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# SWP

# discussion bulletin

Vol. 25, No. 12

Published by

**SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY**

116 UNIVERSITY PLACE •  
NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK

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## POLITICAL WORK IN THE UNIONS

by George Breitman

Perhaps it should have been recognized earlier, but it definitely should be recognized now that a new situation confronts us in the unions, in response to which we can and should conduct ourselves and our work there differently than we have for the past decade and more. The newness or differentness of the situation is a greater freedom for us to exist and function, as known revolutionary socialists, in the unions.

This does not mean that we have complete freedom or as much freedom as we had in the '30s or '40s; it does not mean that McCarthyite, witch hunt or cold war atmosphere has been completely ended. It means that we have greater freedom to operate politically than we had from 1950 on.

It does not mean that we can, without risk, conduct or engage in struggles for union leadership and posts; that will in many cases provoke concerted measures by the union bureaucracy, employers and government to drive us out of the unions and jobs in industry. It does mean that in many cases we can be known and identified generally as revolutionary socialists, engaging in propaganda and contacting and recruiting union members, without automatically placing ourselves in positions where we can be victimized.

It does not mean that we can, in the way we could in the '30s or '40s, lead strikes and similar actions and reasonably expect that in some cases the workers would defend us against reprisals; in most cases today, known party members leading such struggles would not be able to survive in the unions long. It does mean that the union, employer and government bureaucracies in many cases will not bother to go after us, because they consider us too insignificant to be a threat, and that we have relatively greater freedom than before to propagandize, contact and recruit union members or workers in industry to our movement.

The reasons are many. One is our numerical weakness and apparent insignificance. (This can change, and some day will; meanwhile, it serves to give us a little more elbow room of a certain kind.) Another is the limited effect of certain court decisions, such as the Kutcher victory some years ago, legal stalemates in some of the Stalinist court cases, the standoff in the Mobilization for Youth case, and the recent victory in the Archie Brown case on the right of communists to hold union office. (These

are temporary too; meanwhile they provide us with greater leeway, which only inertia or folly should keep us from taking advantage of.) A third is the general decline of acceptance or interest in redbaiting. (Today, people holding "public" jobs can sometimes keep from being fired from them after they avow a belief in Marxism or after they run for public office on a radical party ticket. This affects the atmosphere in the unions too: There is a contradictory, and favorable, aspect to the system of pensions in industry; on the whole, they have a conservatizing effect, but they have also led to the departure of many hundreds of thousands of older workers still intimidated by the witch hunt standards established in the '50s, and their replacement by younger workers, who have had little direct experience with the witch hunt and therefore are more open-minded and less timid about talking and listening to radicals.) There are other reasons, but I won't bother listing more.

What is indicated? Not that we act as freely as we could in the '30s and '40s; that would lead to sure and unnecessary victimizations at this time. Not that we act as cautiously as we were forced to in the '50s and early '60s; that would mean failing to take advantage of certain kinds of greater opportunities. But something in-between, something transitional.

In general, our members (I am talking of those with seniority, not new workers) should become known or better known on the job and among their fellow-unionists as socialists, party members, supporters and distributors of The Militant, etc. The FBI, the employers and the union bureaucrats usually know this anyhow. We should make sure that more of the workers know it, especially those who show a tendency to take an interest in politics (not just, and not primarily, "union politics").

Our members should talk to these workers about politics in all its scope (not just, not primarily, union politics). We should let them know where we stand on all the big political questions of the day and of the age. We should sell them literature and bring them to meetings where possible and recruit those who look like party material. Even if we can't recruit them now, we should establish links with them -- political links (not just, not primarily, union links). We can do this more freely and more effectively today than at any time since the '40s. We must do it to build the party now and to establish political ties with the human material out of which the future union left wing will be built.

Political work of this kind should supersede all other types in the unions. When unions engage in struggles, large or small, against employers, we participate; but that is not our main political task in the unions today. When progressive groups of various sorts are created, we may or may not join them and we may or may not participate in them to one degree or another; but that is not our main political task in the unions today, and the extent to which we participate in such groups and the way in which we participate in them should be subordinated to our main political tasks in the unions and elsewhere today. In general, it is better today to establish direct political relations with one worker, educating him and drawing him closer to us politically, than it is to join ten progressive caucuses or engage in twenty election contests to decide which non-left wing group will gain control of a union. And it is better today to recruit one young worker than to get elected to thirty union posts.

Of course, nothing said above should be applied without due consideration of specific situations or without common sense.

Detroit, Michigan  
August 1, 1965

## TWO PROPOSALS

by George Breitman

### 1. That we discontinue designating ourselves as "Trotskyists."

On April 10, 1951, Comrade Cannon, on behalf of the Secretariat, gave a report to the PC on reasons why we should stop designating ourselves as "Trotskyists" and why we should refer to ourselves as socialists, revolutionary socialists, the Socialist Workers Party, etc. A motion to this effect was then passed by the PC as a recommendation to the next plenum. There was also agreement with a Secretariat proposal that the pictures of Lenin and Trotsky be removed from the editorial masthead of the paper. (Pertinent excerpts from the minutes are attached.) I can't find the minutes of the subsequent plenum, but the only ones who ever demurred, if my memory is right, were the Marcyites (who reinstated the two pictures in their paper's masthead for a short while after they left us.)

I thought the proposal was a good one then; and, despite conditions that are not identical, I think it's good now. On the whole, the label "Trotskyist" is a handicap, not an asset. To new people it gives the impression that we are some kind of cult, creating unnecessary obstacles to reaching them with our program, especially rebellious youth who are suspicious of cults.

This was not a term we chose or sought. Trotsky never used it, except within quotation marks to indicate it was not his designation for our movement. Moreover, we ourselves generally did not use it during his lifetime. Only after the 1940 split did we begin that practice, when the Shactmanites used it for a while.

Unfortunately, there was a relapse from the wise decision of 1951, starting in 1952 with the fight against the Cochranites and their slogan, "Junk the Old Trotskyism," and continuing to the present time with few exceptions. I maintain this is quite unnecessary today in the U.S.; 99 times out of 100 that the term is used in our articles and speeches it is unnecessary. I wish our editors, writers and speakers would take the trouble to see how often it can be replaced, without any loss of specificity, by Socialist Workers Party, revolutionary socialists, the Fourth International and its sympathizers throughout the world, etc. And I hope the NC or the convention will stimulate them to take the trouble.

2. That we change the transitional slogan "For a Workers and Farmers Government" to "For a Workers Government."

The present slogan and the one proposed both are designed as bridges to the idea of a government of the revolutionary workers and their allies among other sections of the population -- farmers, minority groups, women, youth, parts of the petty-bourgeoisie, etc. The trouble with the present slogan is that it mentions only one of these potential allies (farmers), and that these are not the most important of the allies, either numerically or socially. Since we can't include all the allies in the slogan, it would be better in my opinion to include none, and to list them all in the explanations we have to make of the slogan; we have to make explanations with both slogans.

There was a time when the farmers were a much bigger section of the population, and when their relative political weight was heavier. Such was the case in 1938 when the present slogan was adopted. But technological change has altered the situation considerably. In 1938 those Americans occupied in agriculture, including all classes and their families, represented between 21 and 22% of the population; today the figure is around 8%, and the trend continues to be down. It is wrong today to single out the farmers above all the other potential allies of the revolutionary workers when, to take one example, the Negro people are both more numerous (10 to 11%) and more dynamic.

In 1938 there were differences and a discussion about the slogan (see articles by Burnham and Weber and conversation with Crux in the August, 1938 bulletin). I hope my proposal will not be connected in any way with that discussion (or be misconstrued as an "under-estimation" of the revolutionary potential of the farmers). The proposed change is motivated primarily by the different rank among our potential allies that the farmers have been shifted to by changes in American capitalist society during the last 27 years.

But I would like to call attention to a point made in 1938 by both Crux and Weber in their defense of the present slogan. Crux said, "The farmers play a very important role in the United States. In England, this is not a very important question because the workers are the overwhelming majority." Weber, following this cue, said the Workers and Farmers Government slogan does not apply universally; "It would not at all apply, for example in England. But it does apply in the United States." Because in England the farmers had, in 1938, become "a negligible factor, numerically and economically," forming, "families and all, only some seven per cent

of the population. Thus in England it would be quite unnecessary to argue the point, in a transition program, of whether to call for a workers government or a workers and farmers government."

Detroit, Michigan  
August 1, 1965

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The above two proposals were submitted last January too late to reach the N.C. plenum. They were then mailed to the N.C. members in April, but never evoked any response. They are now submitted for action by the coming convention, under any point on the agenda deemed most suitable, or for referral by convention action to the new N.C. for disposition.

I would add only this: "For a Workers Government" looks a little sparse. Perhaps the formula should read: "For a Workers Government -- for a government based on, representing and acting for black and white factory, farm and office workers and their allies." On certain occasions, it could be referred to in shorthand as "A Black and White Workers Government" or "A Factory, Farm and Office Workers Government"; or "a government of factory, farm and office workers and their allies."

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Attachment: (From P.C. Minutes, April 10, 1951)

(Cannon) reported discussions in Secretariat on how we should designate ourselves as the movement approaches more and more the general public, particularly as we are developing a pattern of broader participation in election campaigns. We have tended to call ourselves Trotskyists as a distinguishing label in what may be called the internal fight of the Socialist and Communist movement in order to distinguish ourselves from the Stalinists, the Social Democrats, etc.

For some time our struggle in this country has been shifting away in its main axis from both of these struggles. It is no longer concentrated primarily on fighting Stalinism; and even the fight against the Social Democrats of various breeds is a subordinate part of our work....

Our comrades in the field, however, have had the tendency to insist on calling themselves Trotskyists everywhere... I have the feeling that this designation impresses the average unpolitical

American -- the very person we are most interested in -- as a sectarian movement, as followers of some individual, and a Russian at that. It is not a suitable characterization for a broad American movement. Our enemies will refer to us as Trotskyists, and we will, of course, not deny it; but we should say: "We are Trotskyists because Trotsky was a true socialist."

What we are presenting against American capitalism and the labor bureaucracy is the principle of the class struggle of modern socialism. I think we ought to consider this seriously from the point of view of propaganda technique, and more and more refer to ourselves as Socialist, revolutionary Socialist, Socialist Workers, or something like that....

Let our enemies within the movement, that is in the narrow framework of the more political movement, call us Trotskyist. We will not protest. But then we will say we are Trotskyist because he represented genuine socialism and we, like him, are the real Socialists. This has importance because more and more in elections we have the only candidates against the bourgeois candidates....

We have to think of ourselves more and more as representing the Socialist opposition to the American bourgeoisie. I don't think we should do it under the handicap of what appears to the workers as a sectarian or cultist name. That is what the term "Trotskyist" signifies to them. A very illuminating comment was made by Herrick in a letter from Seattle. A party member reported the remark of a worker about the "picture of the two Russians" on the editorial page. He said, "Your party must be some kind of Russian outfit." These things have to be noted. This should be one of the points on Plenum agenda for decision.

#### General Discussion.

Motion by Cannon: That we propose to the Plenum that we designate ourselves in broad public political agitation as "Socialist" or "Socialist Workers" or "Revolutionary Socialist," alternatively, as the occasion may demand.

Carried.

Proposal of Secretariat: That the two pictures be removed from the masthead as of next issue, and that hereafter we run occasional quotations from American leaders of the past, as well as from our classic leaders, with pictures.

General agreement.

PARTY-BUILDING TASKS AND  
FACTIONAL HANGOVERS

Statement by the Secretariat of the Political Committee

At the outset of the preconvention discussion the Political Committee submitted draft resolutions on the overall political situation in the country and on the Negro struggle. The National Committee presented a draft resolution on the organizational character of the party. The central aims of these drafts were: to present a general analysis of new political trends favorable to the party; to project a political line of approach to the various sectors of the mass movement in keeping with our transitional program; to set an order of priorities for party-building activity, with special emphasis on work among student youth and within the promising new anti-war movement; to reaffirm and codify the party's organizational principles; and to orient the party as a whole toward vigorous implementation of the convention decisions in keeping with the principle of majority rule.

Special efforts were made to publish the draft resolutions early in the preconvention discussion so the party members would have time to appraise them and to submit whatever constructive criticisms and amendments they might consider necessary. Such a constructive discussion would have helped the convention to carry out its central task of laying the political and organizational groundwork for intensified party-building activity designed to take maximum advantage of the new opportunities opening up for us.

No sooner had the PC and NC draft resolutions been published, however, than the discussion bulletin was flooded with documents from various small minorities, each seeking to grind its own factional ax. These minorities have the democratic right to present their views, although it must be said that some of their documents are so insufferably long that they constitute an abuse of the party membership's patience. This longwindedness serves to emphasize their lack of touch with reality, the sterility of their political outlook, and their ingrown factional blindness. Without exception the minorities play the role of calamity-howlers, predicting disasters for the party, and ignoring or belittling the significant gains registered by the party in recent times, especially among the youth.

Each minority presents its own quack remedy for the situation, as illustrated by the documents of the Swabeck-Boulton, the Kirk-Kaye and the Phillips-Miller grouplets. Each of these minorities has its own political gimmick, which was developed during the long period that the party was thrust into isolation from the mass movement, and which has been repeatedly presented as a new revelation that would quickly and easily enable our movement to surmount adverse objective conditions. The current minority documents, in which the authors presume to put the party to the acid test of theoretical clarity and political sagacity, offer little more than a stale rehash of views that have long been argued before the party and which have been repeatedly rejected by an overwhelming majority of the membership.

Comrade Swabeck claims to have found the touchstone to all political wisdom in the pontifications of Maoism. To put us on the high road to success, he would have us jettison our Trotskyist program and debase our line of critical support to Peking as against Moscow on international policy into giving the bureaucratic Mao regime what amounts to unconditional support. In this country he would have the party seek fusion with the pro-Maoist Progressive Labor group, whose leaders designate the SWP as "objectively counterrevolutionary" and are averse to elementary forms of collaboration with us. Although Comrade Swabeck's line has been emphatically rejected by the party, he simply repeats his threadbare arguments, adding little more to them than wild charges against the party leadership.

Comrade Kirk has long set forth a new political revelation based on an abstruse theory about the nature of the state regimes in the South of this country. Warping political reality to fit preconceived notions, the document submitted by Comrades Kirk and Kaye perceives an impending revolutionary situation in the South which will break out before the rest of the country has reached a comparable stage of radicalization. At the same time our would-be mentor also discovers that Johnson has introduced Bonapartist rule over the country which he will use to crush the impending Southern revolution. We are told that the party must call forth a movement outside the South to stay Johnson's hand, and also that a campaign must be launched to encourage comrades of all ages to go to Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. This unrealistic appraisal of the actual state of developments resembles science fiction more than serious political analysis.

Among diverse other points in the longwinded Kirk-Kaye document, the Trotskyist program of political revolution against the Mao bureaucracy is declared untenable. In addition to making

a bloc with Swabeck-Boulton on that key feature of their line, support is also given to Comrade Swabeck's advocacy of a fusion approach to PL. They also propose a line of regroupment in the radical movement for the party. This should come as no surprise because Kirk-Kaye and the members under their immediate influence seem never to have accepted or followed the party decision that the regroupment chapter opened in 1956 had come to an end by 1959.

Comrade Phillips, along with Comrade Miller who now openly supports him, has long held to a state-capitalist theoretical outlook. In their document Phillips-Miller neither affirm, nor disavow, nor even mention the state-capitalist concepts they have been known to embrace and which have been decisively rejected by the party. They simply proceed to indict the party majority for general political bankruptcy. Such an approach to revolutionary politics is certainly something less than theoretically frank.

Also to be noted in their opus is a bent toward super-proletarianism, a trait Comrade Phillips seems to have acquired, along with his state-capitalist views, during his earlier sojourn in the Johnson tendency. Phillips-Miller stridently attack the party majority for defeatism about the industrial proletariat. Then Comrade Phillips reduces all the clamor about a proletarian orientation down to the spurious coin of meaningless power politics in the unions centered on posts rather than on programmatic issues. He argues that with a few more Trotskyists in Local 600 the Philo slate, an opportunist power combination, could have been elected, misconstruing such an outcome as a progressive step. Proletarian generalship of that kidney can never build a class struggle left wing in the unions.

Each of these various minority viewpoints has been repeatedly rejected by a majority of the party membership. Out of their frustration the minorities have now evolved a common front on one special point -- their opposition to the principle of majority rule. It is argued that discipline must flow from political line, which would seem to imply that the majority has no right to require a minority to support official party policy. We are pompously informed that party loyalty can't be legislated. This is true enough in itself, but there is more to the matter.

Comrades who believe in the party and who want to be loyal to it will accept party discipline. Those who don't want to be loyal to the party can't be compelled to do so, but they can be removed from our ranks if they are found to be disloyal. Serious party members understand all of this and they will support the draft resolution reaffirming the party's organizational principles

on this point. Comrades who take the party seriously will also reject the slick "amendment" to that resolution introduced by Comrade Miller which is designed to nullify the principle of majority control over internal party affairs.

Along with the attack on the party's organizational principles, a campaign of vilification has been launched against the leaders of the party. They are charged with unconcern for basic philosophy, political theory and scientific method. They are variously described as abstentionists, sectarians, adaptationists, male supremacists and panic-ridden liberals who blunder and stumble into positions. A general tone is set by the minorities that anything goes in name calling. The most extreme example has been given by Comrade Marcus who has called the party leaders "counter-revolutionary."

Most scurrilous of all is the attack on the youth leaders, especially by Comrades Kirk and Kaye. Young leaders striving with notable success to forge a revolutionary youth cadre are cynically accused of conservatism in cadre selection and training. Leaders of a revolutionary youth movement that is winning increased influence among broader strata of youth are falsely charged with overcaution and suspicion toward struggles outside their direct control. Young leaders working devotedly to develop a youth movement capable of disciplined revolutionary activity are outrageously accused of discouraging minority views and of demanding slavish rank and file loyalty to themselves as leaders. A dedicated youth cadre that has consistently devoted itself to study of revolutionary fundamentals is callously low-rated with the claim that its theoretical training is too meager for it to be politically effective.

Their real gripe against the youth, of course, is that they generally support the political line and democratic-centralist principles of the party majority. In the minority view that makes the youth theoretical ignoramuses and their leaders bureaucrats to boot. In the light of what has been said by the minorities about the alleged anti-democratic practices of the party and youth leaders, it would seem relevant to examine, among other things, the organizational policies followed where one or another of the minority factions has control of a party branch.

In two current instances minority documents have been adopted by a party branch before they were submitted to the discussion bulletin. One is the Kirk-Kaye document which has been adopted by the Seattle branch; the other, a resolution which has been

submitted in the name of the Milwaukee branch. This is not only an unprecedented procedure in the party. It is highly undemocratic and it is contrary to the provisions of the convention call.

In the case of political differences defined by conflicting resolutions, the convention call provides that the branches shall elect convention delegates on the basis of the vote on the conflicting resolutions voted on at the meeting at which the delegates are elected. As that provision makes obvious, the branch members should have an opportunity to consider all viewpoints before they take a position by voting for one or another resolution. It is equally obvious that such a vote should be taken toward the end of the preconvention discussion, not at the beginning when the comrades have not yet had a chance to consider all viewpoints. In Milwaukee and Seattle, however, the minority faction leaders used their control over the branch to put their line to a vote at the start of the preconvention discussion, seeking to commit the comrades in advance to the minority line and to close their minds to any contrary views.

Such organizational procedures find their concomitant in the proclivity of minority leaders to inject features of their line into branch political activity where they have control over the branch. Evidence of that practice may be perceived in the appendices to the Kirk-Kaye document. The appendices show that in some respects the line they are now presenting for a decision by the party convention had already by coincidence, been incorporated into the 1964 statement of the so-called Freedom Socialist Party of Washington. Official party policy thus becomes subordinated to minority political improvisations and that is against the party's organizational principles.

Intervention by national party bodies into the affairs of a branch under control of a minority faction leads to charges that the minority is being persecuted. Comrade Swabeck alleges in his document, for example, that "Members of the Milwaukee branch were charged with irresponsibility and accused of hostility toward the party youth when they took normal measures against a dishonest interloper who had absconded with money belonging to a defense fund and money borrowed from the comrades." (Emphasis in original.) A brief look at the actual facts of the case will refute the charge and also throw some light on the "normal" manner in which the Boulton leadership has kept iron control over the branch.

On Feb. 22, 1963, two young Milwaukee comrades were ordered to stand trial on charges made by the branch executive committee. Comrade LP was charged with uncomradely actions and criminal conduct for alleged embezzlement from a defense committee, defrauding of comrades and flight from the Milwaukee area. Comrade EH was ordered to submit a written report on his alleged trade union relations, Chicago organizational discussions, and criminal associations and movements.

Because of the scope and gravity of the charges the Political Committee directed the Milwaukee branch to hold the trial proceedings in abeyance pending an investigation by the Control Commission. But while the CC hearings were still in process the branch leadership took the initiative in undertaking to expel Comrade LP from the party, and it had to be called to order by the CC. Upon completion of its thoroughgoing investigation the CC reported its findings and recommendations to the PC as provided by the party constitution.

On August 23, 1963, the Political Committee made the following decisions concerning the case: No evidence was found to substantiate the charges against Comrade LP, and because of the manner in which the branch executive committee proceeded against him it was held to be irresponsible in its relations with party members. The effort by the branch leadership to expel Comrade LP in the midst of the CC hearings was denounced as a flagrant violation of party discipline. No justification was found for ordering Comrade EH to submit the written report demanded of him and the action of the branch leadership in his case was held to be irresponsible. The branch leadership was found to have a hostile attitude toward the youth and it was instructed not to interfere with youth activities.

A full account of the CC findings and recommendations, and of the PC decision in the case, was provided to the National Committee. At the Dec. 1963 plenum the NC concurred with the PC decision in the case.

As may be inferred from the reference to "Chicago organizational discussion," political differences between the two young comrades and the branch leaders were also involved in the Milwaukee case. Under those conditions a responsible branch leadership would have proceeded with great care insofar as any organizational charges were involved. Yet the Milwaukee branch leadership proceeded so viciously against the two young comrades, bringing them up on such drastic charges, that the CC had to intervene. The whole

case against the two was found to be groundless, and the leading party bodies had to call the branch leadership to order for its irresponsible conduct which violated the party's democratic-centralist norms.

It is hard for critics to live in a branch atmosphere where so many irrational characteristics of leadership by a cult have appeared. The branch develops a deadly internal sickness, it becomes disjointed from the party, and it loses any serious prospects of healthy growth. A branch fallen into that condition is completely out of step with the party and the situation requires correction, not pettifogging misrepresentation of the true situation such as Comrade Swabek has introduced.

In marked contrast to such anti-democratic practices, the party majority will continue to adhere strictly to the principles of democratic centralism. As has always been the case, the minorities will receive at the coming party convention all the democratic rights to which they are legitimately entitled. It would be ridiculous, however, for the delegates to allow the minorities to turn the convention into a factional shambles. The convention has far more important tasks than to devote its major attention to arguments hinged around minority political gimmicks and factional echoes from an earlier period.

Favorable new political trends are developing within the country, new opportunities are opening up through which the party can attain new growth, and those are the matters to which the convention should devote itself. Toward that end the PC and NC has submitted three draft resolutions aimed toward the intensification of party-building activity in the next period. The drafts are entitled, "The Next Phase of American Politics," "The Freedom Now Movement in 1965," and "The Organizational Character of the SWP." Delegates who agree with the general line of those resolutions should come to the convention prepared to discuss them constructively, to offer any criticisms and amendments they may feel will further help to arm the party for the work ahead.

The delegates will take a vote on the conflicting resolutions before them, and the decisions of the convention will set the line for the party as a whole. It will then be the duty of the entire party to help carry out the convention decisions through intensified party-building work. It will be -- without exception -- the duty of every party branch and of every branch member.

August 11, 1965