

SWP

discussion bulletin

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. A Note on Leadership and Democratic-Centralism, by Jack Barnes.	1
2. Comments on the Political Resolution, by Myra Tanner Weiss	3
3. Statement by Farrell Dobbs	14

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A NOTE ON LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC-CENTRALISM

A number of newer comrades for whom the present pre-convention discussion is their first have found it worthwhile to read contributions to previous discussions.

This has been especially valuable in clarifying the connection between organizational problems, leadership, and political program.

The following contribution from Comrade Trotsky, made in 1937, we found especially enlightening.

Jack Barnes,
Chicago, Illinois
May 20, 1963

* * *

December 8, 1937

TO THE EDITORS OF "THE SOCIALIST APPEAL"

A Few Words About the Party Regime

by L. Trotsky

During the past months I have received letters in regard to the inner regime of a revolutionary party from several apparently young comrades, unknown to me. Some of these letters complain about the "lack of democracy" in your organization, about the domineering of the "leaders" and the like. Individual comrades ask me to give a "clear and exact formula on democratic centralism" which would preclude false interpretations.

It is not easy to answer these letters. Not one of my correspondents even attempts to demonstrate clearly and concretely with actual examples exactly wherein lies the violation of democracy. On the other hand, insofar as I, a bystander, can judge on the basis of your newspaper and your Bulletins, the discussion in your organization is being conducted with full freedom. The Bulletins are filled chiefly by representatives of a tiny minority. I have been told that the same holds true of your discussion meetings. The decisions are not yet carried out. Evidently they will be carried through at a freely elected conference. In what then could the violations of democracy have been manifested? This is hard to understand. Sometimes, to judge by the tone of the letters, i. e., in the main instance by the formlessness of the grievances, it seems to me that the complainers are simply dissatisfied with the fact that, in spite of the existing democracy, they prove to be in a tiny minority. Through my own experience I know that this is unpleasant. But wherein is there any violation of democracy?

Neither do I think that I can give such a formula on democratic centralism that "once and for all" would eliminate misunderstandings and false interpretations. A party is an active organism. It develops in the struggle with outside obstacles and inner contradictions. The malignant

decomposition of the Second and Third Internationals, under the severe conditions of the imperialist epoch, creates for the Fourth International difficulties unprecedented in history. One cannot overcome them with some sort of magic formula. The regime of a party does not fall ready-made from the sky but is formed gradually in the struggle. A political line predominates over the regime. First of all, it is necessary to define strategic problems and tactical methods correctly in order to solve them. The organizational forms should correspond to the strategy and the tactic. Only a correct policy can guarantee a healthy party regime. This, it is understood, does not mean the development of the party does not raise organizational problems as such. But this means that the formula for democratic centralism must inevitably find a different expression in the parties of different countries and in different stages of development of one and the same party.

Democracy and centralism do not at all find themselves in an invariable ratio to one another. All depends on the concrete circumstances, on the political situation in the country, on the strength of the party and its experience, on the general level of its members, on the authority which the leadership has succeeded in winning. Before a conference when the problem is one of formulating a political line for the next period, democracy triumphs over centralism. When the problem concerns itself with political action, centralism subordinates democracy to itself. Democracy again asserts its rights when the party feels the need to examine critically its own actions. The equilibrium between democracy and centralism establishes itself in the actual struggle, at moments it is violated and then again re-established. The maturity of each member of the party expresses itself particularly in the fact that he does not demand from the party regime more than it can give. He is a poor revolutionist who defines his attitude to the party on the individual fillips that he gets on the nose. It is necessary, of course, to fight against every individual mistake of the leadership, every injustice and the like. But it is necessary to estimate these "injustices" and "mistakes" not by themselves but in connection with the general development of the party both on a national and international scale. A correct judgement and a feeling for proportion in politics is an extremely important thing. He who has propensities for making a mountain out of a mole-hill can do much harm to himself and to the party. The misfortune of such people as Oehler, Field, Weisbord and others consists in their lack of feeling for proportion.

At the moment there are not a few half-revolutionists, tired out by defeats, fearing difficulties, aged young men who have more doubts and pretensions than will to struggle. Instead of seriously analyzing political questions in essence, such individuals seek panaceas, on every occasion complain about the "regime," demand wonders from the leadership, or try to muffle their inner scepticism by ultra-left prattling. I fear that revolutionists will not be made out of such elements, unless they take themselves in hand. I do not doubt, on the other hand, that the young generation of workers will be capable of evaluating the programmatic and strategical content of the Fourth International according to merit and will rally to its banner in ever greater numbers. Each real revolutionist who notes down the blunders of the party regime should first of all say to himself: "We must bring into the party a dozen new workers!" The young workers will call the gentlemen-sceptics, grievance-mongers, and pessimists to order. Only along such a road will a strong healthy party regime be established in the sections of the Fourth International.

Reprinted from Internal Bulletin, No. 5, December 1937.

COMMENTS ON THE POLITICAL RESOLUTION

by Myra Tanner Weiss

The task of drafting the political resolution for our 1963 Convention was assigned in January of this year. On May 3 it was first distributed to the Political Committee. A week later it was placed on the PC's agenda for its first organized discussion. At the same meeting, however, the Wohlforth-Philips resolution was presented. The two documents were counterposed for discussion and vote. And the debate with Comrade Wohlforth began.

Under these circumstances a careful, unfettered consideration of the majority resolution was impossible. I asked for more time to consider the majority resolution. Because of the lateness in getting the resolution to the membership (no fault of mine), my request was denied. I had the choice, consequently, of interjecting into a debate with Wohlforth my criticism of the majority draft (a course that once was unthinkable in our tradition) or accepting my defeat and taking my differences with the majority directly to the membership.

The majority draft resolution, therefore, is not the product of collective collaboration of the entire majority. Other members of the PC majority were consulted, individually, if not collectively, before its presentation. I was not. For these reasons I voted against the minority resolution and abstained on the majority document with a protest.

1. The Political Revolution: The world Trotskyist movement and the SWP were borne in the struggle against the bureaucratic deformation of the Soviet Union and the Communist International. We were the advanced expression of this struggle, the conscience of the revolution.

But it was not until the end of World War II that the political revolution entered its opening stages. With the extension of the revolution into East Europe and Asia, the monolith of Stalinism began to crack. And by 1956, the new upsurge forced the Kremlin to confess the crimes of Stalin and to promise reforms.

Until the prediction of a political revolution was confirmed in the actual revolutionary struggles within the Soviet orbit, it appeared that Trotskyism had no other course than the seemingly impossible task of pitting itself in direct competition with the Communist Party for leadership of the revolutionary vanguard. Nowhere in the world (with the exception of Ceylon), despite many revolutionary events, did we succeed in defeating the powerful Communist Parties in this direct confrontation. Yet we had to win this struggle or the workers in the advanced countries would continue to be frustrated in their socialist aspirations and the colonial people would be forced to fight the imperialist powers alone.

The opening stages of the political revolution, however, changed all that. The Marxist, Bolshevik pretensions of the Kremlin were exposed. Fissures appeared in the monolith and new opportunities opened for the creation of a revolutionary vanguard.

How are these momentous events treated in the political resolution of the majority? The effect of the political revolution is described in Paragraph 8: "Generally speaking the crisis of world Communism has acted as a depressant upon many one-time revolutionists. Already wearied and disillusioned, they have reacted by retreat and withdrawal from political life, reducing the effective

forces of the radical movement as a whole" (my emphasis). Since when did we regard the Communist movement, under Stalinist control, an "effective force" in the radical movement and mourn its reduction?

The old Communist parties strangled the revolutionary vanguard, demoralized its struggle for socialism, and discredited socialism in the eyes of the broader mass of workers. This old apparatus had to be shaken, broken, and will have to be finally destroyed before the new revolutionary leadership can be borne.

Anyone who might have expected that the revelation of part of the truth of Stalin's crimes would hurl the Communist workers into the small Trotskyist movement, knows little of historical processes. Much more time and experience will be required for the construction of a new revolutionary vanguard -- and much of it depends on the depth of our understanding and the skill we can acquire in taking advantage of the openings given us by the heroic struggles of the Chinese, the Hungarians, the Poles, the Yugoslavs, the Germans, the Russians, etc.

Cuba has had a most dramatic affect on the political revolution. In Cuba, we see not only the bourgeois democratic revolution merged with the proletarian revolution -- but we see the political revolution merging with both. It is for this reason that Cuba, in addition to China, is becoming a new pole in the regroupment of revolutionary forces throughout the world. For example, young revolutionary Communists, heroically battling the white rulers of South Africa, no longer look to Moscow, but to Havana for revolutionary inspiration and instruction.

The re-unification of the Fourth International, in my opinion, is only a beginning of the international regroupment that now is possible. Eventually we shall have to show sufficient tolerance of differences and effectiveness to meet not only fellow Trotskyists in a common movement, but these emergent revolutionary forces as well.

2. Regroupment: The shattering blow to Stalinism that was dealt in 1956 opened up a new arena for Trotskyism in the United States. Slander and vilification could no longer keep us isolated from revolutionary forces in the Communist Party and its periphery. The period of regroupment began, reaching its peak in the ISP campaign of 1958.

What does the majority resolution have to say about this rich experience, the first release from the long isolation we had suffered? It fails to even describe that experience correctly.

It says in paragraph 7: "In an energetic search for new allies and recruits, the SWP intervened in the radical shakeup with a regroupment policy. Leaving open the question of organizational forms if a substantial regroupment should become possible, we put our stress on revolutionary principles and genuine democratic-centralism in the construction and operation of the revolutionary party" (my emphasis).

Were this so, then what was new in our regroupment policy? Nothing at

all! For we have always "stressed" revolutionary principles and the building of a revolutionary party.

The truth was that we did just the opposite -- or almost the opposite. We sacrificed our usual exposition of all our programatic positions, through our own election campaign, in order to move larger numbers of radicals, of socialists, on one principle, the most elementary one -- the necessity for independent political action against the two capitalist parties. Even this we did more as an action, in the fact of our independent campaign, than as a statement of principle.

Nor was this action based on "genuine democratic-centralism." We entered into a bloc relation with former ALP leaders and Stalinists. We didn't impose a majority rule, even though we had a majority, for that would have been contrary to the basis of the bloc and would have destroyed the temporary alliance of forces.

And what was the result of this experience? The majority resolution has the following to say: "Although some new forces were won over to our revolutionary-socialist concepts, in the end we had to draw a largely negative balance sheet concerning the potential for allies or adherents within opponent radical tendencies. Experience revealed that significant reinforcements to our ranks can now come only from the mass movement, primarily from the worker, student and minority youth."

Are we to evaluate such a rich experience like petty shopkeepers -- how many new dues payers did we get out of the deal? But even on this basis, we were and are not so large in numbers that we can "draw a negative balance" because of this.

The actual, and dramatic, fact is that in a period of demoralization, isolation and dispersion of radical forces, we effected a union of radical forces -- for the first time in more than a decade. For the first time, peripheral circles of the Communist Party, despite all efforts of the CP to prevent it, broke with Stalinism to the extent of allying themselves, if even temporarily, with the hated opposition.

Two very tangible acquisitions resulted: We went a long way toward proving to friends and enemies both, that the charge of sectarianism, long the battle-cry of the Stalinists, was a slander. And 2. we won for ourselves the first periphery that we have had in several decades. One need only take a look at the speakers list at the final rally of the SWP in the NY State election last year.

Equally important, in my opinion, was the effect this work had on our own cadres. For years we addressed ourselves to the radical workers in the Communist Party. We had no choice in the matter. We could not ignore them and we could not go over their heads. We were slandered and even beaten for our trouble. But we did not get their ear. After awhile we ceased to talk to them. All we could do was shout at them in the hope of catching a neutral ear in the process.

As a result, we had to learn again how to talk to and work with people who differed with us but were at least partially listening. We had to learn patience, tolerance. We had to learn how to start on the narrow, and sometimes hard to find, areas of agreement and work to deepen the mutual confidence and comradeship that can and will develop.

And from all of this we are to draw a "negative balance"? The minority, with its touch of Stalinophobia, does, I know, but does the majority as well?

Those who may have thought that regroupment would bring a quick unification with the Communist Party, or even a permanent organizational union with its periphery, were of course only quickly liberated from this illusion. Regroupment need not necessarily take this form at all. It can take the form ultimately of union of split-off groups with Trotskyism. It can take the form of growth directly through the Trotskyist pole in the radical forces. Or it may take place through an entirely new political formation -- such as a labor party. But it will take place if a revolution is to be made. Regroupment is not over. It has barely begun.

Now, what about the future of regroupment? It still goes on -- in the peace movement, in the civil rights struggle, in the defense of Cuba, in our isolated but potentially effective trade union forces and among the youth. It will continue to be a part of almost every aspect of our work. And how could it be otherwise? Have the Russian workers finished their job? The Hungarians? The Chinese? By no means. The political revolution, as I have said, is only in its opening stages. It will bring ever new and more powerful events in its wake and help to prepare the ground at last for the revolutionary Marxist movement that can lead the revolution.

3. The Capitalist Crisis: To prognosticate the future of the class struggle, as Marxists, we begin with an economic analysis. The minority resolution valiantly attempts this and arrives at the conclusion that precipitate manifestation of the crisis is a thing of the past, that we face what it calls a "crisis of stagnation." I think the minority is mistaken but I shall not deal with that at this time.

The majority resolution fails to even make the attempt to analyze the economic problems of the United States. It does not go beyond the false, reformist economic theory of the labor bureaucracy. Paragraph 15 says: "A capitalist crisis of overproduction has gradually been developing. At present there is a gap of \$50 billion between consumer demand and productive capacity..." The labor bureaucrats agree and say that wage concessions will reduce this gap and the crisis can thereby be avoided. The liberals agree and ask for tax reductions to reduce the gap. Is that all there is to it? Of course not. Their prescriptions, other factors remaining the same, would accelerate the crisis, would sharpen the declining rate of profit, and quickly plunge us from stagnation into depression.

It is not enough to give the party a few incorrect abstractions about economic problems. It is not enough to describe in a superficial way some of the apparent economic phenomena. The economy is in serious trouble. The long post-war expansion is over. The number of workers employed in the United States increased in the two decades, from 1940-60 by 45%, but in the

last decade, 1950-60, there was a gain of only 15% (1960 U. S. Census). The lush days are over and fierce competition is replacing the live-and-let-live era that was enjoyed so long.

U. S. imperialism is today the organizing and directing center of world capitalism. There are no longer any rival capitalist headquarters. U.S. monopolists must think in terms of world organization of their industrial empires. The conflict between the national, legal structure of business and its actual worldwide, functional organization has become a serious problem to the industrialists and makes the continued existence of nations superfluous and reactionary. This is seen in the outflow of gold and the attempt to erect a supra-national backing of currencies.

The great post-War II expansion was made possible by government subsidization of capitalism through a permanent war economy. The workers of the United States have borne the biggest brunt of this expense and could not escape it. But the capitalist class could escape and did. Year after year it poured its profits into new capital outside the U.S., especially in Europe where the tax bite was not so great and the profit from this capital remained abroad. As a result U.S. capital became the dominant force in Europe, its unifying power, transforming the economic structure of the continent -- and the relative position of industry at home.

Kennedy's speech to the Manufacturers' Association in the spring of 1962 revealed some of the problems and some of the plans of U.S. Big Business. The proposed U.S. merger with the continent for trade purposes, Kennedy predicted, will have drastic consequences for U.S. business. But the prospect of removing trade barriers will have a more drastic affect on the American workers. Both U.S. and European labor stand to be shaken out of old moods and old patterns.

I do not have the time to make the analysis that is needed. But it must be made if we are to adequately equip ourselves for the struggle ahead. Is there any more important task for the full-time staff of the Party? If we still consider theory important to a revolutionary movement, the answer to that question is clear.

4. The Coming Upsurge: Both the minority and majority resolutions apparently consider the period we are now in as "transitional," whatever that means. We are now isolated, but the upsurge is coming and then we shall begin to live again. The majority resolution says in Paragraph 1 that "This state of transition presents difficult problems of adjustment and activity to our cadres. It demands a clear understanding of the course and aims of our movement..." I presume this is a prescription for patience. The minority resolution proposes that we prepare for the upsurge by getting back into the trade union movement now.

Both resolutions speak as if we shall experience something like a return to the Thirties. The Party will be deeply involved in trade union work, infighting as a left wing, as it was in the Thirties except that the problem of political action, a labor party, will be posed.

This is in line with the classic view that was held many years ago. The organized workers in the trade union movement will make the revolution, supported by the minority peoples, the women, and the youth, as auxilliary forces thus solving the more acute problems of the latter.

History is working out somewhat differently, as usual. The Negroes, the women and the youth are not waiting, and cannot wait for the now relatively privileged organized sector of the class to solve their problems. The uneven course of development has forced them to catch up, and in doing so they pass beyond the consciousness of those who fought before. The unorganized section of the class is getting organized. The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, the women, and others are demanding equality now. We are in an upsurge already -- but it is not quite like the anticipated one.

This is not to say that the older cadres of more privileged workers will not become involved. They undoubtedly will. (It is not excluded that this involvement could be limited to the acceptance of what is accomplished by the larger, less privileged sector of the class.) Meanwhile, we cannot wait for their action. Should we do so, the first stages of the new upsurge would pass us by.

How do we link ourselves with this mass upsurge? Solving this problem will not be easy. But we must start with a full understanding of what the problem is.

The minority is wrong, in my opinion, to propose colonizing the labor movement in anticipation of its participation in the upsurge. But it was not wrong to propose in the New York branch to set up a committee to help young comrades who are job hunting to find work in areas where mass work can be done now. To have rejected this proposal was sheer factionalism, based on the "logic" that a minority, wrong on one question, must be wrong on all others.

5. The Struggle Against Sectarianism: We say we are in a struggle with our British comrades and the Wohlforth-Philips minority because they are sectarian. That may very well be. But who are we to throw stones? We have made too many sectarian mistakes ourselves to get "tough" with others on this score. I shall list some of these mistakes:

a) We decided, but failed, to effect a union with socialist elements in the nationalist movement in building a defense for the Monroe victims of racist terror.

b) We negotiated with a New Jersey group of dissident Stalinists for common action, etc. Nothing came of this. It is possible that nothing could come. But I know how hard Comrade Weiss had to work to bring about the I. S. P. and I don't think an equal effort was made for this bloc.

c) At least in New York, we abandoned our efforts to build a united defense of the Cuban Revolution through Fair Play.

d) Our failure to properly orient our forces in the new peace movement led to a whole series of needless and foolish sectarian errors. Nor does the vague, confused Paragraph 32 of the majority resolution

compensate for this deficiency. In what way is the peace movement different from the pacifist movement of the Thirties? Aside from the peace demonstrations of radical youth in the Thirties, the pacifist movement was confined largely to religious sects -- Jehovah's Witnesses and to a lesser extent, the Quakers. Today the peace movement is composed of radicals but it has a mass support, a non-religious base due to the "clear and present danger" of the outbreak of war and its monstrously destructive potential as well as to its more apparently reactionary character. As in the civil rights struggle, its pacifist features arise largely out of its necessary defensive stance rather than cultism.

The second difference is that today's peace movement cannot address itself to the labor movement. That is strangled in a bureaucratic vice that out-warmongers the warmongers. To reach the workers one must go around their official organizations, directly to the streets. And this the peace movement attempts to do.

The aims of the peace movement -- a ban on nuclear tests, disarmament, even world government (as opposed to national conflicting states) are our aims. We think they can be realized only through socialism. But in a transitional sense, we join in the demand with the knowledge that the struggle for these goals will inevitably lead to socialism.

We participate in the peace movement, work with them in the effort to educate the workers to the war danger and stir them into action. We should in my opinion urge the peace movement to political action -- for war is a political problem, not a matter of negotiations with an individual boss. Experience will show them the pro-war character of the Democratic and Republican parties, the need for an entirely new political formation. But meanwhile, we do not tell them to wait for the labor movement. We can tell them to vote for us -- and a few will, despite the fact that they are not socialists yet, when there is no other alternative.

But there is another possibility: As with the workers and the Negroes, we say, put up your own candidates, people who are fully committed to your cause, in this case the fight against war. And we urge the democratic selection of program and candidates when peace forces have reached this stage of consciousness. Could such formations not be a preliminary skirmish, a peripheral organization of forces for a labor party? Or are we stuck with pre-conceived notions as to the order, or sequence of developments? Or do we have to have guarantees that the candidates selected will not "deceive" the embattled peace forces?

I am not talking about potential development of peace forces to an understanding of the necessity for independent political struggle. In the last election, a number of peace groups tried to get serious commitment to peace issues from the old capitalist political machines. Failing this, they put up their own candidates. We gave no support despite the fact that we had no candidates of our own in the field. We just plain abstained.

Concrete manifestations of our sectarian mistakes are seen in the following: One of our State-wide N. Y. candidates during the Cuban crisis in 1962 went on the air calling for a demonstration at Times Square that never took place, showing at least lack of realism in estimating the relationship of forces within the peace movement. To top that, in

New York we refused support to the biggest demonstration that was held on Sunday, participating only in the smaller demonstration on Saturday. Fortunately, this position was not taken publicly -- but it was taken.

The work of the Bay Area in California during this crisis was a model in all respects and deserves careful study. It contrasts sharply with the New York experience.

e) The Party reacted to the attempt of Progressive Labor to organize a student defiance of the travel ban to Cuba by prohibiting Party members from participating. This line was corrected at the last moment, but the initial error is at least a symptom of a problem in our thinking. (Pre-publication correction: A new edict from the National Office presented to the N.Y. Branch, May 29, forbade more than a token support to the youth defiance of the Cuba travel ban. And the N.O. decided on this reversal of policy without even consulting the Political Committee or the branch, despite its knowledge of differences on this question. The branch was permitted to discuss the matter, although it was explained that it could not override the National Office, and supported the edict by a vote of 28 to 12 with 5 not voting.)

f) The Party was asked to give its assistance to an anti-fascist demonstration in Yorkville. We didn't even send an observer to what turned out to be the most militant demonstration New York has seen in many years.

g) High school youth who were interested in fighting a Board of Education ban on SWP speakers (where Birchites were permitted) got no help from us. This opening -- we do not get them frequently -- was missed.

h) Perhaps the most costly aspect of our sectarian tendency is the intolerance and rudeness with which we deal with differences among ourselves. I have heard comrades referred to as "nuts," "screwballs," "crackpots," and other such apolitical insults even in formal meetings. I heard one comrade warn another that if one is going to have differences, one has to have a tough skin, be prepared to "take it." This was in a New York branch meeting. As if to confirm the truth of this warning, no one rose for a contradiction -- no one insisted that a difference could be resolved in a comradely fashion. Even I -- a veteran of 28 years in the revolutionary struggle -- in objecting to what I considered a bureaucratic action, was told that I squealed like a stuck hog. No one but me objected. I have commanded more respectful treatment from the class enemy. We can and have driven badly needed comrades out of the movement with this kind of bureaucratic, uncomradely method of dealing with differences.

6. The Solution: As a preliminary, let me state an obvious fact. There has never in history been a successful socialist revolution in an advanced, industrialized country. We have unsuccessfully, as yet, competed with the Communist Party and the Social Democrats for leadership of the industrialized workers. We have, amidst defeat and demoralization, tried to keep the science of Marxism alive, the clean, revolutionary banner of socialism aloft. In this, we did well. But the road to power in this country is a much bigger problem. That is absolutely clear. And we are far from having all the answers.

At the same time, our responsibility today is greater than it has ever been. To prevent World War III -- to save human existence -- to bring sorely needed help to the embattled, bleeding colonial peoples, we must make our revolution. I know of no organization in the world that understands this better than we. But the task of even assembling a vanguard has only begun -- and from there, there is the question of power.

Where to begin? My answer is perhaps an elementary one. But it can be a start. We must strive for more democracy in the Party; we must be tolerant of differences; we must discuss them, patiently and in a comradely fashion; we must learn from them.

The symptoms of bureaucracy arise out of our isolation -- our inadequacies, our nervousness, our weariness. It will take a conscious effort to overcome these tendencies. (In most of the country I believe we are too small for bureaucratic tendencies to be apparent. But they are in the center and in the key branch of New York.)

Let me illustrate what I mean: We have always considered it the right and duty of the leadership to guide the discussion of differences within the Party. It is not an absolute right for democracy is always to be measured by the freedom it gives a minority. Our practice has therefore been to provide for both. The synthesis in this contradiction is determined by the objective tasks of the moment. Where should we seek our balance now?

This question was raised among majority leaders in the center early in the preparation for the convention. Comrade Dobbs indicated his answer: toward greater discipline; we must settle our differences at the coming convention and go on to action. I disagreed with this view and asked that it be put on the agenda for discussion. That discussion has never been held. But there are indications that the decision was made and is being acted upon.

I think we should have far more democracy as I have already stated. Why not? The leading committee has spent a great deal of time considering what is called the "crisis of leadership." We have problems not only between the older cadre and the younger, but between ourselves. We have at least three organized tendencies and many more groupings with perhaps even more important differences.

We are not, according to the majority, facing a period of action. Paragraph 47 of the majority draft, its final one, says, "For the coming period the SWP will still have to swim against the stream, contending with an unfavorable environment. The principal tasks in this period of transition are to hold firm to our principles and outlook and prepare those points of support which will enable the party to move forward most swiftly and effectively as soon as the anticipated openings in the next stage of the class struggle emerge."

I do not agree with this statement. But there is an element of truth in it, and both the majority and minority resolutions accept this view. If they are right, why do we need more discipline? Our task will be to assimilate and teach "our principles and outlook," a pedagogic

task, a propagandistic task. To make progress in this field, the freest, most democratic atmosphere must be built.

Comrade Dobbs is the National Secretary. He has the power to decide matters between meetings of the Political Committee. How has he used this power? For the past several years we have had a laissez faire attitude toward the minority tendency -- composed mostly of young comrades and not a big threatening force. Suddenly that attitude was changed. We sent two majority comrades to try to attend the minority tendency meeting, which they had no right to do, and of course they were not welcomed. Then we attacked the minority on the floor of the branch for violating party procedures -- over minor technical questions. No one attempted to talk to these comrades and explain to them how to proceed to organize the struggle for their point of view. Catch them in the act and crack down -- that was our method.

The New York leadership in collaboration with the N.O. made a policy decision, important enough to involve disciplinary action, on the work of Progressive Labor without even reporting that decision to the branch membership. A request that a report be given was treated rudely, although finally granted.

Legitimate, healthy practices become transformed into rules. For example, members of leading bodies generally discuss their differences there before taking them elsewhere for resolution. This is a natural and efficient way to proceed. But I was accused of "irresponsibility" for merely expressing a difference with a fellow-P. C. member on a matter that had never been taken up in the Political Committee, the spontaneous appearance of a difference. Why? Does the leadership impose caucus discipline on itself in relation to the members of our Party -- as if they are a hostile organization?

As a member of the N.Y. branch, I asked the organizer why we refused to assist some workers trying to organize a union. I properly asked the question on the point on the agenda where the organizer is supposed to report his and the Committee's decisions, the Organizer's Report. Now I know that the usual procedure would be to ask the organizer privately for the information -- especially as there was the possibility of differences. But there is "no rule" on that matter. An organizer hopes for and will try to earn that kind of respect with branch members, but he or she cannot legislate it. But some leaders seem to think it is a rule and when it is broken, it justifies a rude response.

I cite my own experience with bureaucratic tendencies because these are not hearsay. I know all the facts. I could cite many more that are hearsay to me -- including the out-of-this-world story that a comrade was told by two leading comrades, in private, to shave his beard for it didn't fit our image. But I think I have cited enough to at least pose the problem of a struggle for more democracy.

The political revolution in the Soviet world has posed the question of democracy in all the workers states. The Cuban revolution has placed that question on an even higher point on the agenda. The overcontrolled masses in the capitalist world are also trying to break free. That is

the spirit of the world revolution today.

The young generation in America is not immune to this stage in revolution. On a mass scale, with Negro youth in the lead, it is stirring this country up. I saw it first in the national election campaign of 1956. I saw it even more clearly in 1960 -- with young people everywhere ready spontaneously to defend against the authorities and right wingers our right to speak -- despite all their differences with us.

Democracy is the common denominator, the universal demand, in all struggles today -- the labor movement, the peace movement, the radical movement, the youth, and the civil rights struggle. Freedom is the banner that all must carry if we are to find our way out of the monstrous terror of the age in which we live.

The Socialist Workers Party must be the boldest advocate of freedom, its most consistent defender, not only in our program but in our way of life. Out of this struggle, our revolutionary victory may come.

Received June 3, 1963.

End

Statement by Farrell Dobbs

Elsewhere in this bulletin will be found an article by Comrade Myra Tanner Weiss which she has euphemistically entitled, "Comments on the Political Resolution." After dabbling in the subject matter of the PC's draft resolution, she gives vent to a diatribe against the national leadership and the leading comrades of the New York branch. She hurls intemperate charges against leading comrades of "sectarianism," of "intolerance of differences," of "bureaucratic tendencies."

These wild accusations are made at a time when internal discussion bulletins in unprecedented volume are flooding the party membership, bulletins in which various factions opposed to the party majority are getting the lion's share of the space. "Intolerance of differences" is charged at a time when the minority oppositions are being given full opportunity to state their views in the pre-convention discussion at branch meetings, at a time when the party has before it an official Convention Call stipulating that minorities shall have representation in the convention delegations in true proportion with their actual strength in the ranks.

Comrade Myra makes numerous charges against the New York branch leadership involving local matters such as the call for a Times Square demonstration during the Cuban crisis, a trade union item, etc. Instead of giving the pertinent facts, she presents a partial, slanted version calculated to buttress her unsubstantiated charges. She states, for example, "As a member of the N. Y. branch, I asked the organizer why we refused to assist some workers trying to organize a union." Not a single word of factual explanation follows, there is only an attack on the organizer.

Does this mean the branch leadership refuses to pay attention to union work, as the charge infers? What is the relationship of the "some workers" to the party and what was the party asked to do? What practical considerations were involved from the branch viewpoint? Just as the New York comrades have no way of knowing the details of comparable work-a-day matters that arise in other party branches, comrades outside New York have no knowledge of the pertinent facts in this specific local case. All they can know from Comrade Myra's harsh accusation is that a member of the Political Committee has attacked the branch leadership for alleged neglect of union work and that she, "as a member of the N. Y. branch," received what she considered a "rude response." Perhaps some of the New York comrades may want to express their views about this kind of conduct on the part of a Political Committee member.

Among her other accusations, Comrade Myra charges that "a careful, unfettered consideration of the majority resolution was impossible" in the Political Committee because Comrade Wohlforth had simultaneously introduced a counter-resolution. She complains because the PC denied her request to hold up action on the political resolution and insinuates there was some other form of majority consideration of the resolution outside the PC from which she was excluded. Her insinuations have no foundation whatever in fact.

The party leadership has done its best to facilitate early distribution of the PC draft resolutions to the membership so that the comrades would have an opportunity to consider the drafts in advance of the party convention. As quickly as the National Office could arrange the preparation of each working draft, including the draft political resolution, it has been distributed to all PC members so that the comrades would have a chance to study the draft before it was brought up for discussion and action in the Committee.

From the outset it has been understood that in voting on the general line of the draft resolutions PC members retain the right to submit amendments up to the time of the party convention. If a PC member disagrees with the general line of any draft resolution, and wishes to present a counter-line, an equal opportunity is afforded to take that course. Through this procedure the democratic rights of all PC members are scrupulously protected. That being the case, Comrade Myra was not justified in demanding that the draft political resolution be withheld from the party membership while she took her own time to decide her attitude toward it.

Equally unjustified, and in fact incomprehensible, is her charge that the counterposing of majority and minority political resolutions at the same meeting made unfettered consideration of the majority resolution impossible. There has not been, and there is not now, any curb, implicit or explicit, placed upon her. Nobody stopped her from talking at the PC meeting in question, nor is anyone trying to prevent her from stating her views.

She has neither been forced into, nor prevented from, submitting to the membership her article, "Comments on the Political Resolution." The decision has been entirely hers and it is, of course, her democratic right to present her views in this manner. After reading her article it is my impression that her criticism actually has little to do with the manner in which the PC acted on the political resolution. It seems plain that she has important differences with the general line of the majority draft. For the present, however, that aspect of the article will be left aside, since the purpose of this statement is only to deal with the manner of Comrade Myra's tendentious attack on the New York branch leadership and her insinuations that her democratic rights as a PC member have been violated.

June 5, 1963

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