings and recommendations to the Political Committee for action. Action shall be taken by the Political Committee, or by the National Committee in those cases referred to it by the Political Committee.

"Section 3. In those cases where the Control Commission finds it necessary to intervene, its authority shall supersede any local investigation or trial.

"Section 4. It shall be obligatory on every member of the Party to furnish the Control Commission or its authorized representatives with any information they may require."

In line with the above, I wish to inform you that the Control Commission has decided to undertake an investigation of this matter and that you are to inform the branches to this effect.

Fraternally yours,

M. STEIN
Acting National Secretary

July 10, 1944

Statement of Control Commission on the case of
Abe Stein, Sylvia Rainer, Helen Russel and Ruth Winkler

The Control Commission investigated the report that the four above-mentioned comrades have met with a group of WP members. The four comrades were questioned separately by the Control Commission and the following facts were established:

Some six weeks ago (we could not establish the exact date) Ruth Winkler, who has been in the party about three months and who came from the left-wing Zionist youth organization, had lunch with a friend of hers who had belonged to the same organization with her, but who had since joined the W.P. Helen Russel was with her at the time. They claim that Ruth's friend suggested a meeting with a group of W.P. members for the purpose of "discussion with them on problems of the movement, particularly the Russian question."

Helen Russel invited Sylvia Rainer and Abe Stein to the meeting, held in the house of one of the W.P. members. There were five members of the WP present. The discussion at this meeting revolved primarily around the Russian question, with Abe Stein defending the SWP position against that of the WP. The meeting ended with the general understanding that there would be more discussion meetings held, the WP members suggesting that they would like to bring along either Carter or Shachtman to the following meeting. The four members of the SWP subsequent to the first meeting, decided that they would no longer participate in further discussions, and at the CRDC mass meeting informed the members of the WP to this effect.

In questioning the comrades, it was revealed that Ruth Winkler, Helen Russel and Sylvia Rainer participated in this meeting for reasons of their own, while Abe Stein gave different reasons. The three revealed a false concept of the party organization and its relations with members of opponent parties. They were of the opinion that they would like to have a discussion group in which, in the words of Helen Russel, "there is no need to have as the paramount aim winning advantages for one party or another; rather the paramount aim is the examination of the problem at hand."

Abe Stein, however, testified that he was fully cognizant of the significance of such discussions, and that it comes within the category of opponent work, and has to be directed by the party, but that he went along with the other three, knowing their immaturity and that they are not fully in agreement with the party position on the Russian question. He participated in the discussion, he said, in order to demonstrate to the three in practice that their attitude was wrong. He was informed of the discussion, he claims, the night before the meeting, and had no opportunity to inform the party committees of it. When asked why he failed to inform the party

committee after the event, he stated that he did not find it necessary, since they had decided not to have any more discussions with the WP members, and since he felt that the other three comrades involved had been very critical of the party leadership and that he would exert an influence on them best by himself.

It is the opinion of the Control Commission that the four comrades involved are guilty of a violation of party discipline and party procedure in participating in a political meeting with members of an opponent organization, without the permission of the official party committees and without informing the party committees of this fact. For this they should be censured. In the case of Abe Stein, who is a member of the City Committee and an old party member, and who is familiar with party procedure, his conduct was particularly reprehensible. Even if he had no opportunity to inform the party in advance of the meeting, and if his excuse for it should be accepted, it would nevertheless be inexcusable that he failed to inform his own City Committee of this meeting after it had taken place.

It is the proposal of the Control Commission that the report on this censure be made to a membership meeting in New York in the name of the P.C., and that the reporter take this occasion to explain to the membership the correct conduct of party members in relation to opponent organizations.

* * *

This report of the findings of the Control Commission and its recommendations was submitted to a meeting of the Political Committee on July 10, 1944. This report and the recommendations were approved by the unanimous vote of the Political Committee. This included also the proposal "that the report on this censure be made to a membership meeting in New York in the name of the P.C., and that the reporter take this occasion to explain to the membership the correct conduct of party members in relation to opponent organizations."

On July 28, a city-wide New York membership meeting was held at which Comrade Thomas reported for the P.C. on the case and on the rights and obligations of party members in their relations with opponent organizations. The report was approved by the overwhelming majority of the membership present.

* * *

LETTER FROM M. MORRISON

July 23, 1944.

As far as I can gather, the New York membership meeting held recently was a result of the fact that four members of the party participated in a discussion on the Russian question with members of the Workers Party. I understand that the reporter at the membership meeting considered the conduct of these members reprehensible and that a motion censuring the four members was actually passed by those present.

It is difficult for me to convey the feeling of sadness and frustration that came over me as I contemplated the significance of this incident. I do not want to believe it, and I still hope that I have not been informed correctly. If the report is correct then I can only say that many have been misled by those who, in their anxiety to retain the discipline essential to the existence of a Bolshevik party, have lost sight of the proud and emancipating spirit which is part and parcel of Bolshevism.

It is because of this membership meeting, undoubtedly arranged with the knowledge and consent of, if not at the instigation of, the highest body of our party, that I feel impelled to write the following words of caution. You, who are young in the movement and have not had a chance to study the history of Bolshevism, do not take for granted that whatever someone in authority claims to be Bolshevik practice, is actually such. Nor should you be overly-impressed if that someone takes great pains to emphasize and stress and repeat the word "Bolshevism."

Acquire the habit of asking everyone who presumes to tell you what Bolshevik procedure is, to show you where a particular procedure has been followed in the history of the Bolshevik movement. Acquire the habit of asking that every strange procedure claimed to be Bolshevik, be justified by reason and common sense. Above all, study the history of the Bolshevik movement and see if you do not agree with me when I say that it has a proud and liberating spirit, in addition to requiring discipline in action.

I know how dangerous it is to follow a general rule, but I think you will be quite safe to abide by the following general rule: whenever any organizational procedure has a resemblance to Stalinist procedure, hesitate a thousand times before accepting it as Bolshevik procedure.

You all know, or should know, that in the Stalinist organization, members are expressly forbidden to have any personal relations with Trotskyists. Everyone has rightly pointed to this prohibition as an indication of the inability of the Stalinists to cope with our arguments and their consequent fear of having their members come into contact with us.

To consider it reprehensible to attend a lecture by Shachtman or to meet Workers Party people to discuss the Russian question is, of course, not the same as a written prohibition to have any personal relationships, but it is not very far removed from it.

No one can convince me that, when the Bolsheviks were only one of the political groups in the Russian labor movement, it ever occurred to any responsible Bolshevik to condemn any member of the party for attending a meeting of an opposing party or for arranging a discussion on an important political question with members of an opposing party. The Bolsheviks were too proud and too confident of the correctness of their ideas even to think of such nonsense. Only people who are not very confident of their ability to defend their position would adopt such a measure.

This year marks the end of a quarter of a century since I came into the revolutionary movement, and during all this time I have never heard nor read of any case where responsible Bolsheviks have even discussed such a question as was raised at the New York membership meeting. I have always felt free to attend any meeting of any opponent organization or to arrange a discussion with any members of an opponent organization. I still feel free to do the same thing. If it was important enough I informed some member of a higher body; if it wasn't of sufficient importance I did not mention it.

There is absolutely nothing wrong in a member attending a meeting or class of another political group unless it is for the purpose of supporting that group. There is nothing wrong in discussing any question with members of an opposing political group. There may be some in our party who are so enraged at the harm done to our movement by the split organized by the members of the Workers Party, that they refuse to speak to those members or have anything to do with them. I sympathize with their feelings, but I shall fight any attempt on their part to transform them into a rule of political conduct obligatory on all members, and, what is worse, to call it Bolshevism.

With reference to any action of any of our members in relation to any opposing political organization, there is only one charge justified by reason, common sense and Bolshevik procedure, and that is "of being an agent of an opponent organization." I shall be willing to modify this general rule if events show that it needs modification.

I hope that it is unnecessary for me to add that a member of our party has a right to agree with Shachtman on the Russian question. So long as he accepts discipline in action he is just as good a member as anyone else.

For the sake of the party and the great principles it stands for, I fervently hope that the New York membership meeting is but a passing incident. Let not one single Stalinist germ penetrate into our ranks.

LETTER FROM M. MORRISON

July 30, 1944

I received the report of the Control Commission dealing with the conduct of the four members who participated in a discussion with W.P. members on the Russian question. In essence my first letter requires no change as a result of the report. The principles I enunciate there are still relevant and it is necessary in my opinion to instruct the members in those principles.

The Commission obviously tries hard to inject the question of democratic centralism, but it should not require long experience in the movement to realize that the New York membership meeting was not called to give the members a lesson in democratic centralism, but to inspire them with the idea that it is wrong to discuss any question with the W.P. people. On the basis of the report itself it is clear that Abe Stein is the only one who claimed that he was doing opponent's work. The others said that they went to discuss the Russian question. Since they too were censured, it is evident that the leadership thinks it impermissible to discuss questions with members of the W.P.

The question of democratic centralism could be legitimately raised only if the members who entered into a discussion with the W.P. people did so as part of a plan to penetrate into the ranks of that party and attempt to work there with the perspective of gaining members away from the W.P. Members who have a plan for work in an opponent organization are in duty bound to present the plan to an official body of the party. It is for the party as such to decide whether and how work should be done in any other party.

That the members who were censured had no such plan is quite obvious. It is also obvious that the one who claimed he was doing opponent's work did so because he was afraid he did something wrong in going to a meeting to discuss the Russian question with W.P. members. Obviously, also, if the question were merely one of straightening out some members on the principle of democratic centralism, no general membership meeting would have been called and surely no motion to censure would have been introduced. No one should permit the question of democratic centralism to confuse the issue.

To discuss any question with members of an opponent organization is one thing; to organize and execute a plan for work in an opponent organization is another thing. To do the first is perfectly permissible without requesting permission from, or even informing anyone, although in the vast majority of cases a member would naturally inform someone in authority, probably for the purpose of getting advice. To do the second without the authority of the party as such would be wrong.

It is, I hope, unnecessary to add that I am not suggesting that members of our party begin a general discussion with W.P. members. If the W.P. has some new members, quite obviously any member would be justified in seeking them out for the purpose of discussing the Russian question. All that I am contending for is that any member of our party who wants to discuss any question with a member of any other party is at liberty to do so--whether the purpose is to convince the W.P. members or to find out their viewpoint. To call a meeting to censure members for arranging a discussion with W.P. people and to vote for a censure is the same as establishing a rule that a member is not permitted to discuss any question with a member of the W.P. My advice to every member is to inform someone in an official capacity that he intends to discuss a question with a member of an opponent organization, but this is not essential. What the New York membership has done is something entirely new in our party and, as I have indicated in my first letter, contrary to the proud and confident spirit of Bolshevism.

M. Morrison

WHAT ARE THE REAL ISSUES
(An Answer to Comrade Morrison)

By M. Stein

Comrade Morrison's attack on the P.C. for censuring four members of the New York organization raises sharply the whole question of relations with opponent organizations and the rights and obligations of party members in this connection.

It is obvious that neither the P.C. procedure in the case, nor Morrison's sharp protest against this procedure are merely accidental in character or are due to some misunderstanding of the facts in the case. If that were so it could easily have been resolved by a proper appraisal of the facts. The dispute, however, has much deeper roots which grow out of two different concepts of party organizational methods and procedure.

It is essential that the problem be stated bluntly and without any embellishments. This is the only way to achieve clarity.

In Relations with Opponent Parties
the Highest Degree of Centralism must be Observed

Surrounded by a hostile world our party can survive and grow only on the foundation of programmatic firmness and irreconcilable hostility towards its enemies, including the petty-bourgeois betrayers of Marxism who call themselves the Workers Party. In our political relations with parties and groups we must exercise the greatest degree of centralization. In such relations party members do not act as individuals but as agents of the party.

This is the concept which guided the P.C. in its disciplinary action against the four. The facts as incorporated in the Control Commission report make it clear that the meeting of the four with five members of the W.P. was not accidental. It was pre-arranged. It was to have been one of a series of meetings. It was organized for the purpose of political discussion. Was the party entitled to know about it? Were the comrades involved under obligation to consult the party as to whether they should organize such a group, or whether after it was organized, they should break it up or continue in the interests of party opponent work? The four acted entirely on their own in organizing the group as well as in breaking it up. They acted as individuals or a group of individuals in a situation where the party demands the greatest possible degree of responsibility and centralization. Furthermore they kept this whole affair a secret from the party, a secret that came to light indirectly and only by accident.

No one can defend this kind of conduct without running the risk of falling into the trap of conciliationism towards our opponents or taking issue with the party's basic concepts of organization

and discipline.

The Basic Reasons for our Hostility to the
Petty-Bourgeois Betrayers of Marxism

In his letters Comrade Morrison says that; "There may be some in our party who are so enraged at the harm done to our movement by the split organized by the members of the Workers Party, that they refuse to speak to these members or have anything to do with them."

Our hostility to the W.P. is not due solely to "the harm done to our movement by the split." If that were all that was involved, we would be seeking to repair this "harm" by an attempt at reunification. Our hostility is far more basic, far more profound. It flows from the programmatic gulf dividing them from us -- a gulf that is widening and deepening as time goes on. Proletarian revolutionists can have nothing but hostility and contempt, if you please, for a group of petty-bourgeois revisionists and renegades from Marxism who seek to destroy our movement.

The True Meaning of the
Proud and Emancipating Spirit of Bolshevism

Comrade Morrison's references to the "proud and emancipating spirit which is part and parcel of Bolshevism" -- and he has several such references -- are entirely misplaced. It is precisely this "proud and emancipating spirit" which is in contradiction to conciliationism -- in fact, it is its opposite. Conciliationism flows from a lack of pride in your own organization, from a lack of confidence in its emancipating role. The history of Bolshevism is rich in examples of bitter struggle against conciliationism and conciliators. The traditions of Bolshevism in this case are entirely on the side of the P.C.

Is Comrade Morrison perhaps referring to individuals and not to the party as such, when he speaks of the "proud and emancipating spirit?" If this is the case, he is not speaking of Bolshevism but of petty-bourgeois anarchism. A Bolshevik derives his proud and emancipating spirit from his party, its program and its struggles. Least of all would he seek "emancipation" from the party and its discipline. In his political relations with opponent parties or groups of opponent party members, he acts as a conscious representative of his organization. If one were to guide himself by the conduct indicated by Morrison, he would be conducting himself as an individualistic anarchist and not a disciplined Bolshevik. If the party would condone such conduct it would make a mockery of discipline and centralism.

One must have a Yardstick for Party Procedure

To be able to decide whether the P.C. acted correctly in censuring the four members of the New York organization, one must have a yardstick to measure the conduct of individuals against the accepted practices in the party. For us who are out to forge a party as a sharp instrument of struggle against all its enemies,

the yardstick is one of party patriotism, unflinching devotion, loyalty to the party principles and to the organization based on democratic centralism; freedom and democracy inside the party in deciding the policies of the party when such policies are up for decision, centralism in action and especially in dealings with enemy organizations, or groups of members in opponent organizations. This is our yardstick. With this yardstick it is possible to judge the conduct of the party's leading comrades as well as the conduct of rank and file party members.

But what is Comrade Morrison's yardstick. We quote: "I know how dangerous it is to follow a general rule, but I think you will be quite safe to abide by the following general rule; whenever any organizational procedure has a resemblance to Stalinist procedure, hesitate a thousand times before accepting it as Bolshevik procedure."

With Morrison's resemblance-yardstick one can measure nothing unless he is to begin measuring everything all over again. For example, if you point to a gangster and say that anyone who has features of resemblance to him is suspect, you get into a position where everybody is suspect. Like the gangster all of us have two feet, two arms, two eyes, etc. This kind of yardstick -- and Comrade Morrison gives no other -- is in the last analysis purely negative; it puts a question mark over all party procedure. The moment any point of "resemblance" is indicated Morrison demands time to "hesitate a thousand times before accepting it as Bolshevik procedure." You cannot build a party nor establish party procedure with hesitation as a policy.

Yes, some of the mechanics of our organizational procedure bear an external resemblance to Stalinist procedure. But the Stalinists serve the interests of their master in the Kremlin and of the Allied imperialists. We serve the interests of the proletarian revolution. Theirs is an irreconcilable, yes even murderous attitude to revolutionists; ours is an irreconcilable attitude towards traitors to the revolution. Theirs is an organization with no democracy, built on bureaucratic centralism; ours is an organization built on democratic centralism.

What are the Rules Governing our Relations With Opponent Organizations?

Let us take up one more point Comrade Morrison makes: "With reference to any action of any of our members in relation to any opposing political organization, there is only one charge justified by reason, commonsense and Bolshevik procedure, and that is 'of being an agent of an opponent organization.' I shall be willing to modify this general rule if events show that it needs modification."

Comrade Morrison did not wait for events to be convinced that his "general rule" needed modification. Writing his second letter seven days later, he says: "Members who have a plan for work in an opponent organization are in duty bound to present the plan to an official body of the party. It is for the party as such to decide whether and how work should be done in any other party."

Comrade Morrison casts out this suggestion as if it were necessary at this stage to improvise some rules of party conduct in this connection. At this time we would like to call to Comrade Morrison's attention another general rule which is incorporated in the party constitution which Comrade Morrison himself supported; Article VIII, Section 8, reads: "Political collaboration with non-members of the Party must be formally authorized by the Party committee having jurisdiction."

Whatever the subjective motivations of the participants may have been, the objective fact remains: If the discussion group between four members of our party and the five members of the W.P. was organized not for opponent work, then it could only fall into one other category -- political collaboration.

By bringing in the alleged resemblance with Stalinist procedure -- alleged resemblance to procedure of our deadliest enemies -- Morrison tries to becloud the issue of what is right and wrong in relations with opponent organizations.

But this method of arguing brings in its trail an especially malodorous charge -- the charge that the P.C. is resorting to Stalinist organizational methods. This slur on the P.C. can only hurt the author and no one else.

The facts in the case are clear enough for everyone who is not blind. We have not prohibited personal relations with members of opponent parties and groups. We have not prohibited political discussion between a member of our party and a member of an opponent organization whom he meets in the shop, in the plant or on a personal basis. We do demand however that all organized discussion, all organized political relations between members or groups of members of our party with members or groups of members of opponent organizations, be carried out only with the knowledge and approval of the proper party committees. Any other course may build a discussion circle, but never a revolutionary party. Any other method has nothing in common with Bolshevik procedure; it is its opposite.

* * *

A LETTER FROM THE P. C. TO COMRADE MORRISON

The P. C. wishes to call to your attention the irregular manner by means of which your criticisms are circularized among the membership. This applies especially to your disagreement in the case of the four comrades who organized a discussion group with W.P. members. Your disagreements, as per established procedure, should first have gone to the committee which made the decision for disciplinary action. Upon request, they could and can, thereafter, be circularized in the membership by the committee in organized fashion -- as has already been the case in the past. Instead, your views are being distributed among the party membership by an individual, in an unorganized way, and circumventing the committee. The P.C. would like to know if this is being done with your full knowledge and consent. It also wishes to inform you that it is prepared, as in the past, to take up your criticisms through the regular party channels provided for this purpose and would like to get your agreement on this manner of organized handling of disputed matters in the future.

REPLY FROM COMRADE MORRISON

I am not at all surprised that the Political Committee is dissatisfied with the circularization, among some party members, of Morrison's letters dealing with the action of the commission that investigated the case of the four comrades who participated in a discussion with some W.P. members. Some of the P.C.'s recent actions indicate that it is concentrating its attention on formalities and practically refuses to let its intelligence function freely so that it reaches the essence of a problem. Even the most intelligent individual is capable of making the most stupid mistakes if, for some reason or other, he does not permit his intelligence to function freely.

I shall reduce the question of Morrison's letters to its simplest terms. Morrison is a party member who had to leave the country and consequently is unable to discuss, with other party members, such questions as are arising. A membership meeting was called in New York to listen to certain recommendations, discuss and accept or reject them. I ask this simple question: if Morrison were in New York, would anyone possibly have questioned his right, as a member, to speak at the membership meeting and present his views?

But Morrison is away. He is informed by mail of the membership meeting and the results. He thereupon sends a letter to the New York membership stating his views on the question dealt with at the meeting. He asks that the letter be presented to the City Executive Committee with the request that the C.E.C. send it to the branches to be read to the members. What has Morrison done? He simply asks that his letter be substituted for the speech that he would have made had he been present at the membership meeting.

This is the essence of the matter and everything else is conscious or unconscious confusion.

What should the City Executive Committee do? If it has any respect for the membership, any regard for the right of members to know the opinion of an old party member, any desire to further the education and development of the members, it should, without the slightest hesitation, comply with Morrison's request.

What should the Political Committee do? Since the letter raises a question of interest and importance to all party members, the P.C., to whom a copy was given, should send the letters to all party branches. If someone would undertake to write a reply within a week, then the P.C. should wait for the reply and send it together with the letter; if not, the letter should be sent out and the reply forwarded afterwards.

Instead of adopting this serious attitude, the totally irrelevant question is raised about the irregular manner in which the letter is being circularized. What is that irregular manner? The recipient shows its contents to the few party members that she knows and can reach. Again I ask: Would Morrison have had the right to tell any individual party member the things that he wrote in the letters? If yes, and no one can possibly question that right, could he not write to every party member and tell him about those ideas? And since it is impossible for him to write to every party member, why can he not ask the one person he corresponds with to show the contents of his letters to as many party comrades as can be reached? All it needs is to put the light of common sense on this question, to dispel the confusion created by the P.C.

A member who is not in the country (especially if he was compelled to leave the country), has a right, through correspondence, to inform every party member what he thinks of questions that are being discussed in the ranks. And by "discussed" I do not mean only such questions as have been formally presented to the ranks for discussion. I mean any question that has aroused discussion in the ranks. It follows, as I indicated before, that the right to inform party members by letter includes the right to tell one correspondent to inform all party members of the contents of letters dealing with subjects being discussed in the ranks.

I sincerely hope that the P.C. will realize its mistake in suggesting that there is anything irregular in Morrison's request to have some of his letters read at the membership meetings or his suggestion to the recipient of his letters to inform party members of his views on various subjects. It is an elementary right which should never again be questioned.

THE CONTROL COMMISSION CASE

By Lydia Bennett

We have received a Control Commission report on the recent "hearing" of four comrades in the New York organization. The four fell into three categories for the purposes of this article; Abe Stein, a party member of long standing and some degree of political development; two girls about whose backgrounds I know nothing; and a young girl comrade (about 18 years old, I understand) recently recruited from a Zionist organization. I wish to confine myself, when dealing with certain details of this case, to Comrade Abe Stein and the young ex-Zionist.

The four comrades admitted having had a discussion on the Russian question with some members of the Workers Party; they were called in and talked to by the Acting National Secretary; then they were summoned before some kind of meeting of the entire membership of New York for a hearing or trial of some sort (the thing is so unprecedented in our movement that I don't know what to call it!) No accusation was made that any of these comrades acted as agents of the Workers Party in our organization; if that were true, my attitude toward some aspects of this "trial" would be different.

Two questions are involved: (1) the right of these comrades to discuss political matters with members of other political parties; (2) the effect of this mass-meeting hearing upon these and other members of the party.

What principle of bolshevik procedure or what accepted practice in a bolshevik organization has ever forbidden a member of a party to discuss party political policy with members of opponent organizations of the working class? Granted that our position is correct, how else than by argument does one prove their validity to other politically alert people? I know of only one working-class organization which has forbidden its members to discuss political matters with members of other parties; the Stalinite organization. The written history of the Bolshevik party of Russia can be termed an extended political argument with rival political organizations of the working class; it was in the crucible of polemic that Lenin and Trotsky fused the steel weapon of bolshevik policy and welded the firm party of the first proletarian revolution.

If, then, our comrades are thoroughly acquainted with the meaning, implications and importance of any of our policy, what advantage is there to the party in forbidding them to discuss such policy with anyone who disagrees with us? Are we not a party which distinguishes itself from all other parties precisely and primarily on the difference between our ideas and principles and those of every other organization of the working class and our intransigent adherence to and belief in these ideas and principles? (It should be remembered by those comrades who stand in perpetual fear of our degenerating into a debating society that arguing against the prohibition of discussion with members of rival organizations does not imply issuing an order that no one is to do anything else in his spare time!)

Suppose, however, that a comrade finds he cannot defend our position when challenged by a worker who adheres to another school of political thought. What should be his first instinct? To go immediately to the party leadership and ask for clarification, knowing that he can freely express his failure to understand or his tendency to disagree.

Obviously these four comrades felt no strong inclination to go to the leadership and discuss the question at issue and the fact that their behavior induced such a spectacular reaction as this "trial" can indicate only one thing: that the leadership is convinced that a substantial number of other comrades are in danger of suffering from the same disorder and the entire party membership must have a firm and awe-inspiring warning aimed in its direction.

Now arises the important question; does the handling of this problem through a mass trial of this sort tend to make it easier for members of the party to come freely to the leadership and express questions or doubts on party policy and ask for clarification? I seriously doubt it, for the reason that this spectacle of a mass trial has not only labeled the discussion of political matters with members of other parties as a mild form of treason but has by implication declared that the doubting of party policy is itself somehow a criminal thing.

Comrade Abe Stein was censured for not having notified the leadership in advance of the meeting he attended with the others. At most I can view this only as a mistake on his part, but it can be considered a crime against the party only if it is a crime to argue party policy with workers not in our party or in rival parties. This I deny.

For the sake of argument, I shall assume that Comrade Abe Stein was entirely wrong and that his behavior was detrimental to the party. He should then have been corrected (privately or publicly) and a statement should have been issued to the party requiring comrades who propose to hold discussions hereafter with members of other organizations to notify the City Committee or the City Organizer. But this method of handling the matter is only possible if it is not considered a crime to talk to members of other parties on such subjects as the nature of the Soviet State. Since such activity is apparently considered criminal, then a suggestion that it might possibly be a normal circumstance is out of the question.

If Comrade Abe Stein had proposed to organize a series of debates with members of the Workers Party, then the matter would assume an entirely different character and would have to be discussed and (if agreed upon) organized with the assistance of the City Committee or another party body, since it would then take on the nature of opponents work (a legitimate field of work in a bolshevik organization when circumstance calls for it). This he obviously did not intend to do.

There is, however, another aspect of this mass-hearing spectacle, involving the young ex-Zionist comrade. She is apparently, in view of her history, an unusually good type of young girl.

The fact that she was sufficiently conscious politically (at the age of 18) first to become a member of a Zionist organization and then to move upward in the scale of development to our ranks singles her out from among the common run of young people. She should have a good future in our movement and should be helped in her development. I understand she was present at the hearing and an insistent demand was made that she take the floor in her own behalf, which she reluctantly did, reading a prepared statement (against which some sneering remarks were made!).

I wonder how many members of our party can know what a drain upon the courage and moral resources of a young girl comrade such an ordeal as this constitutes? I happen in my political experience to have had on several occasions to stand up before a mass assembly of my own comrades to explain a rejected political policy; I was in the process of being expelled from the Communist Party for Trotskyism. I can only say that no one who has not had to go through such an experience can know the horror of having to stand all alone before an antagonistic body and argue for a cause already hopelessly lost. It may be argued that the circumstances are not parallel -- that I was right on the question of the united front and the Communist International wrong. But this young comrade thinks herself right, too, and certainly when the party is right it must find another way of impressing its correctness upon her. To call the entire membership together, to force a young comrade to stand before all those who constitute the real social content of her life and defend herself against them as they are whipped into a fever of denunciation by the party leadership -- I cannot accept this as a constructive way of eradicating error in the party!

How, then, should this problem have been handled? The comrades should have been talked to as they were and immediately an educational campaign should have been launched nationally for the purpose of acquainting new party members (as well as those who just are not sure) with our position on the Russian question. There are many members who came into the party after the discussion with the ex-minority had been finished and dropped. I know of absolutely no way of keeping them and the rest of our membership solidly in support of the party except through education; unless we think we can forever keep our members hermetically sealed from contact with non-bolshevik members of the working class! I am not arguing for a constant rehash of already settled questions of party policy; but no one can deny that, if the situation in New York was serious enough to warrant so amazing a spectacle as this "trial", then a rediscussion of this question is not only in order but imperative!

The important consideration is the effect of this incident upon the membership of the party. I hesitate to estimate the damage done by this thing. It is appalling simply to think that the membership of our party can be turned into a prosecuting body, whipped to a frenzy against members who are accused, mind you, of a crime of such an order that the punishment commensurate with it is neither suspension of membership nor expulsion from our body! The most that came from this amazing demonstration was a motion of censure! How can the leadership think of mobilizing this much

venom for so slight a punishment?

I am afraid that from now on for some time anyone who finds himself questioning party policy will keep his mouth very tightly shut and go elsewhere for assistance and explanation, with the result that he will be lost to us. We shall be robbed even of the opportunity to judge how well acquainted the membership may be with our policies since no one will have the courage to express doubt or disagreement. It is not only the young Zionist comrade who has been injured by this hearing; it is every inarticulate and timid member of the party whose inarticulateness and timidity must be consciously uprooted and dispelled by the behavior of the party in showing that questioning is not criminal in our midst.

If this young Zionist comrade stands up under her recent experience (and I sincerely hope she does) then she has some of the makings of a true revolutionary; it is too bad that the party could find no better way of tempering her courage than by making her stand up publicly before the entire assembled membership of the New York organization to defend herself for having committed what she suddenly found to be a highly unpopular and apparently criminal act. The possible damage to this one young comrade I consider great enough to outweigh the mistake of which Comrade Abe Stein may have been guilty and which the party used as an excuse for this "trial."

August 21, 1944

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LETTER FROM MARGARET STEWART

August 31, 1944

Dear Comrade Morrison:

I have always read with very special interest whatever you have had to say on various issues. Your careful and penetrating analyses have always been a great satisfaction to read and have often served to clarify me on matters concerning which I should otherwise have felt hazy and uncertain.

I had, therefore, come to expect from you something quite different from the remarks in your two letters concerning the membership meeting which approved the censuring of the four comrades by the P.C. on recommendation of the Control Commission. You, who are accustomed to strike right at the core of the matter, simply evaded or, at best, set aside what to my mind was distinctly the central issue involved -- namely, democratic centralism.

You say, "The Commission obviously tries hard to inject the question of democratic centralism." And why should not the Commission inject that question? That was precisely the question which was involved in this case.

According to my understanding, democratic centralism implies freedom of discussion within our ranks, discipline in action on the part of every member, once a decision has been democratically arrived at, and as a corollary to this second aspect, the presentation of a solid front to the outside world.

In this connection, by the way, your remarks about Stalinism are quite bewildering. Stalinism, as we all know, has rejected the first aspect of democratic centralism, and for that we have always condemned it. But it has retained the latter aspect (not without some degenerating features, of course) and that is the explanation of its singular effectiveness as an instrument for evil -- a force which must be conjured with in the world of labor and politics.

In the case of our own organization, on the other hand, it is the retention of this same aspect of democratic centralism which must make our party an equally effective instrument for putting into action our own correct political program. The use of democratic centralism in its entirety as a method of organization is Bolshevism, and to suggest that in this may be found the germs of Stalinism is to make an error which seems a little akin to that made by those who want to identify Stalinism with Bolshevism.

But I feel sure that there can be no disagreement between us on this. It can only be that in reading of the meeting and the report of the Control Commission, you received a mistaken impression of what transpired.

You make several implications which would indicate that this must be the case. You say, for example, "There is absolutely nothing

wrong in a member attending a meeting or class of another political group unless it is for the purpose of supporting that group. There is nothing wrong in discussing any question with members of an opposing political group." And again you say, "All that I am contending for is that any member of our party who wants to discuss any question with a member of any other party is at liberty to do so."

But, Comrade, of course! Who questions that liberty? It was not questioned at this meeting. That was not the issue at all.

It is difficult for me to understand how anyone could have left the meeting with the impression that it is impermissible to speak or discuss with members of an opponent organization. That was certainly not the impression that I personally received. I should feel quite free to discuss any question with any member of an opponent organization, but I should consider it obligatory on my part (provided, of course, that I was known to be speaking as a Trotskyist), to put forward the position of our party on any political issue which might arise.

You say, "No one can convince me that. . . it ever occurred to any responsible Bolshevik to condemn any member of the party for attending a meeting of an opposing party or for arranging a discussion on an important political question with members of an opposing party." No one can convince me, Comrade, that it ever occurred to any responsible Bolshevik to discuss or arrange a discussion for any other purpose than to forward the position of the party.

You go on to say, "The Bolsheviks were too proud and too confident of the correctness of their ideas ever to think of such nonsense."

In those very words you imply, although you fail to state it explicitly elsewhere in your remarks, that your assumption is that a Bolshevik must of course defend the correct ideas of which he is "proud and confident." Yet, Comrade, that is just what these comrades, with the exception of Stein, failed to do, nor did they by their own admission (made by at least one of them in what impressed me as a contemptuous and defiant manner) have any intentions of doing so.

The censure was inflicted upon these comrades not because they spoke to or entered into a discussion with members of an opponent organization. It was for deliberately arranging a meeting with members of an opposing group to discuss a political question for a purpose other than defending the party program and for thereby implying that they were not in full agreement with our program. And for this I feel the censure was quite justified. There is, you must admit, no milder penalty.

You speak of the "proud and emancipating spirit which is part and parcel of Bolshevism." It is certainly a proud and emancipating spirit which must pervade the world, once the old order has been overthrown through Bolshevik leadership. Our ideals are proud and emancipating, but the road we must follow in realizing them is a dangerous and tortuous one, and we cannot in the meantime permit any even slight unravelling of that solid front, lest our whole structure be endangered.