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**LETTER OF AUGUST 15, 1974,
TO THE NC PROTESTING THE EXPULSION
OF THE IT,
PRECEDED BY LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL**

**Transmitted by Bob Langston, Lower
Manhattan Branch, June 12, 1975**

The Administrative Committee

Dear Comrades,

Comrades Peter Graumann, Gérard Guibet, Berta Langston, Jim Morgan, Celia Stodola, Alan Wald and I hereby transmit for publication in the Discussion Bulletin the enclosed text. Our purpose in publishing this document is to inform the Party as a whole of our attitude towards some of the questions posed by the expulsion of the comrades of the IT. Please preface the letter to the NC with this letter.

Comradely,
Bob Langston

**TEXT OF LETTER DATED AUGUST 15, 1974, TO THE
N.C.**

To: National Committee, Socialist Workers Party

Dear Comrades:

On July 4, the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party expelled by decree 69 members of the SWP on the grounds that they had constituted a rival party, the so-called Internationalist Tendency Party.

Essentially, the PC's action consisted of three parts. First, acting on a recommendation of the Control Commission, it decreed the existence of a certain rival *party*. The PC proclaimed the existence of a formation to be characterized not as a tendency, not as a faction—secret, disloyal or otherwise—and not simply as a rival political grouping, but as a rival *party*.

Much of the CC report is concerned with alleged indisciplined actions and expressions of a disloyal attitude on the part of some declared adherents of the Internationalist Tendency and with an allegedly high degree of internal organization attained by the IT. The comrades of the CC did not, however, claim to be in possession of any evidence indicating any preparations to undertake any public activities in the name of any group distinct from the SWP and YSA.

Secondly, the PC decreed that 69 members of the SWP belong to this so-called Internationalist Tendency Party. It did not state how it arrived at precisely the figure 69, nor did it describe the method employed to determine which individual comrades were to be selected to be among the 69. Evidently, though, the method of selection was this: All those comrades who had declared their support to the documents that constituted the platform of the Internationalist Tendency before either of the last two SWP conventions were to be regarded as members of the so-called IT Party, except for eight comrades who had taken the step of notifying some Party leader that they had

withdrawn from the IT Caucus. That this was indeed the method of selection is supported by the fact that several of the expelled comrades didn't consider themselves members of the IT although they had voted for the platform of the IT. At least one of the expelled comrades had formally resigned from the IT but had neglected to notify the National Office. Neither the CC nor the PC, it should be noted, claimed that any of the 69 comrades expelled thought they belonged to any party but the SWP.

Finally, the PC proclaimed that by constituting this "IT Party" these 69 comrades had placed themselves "outside the constitutional provisions of membership in the Socialist Workers Party." Not one of the comrades was informed in advance that he or she was charged with belonging to a rival party. Not one was given a trial or hearing of any sort at which he or she might have challenged the claim of the PC. Not one of them was offered any opportunity to repudiate any actions or views—possibly taken or expressed by other individuals—for which the PC declared him or her co-responsible, solely on the grounds that he or she had at one time or another indicated support to the declared political positions of the IT.

This expulsion procedure strictly implies that the expulsions were programmatic in character. For unless this is the case, it is impossible that a comrade's declared agreement with certain documented political ideas could classify that comrade as belonging to a group, membership in which places the comrade outside the constitutional provisions of membership in the SWP.

Moreover, the expulsion procedure implies that it is the *IMT* positions which conflict with the programmatic basis of the SWP. For some of the expelled comrades had not supported the IT's counter political resolution before the August Convention but only, before the December Convention, the documents which the IT shares with the IMT as a whole. In this connection it should be noted that no leading comrades of the SWP have ever asserted—at least not in any document—that the IT's positions on U.S. questions are in their eyes incompatible with the programmatic basis of the Party, however wrong-headed they might think them. But certain cautious moves towards characterizing the IMT positions in general as programmatically non-Trotskyist have been taken by LTF leaders. (We refer particularly to Comrade Joe Hansen's opinion, expressed in his report to the New York LTF caucus, that there is nearly sufficient evidence to support an analysis which would demonstrate that the IMT line is petty-bourgeois in nature.)

To date, political positions within the International have progressively polarized around the platforms of the two big tendencies. "Third" currents have lost ground. This is inherent in the process of a tendency struggle in which

each side step by step brings forth ever more fundamental issues and thus ever more explicitly defines its line in opposition to the other. Under these circumstances, any leadership action—like the July 4 expulsions as they were carried out—which implies that support to the IMT positions is contradictory to adherence to the programmatic foundation of the SWP means in practice to impose the faction platform of the LTF as the programmatic basis of the SWP.

The PC, in short, expelled supporters of the IMT under a procedure that strictly implies the expulsions to be programmatic and it used language insinuating this to be the case. It thereby, in reality, imposed the platform of the LTF as the programmatic foundation of the SWP.

These expulsions raise a number of important questions. Before dealing with the central one, we want to mention a couple of secondary ones.

First, the PC's action is of dubious statutory legitimacy. What is involved here is not whether Article VI or Article VIII of the SWP Constitution governs disciplinary proceedings other than those instituted at the branch level. Nor is any question of the constitutional rights of individual comrades or of organized minorities as against the constitutional powers of leading committees directly raised.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the comrades of the CC express an opinion in their report which, if it should be adopted by the Party, would render any statute on the rights of organized minorities incoherent. For they write: "But an organized faction can circulate its own internal discussion bulletin only on the condition that it receive the prior approval of the party and that its bulletin be made available to the party." (It should be stressed that this is only an opinion, for although the comrades of the CC present it as a gloss on the 1965 resolution, *The Organizational Character of the SWP*, and although they claim for it the dignity of a "principle of Leninist organization," it is not at all implied by anything in that resolution nor has it, as far as we know, ever been incorporated into the statutes of any democratic centralist organization.) But what conceivable sense could be made of a statute that would, on the one hand, grant factions the right in general—without anybody's prior permission—in the words of the CC "to meet privately" and "to circulate drafts of proposed documents among faction members for the purpose of preparing material for presentation to the party as a whole," and yet would, on the other hand, deny this right to privacy when faction discussion was transferred from meetings to paper and would permit *comments* on the proposed drafts to be circulated among faction members only with the prior approval of the leadership?

However, the PC's action does raise a statutory question because the Statutes of the Fourth International impose certain constraints on the disciplinary powers even of leading committees. While nothing in the statutes of the Fourth International is binding on the SWP as we are unable to affiliate due to reactionary legislation, it certainly has pedagogical and moral value to examine what the case would be if we were able to be affiliated to the Fourth International. Section VII, Subsection 29, Paragraph 8, provides, without qualification, that "members facing disciplinary action are entitled to know in advance the accusations brought against them, to present their defense and, except where it is geographically

impossible, to confront their accusers." *None of these conditions was satisfied in the case of the expulsion of the IT comrades.* (We trust that no comrade would be tempted to deny that expulsion is a disciplinary action, even if that term is never used, even if it is carried out on programmatic grounds, and even if it is decreed by the formula that the comrades in question belong to a rival party and that "this status places them outside the constitutional provisions of membership in the Socialist Workers Party.")

Moreover, it is at least questionable that national sections or sympathizing groups affiliated to the Fourth International have the statutory authority to expel members of the International Executive Committee. For Section 3, Subsection 9, provides that the IEC "exercises disciplinary powers over its own members." But two of the 69 comrades expelled on July 4 were granted permission by the 10th World Congress to attend meetings of the IEC as fraternal observers, one with the rank of full member, the other with the rank of alternate member, of the IEC. While this is not binding on the SWP due to the reactionary legislation, that doesn't change the moral weight of the political norm involved.

Likewise important, but not central to this case, is whether it is *wise* for a leadership to carry out expulsions—even if it had unchallengeable statutory authority to do so—through a procedure that strictly implies, and with language that insinuates, a programmatic basis for the expulsions, without explicitly stating that this is in fact the case. And it is not a great deal to expect of a leadership that before carrying out programmatic expulsions, it will initiate, *except in the most extreme circumstances*, a discussion in the whole organization to explain and defend its view that the conceptions in question are incompatible with Trotskyism or, short of that, with maintaining the necessary minimum of political homogeneity.

Important as these questions are, they are not fundamental.

What is fundamental is that this action by the leadership of the SWP that politically supports the LTF is a second—and very nearly decisive—assault in the integrity of the Socialist Workers Party.

The political foundation of the SWP as an organization is its relationship to the Fourth International; *politically* it is the continuity of the Fourth International in the United States, even though it is prevented by reactionary legislation from affiliating to the FI. Its integrity depends on the practical recognition of the principle that as a party, as the historical continuity of the program of the FI in the United States, it is distinct from any tendencies or factions that may exist within the FI, regardless of what tendency or faction its leadership and membership, in their majority, may at any given moment support.

This principle of the distinction between party and faction in no way, of course, contradicts the norm that the party majority has the unconditional right to decide line—in our opinion they are absolutely morally bound to keep this line within the framework of the authoritative declarations of the International—and that every comrade must abide by these majority decisions. Rather, these two principles complement and in practice imply one another. For without practical acceptance of "majority decision—minority submission," any tendency conflict within the International would immediately tend to disintegrate national units affiliated to the FI into distinct, public

factional groupings, each raising the claim to be *the* section, *the* party. But without strict practical acceptance of the principle of the distinction between party and faction, the authority necessary to lead the *party* and not merely a faction—the capacity to assure in practice the submission of the minority to the majority—is undermined.

On August 9, 1973, the SWP leadership took a step that violated this principle of the distinction between party and faction by solemnly affirming that it would turn the Party organization as such into an instrument of factional struggle. Since that date, it has made no effort whatever to correct that error. On July 4, the SWP leadership again violated that principle by taking an action that in fact imposes a factional platform as the programmatic basis of the Party. The PC fancifully charges that the IT transformed itself from a faction into a party. If these two steps taken by the SWP leadership remain uncorrected, it will really very nearly have transformed a party into a faction.

Last August 9, the 25th National Convention adopted, at the behest of the Party leadership, a motion approving the general line of the PC's World Movement Report. The heart of that report was a declaration of factional war on the majority of the leadership of the Fourth International. Of five points singled out by the motion for special emphasis, the last was:

"5. The convention instructs and empowers the incoming National Committee to use all the forces and resources at its command to struggle for a democratic world congress and a Trotskyist Fourth International."

Not merely the literal content of the report, but the war ritual enacted in that convention session, made unmistakably clear the meaning of the words "to struggle for . . . a Trotskyist Fourth International." With no change in meaning at all, point five of that motion could have been phrased: "The convention instructs and empowers the incoming National Committee to place all the forces and resources at its command at the disposal of the soon-to-be-declared Leninist-Trotskyist Faction for use in its factional war on the majority of the leadership of the Fourth International."

At its request, the Party leadership received an instruction to turn the Party organization as such—the greatest "force and resource" at its command and the sum of all the rest—into a weapon of factional warfare.

The PC, moreover, never issued any single, clear statement reaffirming the principle of the integrity of the Party, of the distinction between faction and party. In convention reports to the branches and in private discussion some of us had with PC members, the issue was, at best, simply evaded. Nor did the Party leadership ever undertake any actions—at least prior to the time young comrades ideologically in agreement with the IMT were placed, with the concurrence of young Party supporters of the LTF who were delegates to the YSA convention, on the YSA National Committee—which would even have hinted that that motion would not be implemented with unrestricted scope. On the contrary, what had already before the August convention become a pattern of leadership actions, the factional nature of which has been documented as well as it possibly could be short of a genuine investigation by an international parity body, became even more sharply defined. At the convention itself, this pattern was thrown into sharp relief both by the charges of "disloyalty" and "adhering to a secret faction"

raised against supporters of the IMT in the SWP and by the outrageous denial of National Committee representation to the IMT's point of view.

But the comrades of the CC are right when they insist that it is "not necessary to spend a great deal of time to examine many of the specific incidents, allegations and counter-allegations." The simple fact that the leadership requested and got passage of that motion and refrained from any subsequent actions that would suggest any limitation or modification of it in its application, is fully sufficient to explain certain developments.

Adoption of that motion inserted an element of corruption, in the most literal sense, into the Party. Although the 1965 resolution on organization correctly insists that party loyalty is not merely an abstract idea but a standard of political conduct, adoption of that motion overthrew that objective standard. For thenceforth it has been impossible, logically impossible, for any comrade to answer for himself or herself the question, If I act in this particular way, am I being loyal or disloyal to the Party? And this is so, simply because ever since the Party leadership requested and got an instruction to make the Party organization into a factional weapon, it has been impossible, logically impossible, for any comrade to answer the question, If I carry out this assignment, given in the name of the Party, am I in reality carrying out a Party assignment or am I carrying out an LTF assignment masquerading as a Party assignment?

And with the overthrow of that objective standard of political conduct that constitutes party loyalty, there occurred, in certain essential respects, a collapse of leadership authority.

The formal aspect of this collapse of authority is obvious. For from the moment that the Party leadership solemnly declared to every comrade in the world movement that thenceforth every action taken in the name of the SWP would have to be regarded as a weapon of factional warfare, any disciplinary action taken by any Party body that touched on the tendency conflict in the International has necessarily been under a cloud. Under these circumstances, only an international parity body could possess the moral authority necessary to investigate incidents like those that occurred on May 11 or to express opinions, even though not binding, on appropriate disciplinary action in connection with such incidents.

Furthermore, neither formal nor substantive authority can remain intact for an instant in a party with tendency differences in the absence of rational grounds for confidence that a leadership decision taken in the name of the Party, whether correct or incorrect, is *immediately* motivated by the *shared* goal of taking a step towards implementing the program of socialist revolution and not by the precisely *not* shared goal of gaining some factional advantage for the leadership's faction. Put crudely: Within very broad limits, you can very well expect people to do what you tell them to do, even if they think you are wrong, as long as they have reason to suppose that what you are telling them to do is aimed at achieving what they agree with you ought to be achieved. But it is very hard to expect people to do what you tell them to do if you give them every reason to suppose that what you tell them to do is aimed at achieving what *you* think ought to be achieved but *they* think ought not to be achieved, and not at what both you and they think ought to be achieved.

But since August 9, 1973, when the Party leadership requested and got an instruction to turn the Party organization into a factional weapon, no comrade—at least no comrade who does not participate in the LTF caucus meetings—has had any rational ground whatever for confidence that any action decided to be carried out in the name of the Party is aimed directly at building the party of socialist revolution and not at strengthening the tactical position of the LTF in its war on the majority of the International's leadership.

Since that day, every dime paid in Party dues or sustainer has inescapably raised the question: Is this dime going to be used to build the Party or is this dime going to be used to build the LTF? Every assignment to sell the publications of the Party has posed the question: Are the contents of these publications really intended to agitate, educate and organize for the socialist revolution or are they intended to win some purely factional gain for the LTF?

Thus, the comrades of the CC completely misunderstand the situation when they write: "If permitted to continue, the actions of the IT would result in the total breakdown of the authority of the units of the SWP." Since last August 9, little that the IT comrades did or could do could lead to a breakdown of the authority of the units of the Party. That breakdown occurred at the 25th National Convention when the Party leadership took a step that immediately caused the collapse of its authority into a merely factional authority. From that moment on, the units of the Party—as distinct from the units of the LTF—have been functioning without any authority at all. From that moment on, the only objective source of Party, as distinct from LTF, units' ability to command discipline has been the power—uncontested by anyone—to lock comrades out of the hall. *The leadership has been attempting to lead the Party armed only with factional authority.*

It is, of course, possible that some actions undertaken by some ITers were beginning to undermine that *factional* authority of the Party leadership. This could, certainly, over an extended period of time lead to some impairment in the ability of the SWP to carry out its functions as an organization. If this is so—and we have no way of knowing—it simply means that the Party leadership stood before a basic choice: *either to make an effort to recover its lost Party authority or, by a purge, to make it easier to lead its faction in the name of the Party.* If this problem entered into the decision to expel the IT comrades at all, it is evident which course the leadership chose.

It is easy to understand that the objective meaning of that August 9 motion would escape the notice of some comrades who agree politically with the LTF. It is also easy to understand that many of those comrades—rank-and-filers and leaders alike—would begin to identify the Party with their faction. Indeed, it is hard to explain the CC comrades' erroneous idea that any IT actions could, after August 9, 1973, undermine Party authority, except on the assumption that they too have fallen victim to that confusion.

Whatever the effects of the 25th Convention on the comrades of the LTF, its impact on the IT was little short of catastrophic.

Of course, any hard-fought tendency struggle in the International stimulates centrifugal forces within the sections, sympathizing groups and unaffiliated parties like

the SWP. Of course, these forces are intensified once a number of splits have actually been consummated. Possibly half-formed fantasies of "greener pastures," fueled by feelings of hope, bitterness and anxiety, were floating around in some IT heads. Possibly a few comrades had even begun to formulate a perspective based on the assumption of the "inevitability" of a split in the International and thus on the "necessity" to prepare for any eventuality.

But the overthrow, in August 1973, of that objective standard of Party loyalty—followed two days later by the exclusion of the IMT current from the National Committee on the grounds of disloyalty—and the corrosion of leadership authority by the August convention, necessarily contributed to a qualitative change in the development of the IT.

A conglomeration of false conceptions pertaining to the character of the Party, the functions of the tendency, and the unity of the International—conceptions which if consistently pursued might well have propelled the IT towards an independent political existence began to take shape and gradually to dominate part of the tendency. Given what happened in the convention and the intensely factional atmosphere generally maintained in the Party, this process—which reached its highest development in the weeks preceding the IT conference in Chicago—was completely predictable. What is astonishing is not that it occurred but that it did not go much deeper much faster.

Here, we must write something about our role in the IT, because on the floor of two branches LTF comrades—and not the newest rank-and-filers, either—have accused some of us of disloyalty because we did not go to the Party leadership with information about the tendency.

While we participated in the IT caucus we were guided by the following general conceptions, which we still regard as sound:

1) Given the stage of development of political differences reached thus far, a split in the International would be unprincipled and would seriously undermine the gains achieved in recent years by a number of sections and sympathizing groups;

2) Whatever political and organizational mistakes it has made, the SWP leadership has not failed any *decisive* test of its capabilities; nor has anything happened that could justify the conclusion that the Party itself has become something other than a revolutionary Marxist organization;

3) Thus, it is today impossible to make any organizational contribution to building the mass revolutionary party of the future that will overthrow the American bourgeoisie except in, with and through the SWP;

4) The function of any body of IMT supporters is to help the Party overcome its deviations by convincing comrades of correct political positions;

5) Any actions that could impair the ability of the SWP to carry out the functions of a revolutionary party of that, by their provocative character, could conceivably intensify the danger of a split—even if they did not involve breaches of discipline—had to be avoided.

We thus regarded and regard as thoroughly false and pernicious some of the ideas concerning the character of the Party, the unity of the International and the functions of the tendency that prior to the May conference were apparently coming to be rather widely held in the IT. Likewise we regarded and regard some actions taken by

some ITers as utterly unjustifiable. Before we resigned from the IT, we argued as vigorously as we could against all incipient expressions of those ideas. We sought in every possible way to dissuade IT comrades from undertaking any kind of actions that, *whether they involved actual infractions of discipline or not*, could have even the appearance of involving such breaches or be otherwise provocative.

In doing these things, each of us made mistakes. One mistake, though, we did not make. We did not go to the Party leadership with any of our apprehensions about the possible implications of the IT's development. The reason is simple. Even if we had any individual, personal reasons to suppose that particular leading comrades, or all of them collectively, could be expected to intervene in such a situation in a nonfactional way—in a way aimed at restoring the integrity of the Party rather than at embarrassing opponents in the International tendency struggle—the Party leadership left us not the narrowest principled bridge to them. For they had requested and gotten instructions to utilize any information or opinions we might offer them as weapons in the LTF's factional war. *Under these circumstances*, had we turned to any SWP leading bodies, we would in so sense whatever have been simply rank-and-filers bringing to the attention of the Party leadership a situation which urgently required their loyal intervention, however harsh it might be; we would have been simply and solely informers for the LTF wing of the SWP.

The way the Party leadership, having selected its moment, finally did intervene confirms that from an immediately practical point of view, too, we were wise not to violate that consideration.

We think the struggle we conducted within the IT, as well as our withdrawal from it when that became necessary—alongside the larger number of comrades who share our general conceptions but did not leave when we did—helped to counteract the incorrect responses within the IT to the LTF factionalization of the Party.

However that may be, the decisive role in reversing this process was played by the central IMT leadership.

To have recognized that there was such a reversal, it wasn't necessary to have had private conversations with individual ITers—as we had the opportunity to do—and thus to have learned of the careful rethinking going on within the IT of those central questions: the character of the Party, the unity of the International, the function of the tendency. The attachments to the report of the CC itself offer ample evidence of this re-evaluation: above all *the willingness of the conference to adopt in practice the positions outlined by the IMT that were apparently in sharp contradiction to all those false conceptions that, to judge from the IT discussion documents, had been gaining ground*; and also the decline, following the May conference, in the number of reported activities by ITers that were in any way provocative or could conceivably be regarded as involving breaches of discipline.

The May IT conference was in reality just the opposite of what the CC claims it was. It was not the meeting that launched the IT as a "rival party." It was the meeting that halted any drift towards a split on the part of IT comrades.

But this turn could not be completed overnight. Contrary to a widespread myth—the myth of the existence of a superdisciplined IMT secret faction—the IT comrades' lips

and tongues and arms and legs are not moved by strings that stretch from Brussels or Paris to Chicago and Houston. Only through a process of intense discussion between leading comrades of the IMT and comrades of the IT could the centrifugal forces be totally defeated and could this turn be consummated with the IT completely homogeneous with respect to the questions of the nature of the Party, the unity of the International, and the functions of the tendency.

It is thus very simply a slander when the PC charges the IMT Bureau with complicity in any plot to split the SWP. Rather, the IMT Bureau intervened *in the only way open to it* to reverse any drift towards a split. It utilized its substantive authority. This authority over the IT comrades derives, of course, largely from the leading IMT comrades' stature as the main articulators of the political current to which the IT adheres and from their stature as leaders of the International and of various national sections. But in no small measure, too, this authority derives simply from the self-induced collapse of the authority of the SWP leadership as a *party* leadership. The IMT Bureau utilized this authority to do everything it could to offer the SWP leadership the chance to recover its lost authority, by getting the IT comrades once again to accept the discipline of the SWP freely and unambiguously.

And for this, the comrades of the IMT Bureau are accused of complicity in a plot to split the SWP.

To summarize:

On August 9, 1973, the SWP leadership dealt a first massive blow at the integrity of the Party when it violated the principle that demands strict organizational distinction between faction and party. The inevitable consequences of that violation of principle began to unfold in the form of the development of certain elements of a drift towards a split among supporters of the IMT in the SWP. Then, just at the moment when, thanks to the intervention of the IMT leadership, this process had been reversed, the SWP leadership again massively assaulted the integrity of the Party by an action that objectively imposes the LTF platform as the programmatic foundation of the SWP: It expelled the great majority of supporters of the International Majority's political positions under a procedure strictly implying the expulsions to be programmatic while using a formula of expulsion strongly insinuating just that. At the same time, it slanderously accused the majority of the leadership of the International of complicity in a plot to split the SWP.

Under these circumstances, it is hard to see how there can be even the beginning of the restoration of the badly mutilated integrity of the Party, of the reestablishment of that standard of political conduct which is Party loyalty, and of the recovery of the authority the Party leadership must have if it is to lead the Party and *not merely a faction*, without these first steps:

a) The speedy reintegration of all those IT comrades who are prepared to commit themselves to abide by the constitution and organizational discipline of the SWP and the democratic-centralist norms of the world Trotskyist movement;

b) A clear reaffirmation in practice by the SWP leadership of the principle of the distinction between party and faction;

c) The retraction by the SWP leadership of its slanderous accusations against majority of the leadership of the Fourth International.

Whatever the intentions of the PC, these expulsions can only seriously endanger the unity of the International.

This is so, first of all, because the most brutally obvious interpretation of these assaults on the integrity of the Party is that at some point in the unfolding of the international tendency struggle the leadership of the SWP politically agreeing with the LTF decided that a split in the International was necessary and that these actions are merely the maneuvers required to consummate that split. This interpretation may well appear to many comrades in the world movement to be the only possible one—and with considerable plausibility.

The timing of the PC's July 4 action confers on it an especially provocative character. It came just at the moment when the dangerous drift of a part of the IT had been reversed but before that turn had yet been consolidated. It will thus inevitably appear to many comrades in the world movement that the LTF leadership of the SWP *wants to produce* that "prosplit wing" of the IMT it has talked so much about, as a step in a plan to split the International while attempting through a maneuver to shift the blame for the split onto the IMT.

In a more immediate organizational sense, too, these expulsions can only be highly dangerous. To throw a group of comrades who agree with the International Majority out of the SWP with the false allegation that they had formed a rival party is *in practice* to provoke them, indeed to dare them, to go public, to set up shop with a public forum, a leaflet, or a newspaper. *It is to encourage the revival of that dynamic that in the years before the last congress led to splits in almost every country where there were substantial numbers of supporters of each of the big tendencies in the International.* Fortunately, so far as we know, all of the comrades of the IT—no doubt with the firm encouragement of the IMT leaders—have kept their heads and refused to be provoked as yet.

Despite all this, we still aim to convince the decisive section of the Party that the International Majority has not broken programmatically with Trotskyism or, short of

that, that the political differences have reached such a depth and clarity as to justify a split. We hope to win the LTF comrades away from a course that would lead to an unprincipled split in the International. We hope that these assaults on the integrity of the Party are the result of serious errors of judgment, not of any intention to split the International (although it is impossible to explain errors of such magnitude without assuming a degree of factional blindness and a certain willingness to play brinkmanship with the unity of the International for the sake of factional gain.

Needless to say, we hold the opinion that the PC's decree expelling the 69 IT comrades is an outrage, an act devoid of any legitimacy. But we do not see that this action by the PC offers any grounds to alter the essential views we defended inside the IT. Especially now, moreover, loyalty to the Fourth International and to the SWP seems to us to require that all sides avoid contributing, in any conceivable way, to any exacerbation of the present crisis in the International. Thus, despite the illegitimacy of the PC's action, we are maintaining strict discipline in this as in all other matters. In particular, we are conducting ourselves in all personal relations with the expelled comrades strictly in accordance with Article VIII, Section 8, of the SWP Constitution.

Comradely,

/s/ Berta Langston
/s/ Bob Langston
/s/ Jim Morgan
/s/ Ralph Levitt
/s/ Celia Stodola
/s/ Peter Graumann
/s/ Alan Wald
/s/ Gerard Guibet

Copy: United Secretariat

FOR A CHANGE IN OUR CALL FOR A BLACK PARTY

By David Kell, Lower Manhattan Branch, New York Local
June 15, 1975

The purpose of this discussion article is to argue that our demand for "an independent Black political party" be changed to "for an independent Black workers' party" or "for an independent Black labor party."

The basic line of our party, on the Black question and on all other questions, is to advocate independent political action by the working class. We advocate a clear class break with the existing capitalist parties and with all future capitalist electoral formations, such as popular fronts, petty-bourgeois "peace and freedom" parties, etc.

In addition, we have a correct analysis of the national question—we say that mass Black nationalist sentiment is progressive and that the coming American revolution will be a combined revolution, carrying out both socialist tasks and bourgeois-democratic tasks not completed for the

Black nationality by the previous bourgeois revolutions. In its correct understanding of the Black question the SWP is distinguished from every other political tendency, without any exceptions. Our program and perspectives for the Black struggle are summarized in the National Committee draft resolution on Black liberation.

One proposal this resolution makes is for "an independent Black party." (p. 11) When we first endorsed this idea in the 1963 "Freedom Now" resolution, we did not specify that such a party would necessarily be a workers party or that we would only support a Black party if it were also a working-class party.

In my opinion, it was an error for us to call for the formation of a party of unspecified class character. This was an error of principle which contradicted our general

line of class independence. This error was repeated in the 1967 resolution, "The Case for an Independent Black Political Party" and the 1969 resolution, "Transitional Program for Black Liberation," as well as in the 1971 and 1973 political resolutions. The error was put into practice in the political arena by our supporting candidates which were not run by working-class organizations and were not genuinely independent of capitalist politics.

In 1971, Tony Thomas wrote in the pamphlet *In Defense of Black Nationalism* that a Black party would necessarily be a workers' party "because nearly all Blacks are workers." The same idea was expressed by Gus Horowitz in the *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* (July 1973, No. 10, p. 18) as "an important factor" in justifying the SWP's call for a Black party. Similarly, the 1975 NC draft resolution predicts that "given the overwhelming proletarian composition of the Black people, the formation of an independent Black party would be a class break with capitalist politics."

This is an improvement in that it corrects our previous error of principle. It is clear now that the party's call for an independent Black party is based on the assumption that such a party would necessarily be a working-class party. But the undeniable fact of "the overwhelming proletarian composition of the Black people" does not necessarily mean that "the formation of an independent Black party would be a class break with capitalist politics." On the contrary, it is possible that an independent Black party could be a petty-bourgeois or even a bourgeois party, because there exist many social layers in the Black population which are capable of furnishing the organizational base for a political party in certain circumstances. Even the fact that there is no layer of Black finance capital does not mean that there cannot be a bourgeois party based on Black people. Such a bourgeois or petty-bourgeois party, i.e., a party *open* to the "Black bourgeoisie," would be impossible to support in the elections, even critically, without violating our socialist principles. The formulation in the draft resolution therefore leaves us open to extremely serious errors of principle in the future.

The Political Committee and National Committee members should reconsider this question and bring in a revised version of the resolution for a vote at the convention. This would mean changing the wording of three paragraphs on page 11 (top half of second column) and a short reference on page 6 (top of second column) to make it clear that the only Black party we would support would be a Black workers' party, i.e., a party based on organizations of Black workers.

Such a change would entail explaining our concept of a Black party more precisely in our day-to-day propaganda as well as reformulating our propaganda on the Raza Unida party to make it clear that the basis on which we support this party is that it is a party of Chicano workers.

I. Contradictions in Our Past Policy

Our theoretical error on this question has led to practical errors in our daily work. In the past, we have supported candidates of the Black Panther party and the Raza Unida party without explaining that we support them as labor candidates speaking for the oppressed nationalities; we supported them simply because they represent an oppressed nationality. In some cases these candidates have obscured the progressive nationalist aspect of their

campaigns or have even associated themselves with the Democratic party. In the Carl Stokes campaign in Cleveland in 1965, we supported a Black Democrat who was making only a short detour outside the Democratic party machine. Stokes' campaign was not "independent" except in a formal sense.

Thus we took responsibility for supporting candidates who did not deserve support at all, according to our policy of never supporting Democratic Party or amorphously defined "people's" candidates. Supporting "independent" candidates who obscure the Black or Chicano character of their campaigns in my opinion clearly contradicts our present stated policy of supporting "independent political action" by oppressed nationalities. Once the nationalist character of the campaign is removed, all that remains is the fact that the individual candidates are Black or Chicano, and hence nothing distinguishes them from Black Democrats.

This self-contradictory error that we have made in particular cases, which should be acknowledged by those who support the present policy, is in my opinion only a result of the general error of calling for the formation of parties whose class character is ambiguous.

The role that might be played by an ostensibly "Black party" is shown by the Bobby Seale campaign in Oakland, in recent years. Seale ran as a candidate for the Black Panther party initially, and we supported him. But during the campaign, Seale changed his designation and began to run as "a real Democrat," i.e., in most people's eyes as a Democrat. We dropped our support.

Unfortunately, the damage had already been done before the change in our policy; Seale, with our help, had gathered support, which he used to further his campaign as a Democrat. His campaign had never been a genuinely independent campaign; the change involved only a shift of labels rather than a break with the form "Black Panther" Seale campaign apparatus. Here was a case where "independent Black political action" proved to be not independent at all. We made an error to support Seale, an error resulting from our unconditional call for "independent" political action without specifying its class nature.

Likewise, the character of the Raza Unida party, as an all-Chicano party, does not guarantee that it always represents independent politics. The Ramsey Muniz campaign for governor of Texas, for example, which we did not explicitly oppose, though we ran our own candidates for governor alongside Muniz, was run as a "people's" campaign rather than as a Raza Unida campaign. According to Harry Ring, writing in the December 13, 1974, *Militant*, Muniz "had deemphasized the name of the party, not including it on various pieces of campaign literature, and so on. Muniz had also projected the idea that La Raza Unida party was not really a Chicano party, but for all the poor and all those favoring better government." Jose Angel Gutierrez, a top leader of the Texas RUP, told Ring that this approach to the campaign had been endorsed by the leadership of the party. Thus, as in the case of the Seale campaign, an "independent" party was used to further a "people's" candidate whose campaign was not qualitatively different from Democratic party or Peace and Freedom party campaigns, as Harry Ring implies in his article.

We must now also recognize, based on these experiences,

that "independent of the Democrats and Republicans" and electorally "based on the Black or Chicano community" are not sufficient specifications to ensure that a party is genuinely independent. The fundamental criterion is not organizational independence, or nationality independence, but rather class independence. Genuinely independent Black or Chicano political action must mean Black or Chicano *labor* political action.

The dual or undefined class character of the RUP in Texas was reflected in Harry Ring's interview with Albert Peña. Peña said that, though the party made the correct decision to reject supporting McGovern in 1972, "we haven't really formalized it or crystallized what kind of a party we really are." Thus the RUP must decide what kind of a party it will be. It is not a capitalist party, nor has its character as a workers' party been made definitive. We must support those tendencies in the RUP which reflect a working-class base and work for this party to become a mass party of Chicano workers based on organizations of Chicano workers. We must base our support for its candidates on the working-class character of the organizations they base themselves on.

In 1965, when Carl Stokes ran for mayor of Cleveland outside the Democratic party machine, the SWP supported him as an independent Black candidate. He was, after all, Black and running against the capitalist party candidates. Thus the tactic of critical support was formally nothing but an application of the party's policy. But Stokes was also, as a Democratic state assemblyman, part of the Democratic Party machine, even though he did not get the party endorsement in the mayoral campaign. He ran a pro-capitalist campaign, furthermore, (according to the *Militant's* coverage), which to all evidence was not based on organizations of Black workers but was supported by such groups as CORE and the Americans for Democratic Action. In 1966, after losing the 1965 election, he was reelected to the state legislature as a Democrat. In 1967, he became mayor of Cleveland with the support of the Democratic Party machine all the way up to President Johnson.

Stokes' 1965 sojourn outside the Democratic machine was only a formal departure, not a real break with capitalist politics, temporary or definitive. The Democratic machine saw this, though we didn't, and later entrusted him with the mayoralty of a major city.

The SWP, by supporting Stokes, did not help educate for the principle of independent class politics, in my opinion. Rather we lent support to the Stokes apparatus, a capitalist political agency whether it was in or out of the Democratic Party, and hence helped make it easier for Stokes to win in 1966 and 1967—despite our opposition to Stokes in 1966 and 1967.

This error of supporting Stokes was a deviation from our general line and practice, but it was a deviation which resulted logically from our position of giving support to Black candidates outside the Democratic and Republican parties without considering the class nature of their campaigns. Under no circumstances can this error become the general policy of the party. To prevent a repetition of the Stokes error, we must change our position and specify that any campaign we support must be working-class in character.

II. The Need for Class Independence

What is meant by "independent political action"? As Marxists, we mean not only independence from the capitalist parties which today predominate, the Democratic and Republican parties, but also independence from capitalist politics of any kind. This has been clear from the party's concrete policies, though sometimes some comrades claim that "independence" means simply "outside the Democratic and Republican parties."

The 1967 SWP resolution on the Black struggle made it clear what we mean by political independence in general: "The Socialist Workers party does not endorse 'people's fronts,' anti-monopoly coalitions, 'lesser evil' choices, 'third forces,' so-called 'peace candidates' or any other formations which have not clearly and cleanly cut their ties with the capitalist parties and asserted their independence of capitalist politics." (*The Case for a Black Party*, Merit Publishers, 1968, p. 22.) To this it might be added that independence of capitalist politics can only be asserted by workers' organizations, acting in their own name.

For example, when the Peace and Freedom party and parties like it ran candidates independent of the Democratic and Republican parties, we rejected the idea of supporting them, in principle, because as parties with no origins in or ties with the labor movement, they were in essence *capitalist* parties in embryo. Likewise, in approving the 1971 convention report on women's liberation, by Betsey Stone, the SWP rejected in principle the concept of a "women's party," because no party can run in an election without posing itself as a holder of state or governmental power and all governments have either a capitalist or a proletarian character (with the exception only of workers' and peasants' governments); hence a hypothetical women's party would have to be defined according to its class character before we could even consider supporting the idea. (See also the discussion article by Lynn Henderson in *SWP Discussion Bulletin* #22 in 1971.)

More recently, articles in the *The Militant* have rejected in principle the idea of calling for a vote for the candidates of the Union of the Left in France except as candidates of workers' parties. By defining itself as an electoral bloc open to capitalist parties, and in fact including a small bourgeois party, the Left Radicals, by failing to define itself as a united front of workers' parties, the Union of the Left made it clear that it was a class-collaborationist bloc, a bourgeois electoral formation. We differ with the Front Communiste Revolutionnaire's policy of voting for Francois Mitterrand for President because, though Mitterrand was a leader of a working-class party, the Socialist Party, he ran as a candidate of the Union of the Left. (See the 1974 plenum report by Mary-Alice Waters, *Internal Information Bulletin (IIB)* No. 8 in 1974, pp. 8-10; also, on the previous error made by the French section on the Union of the Left, see the SWP Political Committee letter, *International Internal Discussion Bulletin*, 1973, #14; Liga Comunista (Spain) Central Committee letter, IIB No. 8 in 1973; discussion articles by Tony Thomas in *SWP Discussion Bulletin* (SWP DB) #22 in 1973, by David Keil in #33, by Brad Merrill in Vol. 32, #1 of December 1973, and by Paul Adams in Vol. 32, #2.)

Thus in principle we cannot support candidates unless they are run by working-class parties. Where the class

character of these parties is intentionally obscured, we must characterize them as capitalist even though no section of the capitalist class supports them, as in the case of the Left Radicals and the Peace and Freedom party.

Whether a party is proletarian or capitalist is not decided only by its self-designation. It is now fashionable around the world for popular fronts to call themselves "socialist," for example. This shows that socialism is popular but does not indicate the class-collaborationist fronts are proletarian in character; it does indicate that they lie about themselves. On the other hand, an electoral formation which does not call itself "socialist" or "working class" may nevertheless be a labor ticket. The "Por Los Niños" slate in District 1 of Manhattan, for example, does not call itself a labor formation, nor is it based on any trade union. But it is clearly a proletarian slate, based on a movement of working-class parents in the Lower East Side, especially Puerto Ricans, fighting for the democratic demand for Black, Puerto Rican and Chinese control of schools.

Nor is the program of a party the decisive factor when we consider whether in principle we can support it in the elections. There are many mass labor, social-democratic and Stalinist parties in the world which Trotskyists support electorally, despite the bourgeois reformist program of these parties. We criticize the program at the same time we call for a vote for the parties. Our decision to support them is not based on agreement with any part of their program, but on their character and composition as mass workers' organizations. We demand that these organizations take office in their own name just as the Bolsheviks called for governmental power to be given to the Soviets and the capitalist ministers to be expelled from the Kerensky government.

Why is the need for absolute proletarian independence in election campaigns a principle of socialist politics, when socialists support movements and struggles which are not explicitly working-class or anti-capitalist, such as defense campaigns, movements to withdraw imperialist troops, the feminist movement, and the Black nationalist movement?

These movements, while not explicitly working-class, are *objectively* anti-capitalist because they are directed against the needs of capitalism and make demands against the capitalists or their state. They do not present themselves as governmental alternatives but rather take the form of mass-action movements usually focused on a single issue. Whereas electoral campaigns and candidates must take a position on all the major issues faced by the state, that is, a class position, these independent movements raise progressive demands on specific questions and struggle for them. Hence we support them unconditionally in action without regard for their program or leadership. This distinction is well-known in our movement.

What is the Marxist position in relation to the need for political action to solve the national question, i.e., to win the democratic demand of self-determination for oppressed nationalities?

Socialists give *unconditional* support to this demand, no matter what the consciousness is of those who raise it and no matter what the nature is of the leadership of the movement; we unconditionally support all struggles by oppressed nationalities for self-determination even if they are under capitalist leadership. In addition, we support and associate ourselves with the progressive nationalist

sentiments of the oppressed nationalities (the nationalism of the oppressed), sentiments which reflect and correspond to the reality of their experience of national oppression. On the other hand, we combat *bourgeois* nationalism, and *ideology*, which is only an attempt to distort this progressive nationalism of the oppressed and use it for the joint benefit of the ruling classes of the oppressed and oppressor nationalities. This is all ABC to us and many quotations from Lenin can be found to support it.

According to Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, the national question cannot be solved in our era except through socialist revolution. Hence attempts to win the demand for self-determination without overthrowing capitalism will in the long run only end in defeat. The correctness of this theory has been shown countless times, most notably by the failure of the second Chinese revolution of 1925-27 in which the movement for independence, led into the arms of the capitalist Kuomintang party (KMT) by the Chinese Communist party, was crushed. Whereas national liberation had been won by numerous European and American nationalities in an earlier era under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, no longer could this elementary democratic task be carried out except by opposition to the capitalist class of the oppressed nationality as well as the capitalist class of the oppressor nationality.

What, then, is the correct attitude to take toward the *parties* of these capitalist classes of the oppressed nationalities? Trotsky's position was unconditional opposition. For example, Trotsky wrote in 1931, "The entrance of the Communist Party into the Kuomintang was a mistake from the very beginning." So fundamental was this question, he wrote that the left wing of the United Opposition should have broken with the right wing on the issue, though it did not. (Article reprinted in *Intercontinental Press*, Nov. 6, 1972, p. 1218.)

It is easy to see why it was wrong to support the KMT. If national independence and unity can only be won through socialist revolution, then capitalist parties, as organizations which propose to lead the movement and form new regime once independence is won, are an *obstacle* to the struggle for self-determination. Having them in office or having the masses vote for them or support them in any way is also an obstacle. A most important principle to emphasize in the movement for self-determination is *class independence* of the working class, and this could not be done by giving any kind of support to the KMT, or participating in it, even though the masses looked to the KMT for leadership and saw it as a party of all classes, as it pretended to be.

More recently, we have seen the struggle of the French-speaking people in Canada, the Quebecois nationality, for self-determination. The League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere, the Canadian section of the Fourth International, and all Trotskyists around the world have supported this struggle. Likewise we have supported Quebecois nationalism.

But we do not support the Quebecois "nationalist" party, the Parti Quebecois, because it represents the Quebecois bourgeoisie, which functions as a privileged servant of the English-speaking Canadian bourgeoisie. The PQ, as its program and its daily functioning have shown, cannot contribute to the struggle for self-determination for Quebec.

From these examples it is clear that it would have been an error for Marxists to call for "an independent Chinese party" or "an independent Quebecois party," since the concrete fulfillment of such a demand in real life would have been, as we have seen, the KMT and the PQ, which were reactionary bourgeois parties. We can never call for the formation of a bourgeois party in the age of the permanent revolution. Nor can we call for the formation of a party whose class character is unknown and unspecified. We must be clear and specify.

III. Two Possible Kinds of Black Party

What would the class character of a Black political party in the U.S. be? This question is not as easy to answer as the question of the class character of the KMT, the PQ, and the Union of the Left, but we can use the experience of these parties, as well as the experience of the Black struggle in the U.S., to make a prediction. Such a prediction is necessary because the class character of such a future party is a decisive question when we consider whether or not it is permissible to call for it.

Yet the social character of a Black party was not even discussed in the SWP resolutions of 1963 and 1967 which called for such a party. (In "The Case for a Black Party," the section entitled "The Nature of an Independent Black Party" did not once venture to hazard a guess on the fundamental question, the class nature of such a party.)

Now, in the 1975 NC draft resolution on Black liberation, we seem to base our call for a Black party on the argument that "given the overwhelming proletarian composition of the Black people, the formation of an independent Black party would be a class break with capitalist politics. It would attract Black unionists and make an impact in the labor movement, giving a big impetus to the formation of a labor party based on the unions." But this is not convincing.

"The overwhelming proletarian composition of the Black people" is an important fact for us to consider. But we must also consider the other social layers in the Black population. These people, especially the upper layers, have more money and experience in politics than the Black proletariat. Despite the "overwhelming proletarian composition of the Black people," these working people have not as a mass gone into political action for their class interests, though they are ahead of the white workers by far. The fact is that the "overwhelming" majority of Black people who are active in political parties and campaigns are not workers, but middle-class people. This will change as the social crisis deepens, but we cannot say exactly when it will change. We can only say that Black workers will enter politics before white workers, in the main, and will set the example for the white workers to follow.

A Black party arising out of the struggle of Black workers, out of such groups as the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement of the late 1960s or such groups as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, or out of working-class Black community groups fighting for nationalist demands, would clearly be a labor party even if it were not socialist and even if it did not have the support of the entire trade union movement. It would not need to be called "The Black Labor Party" to be a labor party; the Canadian labor party, for example, is called the New Democratic Party. We

would want to support such a party of Black workers, join it, and build it.

A party based on middle-class Blacks, on the other hand—clergymen, intellectuals, small business owners, etc.—would be a different kind of party. Where would such a party go? Would it tend to come under the domination of Black workers or not?

In my opinion, this is impossible to tell in advance.

In discussing this question it is not decisive that the Black population is overwhelmingly proletarian. This is very reassuring-sounding, but the same is true of the non-Black population as well in the U.S., when we think about it. The Quebecois nationality, like the American Black nationality, is overwhelmingly proletarian, but it would have been an error for the Canadian Trotskyists to call for the formation of a Quebecois party on this basis, since such a call would have been met by the formation of the PQ—a bourgeois party despite the favorable composition of the Quebecois population.

Some comrades might reply with the argument that there is no Black bourgeoisie in the U.S. Without a capitalist class to represent, how could a party be capitalist, one might ask? Since the working class is a stronger pole of attraction than the petty bourgeoisie, especially the pitiful and assimilated Black petty bourgeoisie, any Black party would naturally tend to become proletarian, even if initiated by strictly middle-class people, according to such reasoning.

It is true that there is no section of the Black population in the U.S. which is part of the tiny imperialist ruling layer of finance capitalists. E. Franklin Frazier's book *Black Bourgeoisie* documents how weak the Black small bourgeoisie is, as does Dick Roberts' pamphlet *The Fraud of Black Capitalism*.

Yet, as Gus Horowitz recognized in his article mentioned above, there is a tiny weak sector of the Black population which can be called "bourgeois." This layer, like the bourgeoisie of the colonial countries, would like to gain a larger share of the profits while serving its imperialist master. This layer is not part of the imperialist finance-capital layer, but may vainly hope to join it.

Seeing the Black masses, its only possible base of political support, begin to go into independent political action, this Black small bourgeoisie may decide to take the road of political action independent of the Democrats and Republicans, but not of their capitalist backers, in order to bring the threatening movement back into capitalist politics. This sector, in my opinion, has the money, influence and will to effectively control any Black party it decides to join or initiate—except a party soundly based on organizations of Black workers, i.e., a party structured so as to *exclude* this small bourgeoisie.

In seizing control of such a party or launching its own party, this small bourgeoisie would only be doing what its predecessors have done throughout history, especially in the colonial countries. Such a party can be a tool for a fledgling bourgeoisie composed of corrupt state officials and middle-men, in its effort to become a full-fledged ruling class, as it was in the case of Nasser's party in Egypt and the case of the Iraqi Baath after the departure of the colonialist forces, and the parties in Mozambique and Angola now collaborating with Portuguese imperialism to rule their countries. But in the epoch of the permanent revolution, such a party can never be an aid in winning national independence and unity for an oppressed

nationality (even on behalf of its bourgeoisie). It can only be successful in winning a better deal for the "national" servants of imperialism, at best, while leading the masses to a dead end—if it does not in fact lead to the total destruction of the nationalist movement, including its bourgeois wing. That is what a Black party would represent if it were not controlled by organizations of Black workers, in my opinion.

It is also possible that a Black party might be launched by petty-bourgeois forces, perhaps with Stalinist support, as a gift offering to the Black bourgeoisie, and restricted to these forces organizationally. Such a party, whether or not supported by the more wealthy Blacks, would be a bourgeois party in its electoral functioning, like the Peace and Freedom party. It would not stand for class independence by the working class and would in the long run aid only the U.S. monopolists.

It has been argued that a Black political party would break up the Black-labor-liberal coalition in the Democratic Party and bring with it a movement for a labor party. This may or may not be true, but it is not a principled basis on which to call for such a party. The Front Communiste Revolutionnaire used the incorrect reasoning that the election of the Union of the Left in France would encourage the workers to struggle and thus have beneficial results. Such an argument is fundamentally misleading when it is abstracted from the question of whether such a party (or electoral bloc, in the case of the Union of the Left) represents a *class* alternative to the capitalist parties. An electoral formation, of whatever nationality, which is not a working-class alternative may break up the Democratic Party only to make possible a new electoral alignment of a capitalist variety.

A petty-bourgeois Black party could conceivably "attract Black unionists and make an impact in the labor movement," but only for the purpose of derailing the Black unionists in their desire to bring about independent labor political action. This was precisely the role played by the Parti Quebecois in Canada. The PQ lets the labor bureaucracy off the hook by giving it an independent "nationalist" ticket to support instead of launching a Quebecois labor party, the only vehicle by which national liberation can be won in Quebec.

All these considerations apply equally well to a hypothetical "independent Puerto Rican Party." Such an idea was put forth in a discussion article by Richard Garza in SWP DB No. 21 in 1973. This article received no response from any other comrades in the discussion bulletin. It would be interesting to hear some discussion of the principled considerations relating to the idea of calling for an independent Puerto Rican party without specifying its class nature.

IV. Our Earlier Theoretical Errors

The error of calling for a Black party without specifying its class character in turn stems, in my opinion, from an earlier tendency in our party to be unclear about what we mean by independent political action and the basis on which we can support "independent" Black candidates. This earlier, lesser error, because it was not corrected, was instead extended and codified in the 1963 resolution and further elaborated in the 1967 resolution, thus weakening our principles through not abandoning them.

The earlier error was to support "independent" Black

candidates, regardless of their ties and base of support, conditional only on their independence from the Democratic and Republican party machines or primaries. The transcript of a discussion with Trotsky was mistakenly used to find support for this policy. In a discussion of a Black political organization which the American Trotskyists were thinking of launching, Trotsky said, "If we are weak and cannot get the organization to choose a revolutionist [as a candidate for office—D.K.] and they choose a Negro Democrat, we might even withdraw our candidate with a concrete [declaration] that we abstain from fighting, not the Democrat, but the Negro." In an article in the 1954 discussion bulletin, George Breitman corrected some comrades who wrongly assumed this to mean that it is permissible to support Black candidates put up by the Democratic Party. In 1959, Farrell Dobbs, for the Political Committee, corrected a second identical misinterpretation.

But it seems to me that even these corrections were not entirely sufficient. They assumed that Trotsky's comments allowed for a vote for a Black candidate who was not running on behalf of a working-class party or organization. In fact, however, Trotsky was only discussing candidates (of various political persuasions, including Democrats) run by an organization which, as the bracketed introduction to Breitman's comments on the Trotsky discussion states, "would be composed mainly of Black workers and sharecroppers" and would be initiated by the SWP on the basis of a class-struggle program. (See *Aspects of Socialist Electoral Policy*, Education for Socialists Bulletin, p. 63.) Thus, Trotsky was not discussing just any Black candidates, but those of a working-class organization.

In my opinion, it is dangerous from a principled point of view to entertain the idea of supporting candidates other than those put up by working-class organizations. Sometimes we must take this risk, of course, when individual workers succeed in getting themselves on the ballot or small campaigns are launched by groups of an undefined character. But these groups and candidates must be scrutinized very carefully to see if advocating a vote for them will, in practice, educate in favor of *class* independence or will on the other hand confuse people or even lead them to vote for candidates who will turn their campaigns over to capitalist political agencies.

In any case, Trotsky cannot be cited as a supporter of voting for candidates not run by working-class organizations.

Breitman's 1954 article and Dobbs' 1959 one, while rejecting the idea of voting for Democratic Party candidates simply on the basis that they are Black, made a concession to the idea of voting for candidates simply because they are Black. In Breitman's article, he wrote that when some local Black groups run a candidate "and their campaign represents a significant part of the Negro community and they run their own candidates against those of the capitalist party machines, it has been our practice to give him critical support, *on the basis of the right of Negroes to representation in office*, despite our differences with their program and despite the fact that the candidate may be a Democrat or a Republican in his politics." (my emphasis). Dobbs wrote, "We support the democratic demand of the Negro people for representation in government. We will give critical support to a Negro candidate—despite differences over program and despite

the past connections of the candidate with the capitalist parties—provided the campaign represents a significant part of the Negro community and the candidate runs independent of and in opposition to the capitalist party machines.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 64, 66.) This idea, when taken to its logical conclusion, as the comrades had done in calling for a vote for Black Democrats, means that we should support any and all Black candidates because Black people have a democratic right to be represented in government. Certainly only the worst sectarians would deny this most basic democratic right of an oppressed nationality! As the dissenting comrades pointedly asked, how can we support the “representation of Blacks in government” without voting for Black Democrats, since these are the only candidates in most elections who are Black?

The argument, used by the dissenting comrades to justify support for Black Democrats and used by Dobbs and Breitman to justify support for Black candidates running outside the Democratic and Republican machines, confuses our support for a democratic demand with our political perspective on how to win this demand. Dobbs himself refuted the basic idea behind the comrades’ argument earlier in his article, as follows: “We support the right to vote no matter who the Negro voter may decide to back. At the same time we do not hesitate to say what political road we think the Negro movement should take and we do not go with them on the wrong road.” (*Ibid.*, p. 66. Before the rise of Black nationalism, the word “Negro” was used by everyone, including the Black movement and Trotskyists, to refer to Black people or Afro-Americans.) Dobbs could have added, “We support the right to be represented in government no matter who the Black voters may decide to choose to represent them. At the same time we do not hesitate to say that they should only choose candidates of working-class parties to represent them.” In brief, we cannot advocate a vote for a Black candidate (backed by a major capitalist party or not) on the basis that Black people have a right to be represented in government. This is not a sufficient basis for support.

Of course, we may attack a labor party or a workers party for *failing* to run Black candidates. Combined with an explanation of the class nature of the Democratic and Republican parties, such a criticism can also help expose capitalist parties. Being Black is a major asset and qualification of a candidate running on behalf of Black people. But the fundamental criterion remains the class nature of the party, not the nationality of the candidate.

The self-contradiction in the two articles written in the 1950s can be resolved by saying that we can advocate a vote for a Black candidate if it can be determined that the candidacy is a working-class one rather than one of a capitalist (explicit or embryonic) or undefined character. The criteria here must not be formal but rather based on real considerations. A neighborhood group with reformist illusions calling itself the “Black People’s Slate” (like “Por Los Niños” and “Raza Unida”) might be a working-class campaign, whereas even a party claiming to take the socialist road must nevertheless be called capitalist if it is open to capitalist forces.

It is interesting that none of the sectarian tendencies which have left our party since 1954 noticed this error (to my knowledge). This is undoubtedly because they were never interested in Marxist principles in the first place, and left only on the basis of sectarian fetishes, shibboleths, obsessions and slogans. Of course, it is not hard to

see the errors of the past today in light of experience, and perhaps some sectarian “theoreticians” have dug up these errors to “trace the roots of the degeneration of the SWP.” But the errors prove nothing of the sort—they only prove that everyone, including Trotskyist leaders and Trotskyist parties, makes mistakes.

V. The International Significance of this Question

As Gus Horowitz pointed out in the document cited above, Ernest Germain’s “In Defense of Leninism” is a challenge to the Trotskyist conception of the national question and puts in question the theory of the permanent revolution. This document of Germain’s became the basis in part for the International Majority Tendency of the Fourth International. Therefore we can assume that the IMT will begin to question the SWP’s position on the Black struggle, beginning with our basic idea that the coming American revolution will be a combined one.

At the same time, the major characteristic of the IMT is its hardened opportunist political line on the question of characterizing and voting for class-collaborationist electoral blocs (popular fronts).^{*} The IMT General Political Resolution fails to point out that the Unidad Popular of Chile was a popular front and rejects the idea of the slogan of a workers (CP-SP) government. Leading IMTers have even called the UP a “workers’ united front.” The IMT forced a special resolution through the United Secretariat, stating that the policy of the Front Communiste Revolutionnaire in supporting the Union of the Left in the Presidential elections was correct. (See SWP IIB, No. 8 in 1974, pp. 26-27.) It passed a motion at the meeting of European political bureaus stating that the slogan of throwing out the capitalist ministers and forming a CP-SP government “must not be made the central one in our propaganda or especially our agitation” in countries where a bloc like the Union of the Left has come to power. (See *Inprecor*, Dec. 12, 1974, p. 32). The IMT has in effect abandoned the demand for a workers’ government, thus letting the reformist parties off the hook on a central aspect of their class-collaborationist policies.

^{*} Mary-Alice Waters discussed the question of principle involved in the FCR’s characterization of the Union of the Left in France in some detail in her report cited above. She said, “These and many other questions raised by the French presidential elections and the line of the IEC Majority deserve a thorough discussion within the ranks of the international. In addition to translating several contributions already made by the French and German comrades, we hope to collaborate with other comrades in the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction on drafting some written material to help advance the discussion in the world movement.” (p. 10) This discussion material, and other articles that may have been submitted since early 1974, should be published without unnecessary delay. The United Secretariat should explain why the discussion preparatory to the next world congress has not begun yet and why there was no post-world congress discussion after the Tenth World Congress, as planned, on areas of fundamental difference. If the IMT delays the publication of discussion material too long, the SWP should publish it in the form of Internal Information Bulletins. It might also be useful for the LSO of Canada and Spanish-speaking sections to publish the material in French and Spanish. Keeping discussion material from the members, as the IMT has done, is one of the worst crimes of disloyalty possible against the Fourth International.

These positions of the IMT, together with the IMT's positions on Stalinism and "armed struggle," characterize its political program as *centrist*, not Trotskyist. Its line is *liquidationist*. One reflection of the IMT's liquidationism as applied to the U.S. can be found in its decision to watch benignly as its political supporters in the U.S., the Internationalist Tendency, prepared and consummated their disloyal split. The most extreme form of the IMT's liquidationism is in China and Vietnam, where the IMT supports Stalinist parties and hence sees no purpose in building strong Trotskyist parties. Until the comrades of the IMT reject its centrist political line, this tendency, which is in reality a faction, will act to split and destroy the Fourth International. The only way to combat this danger raised by the program of the IMT is through a faction. The program of the Leninist-Trotskyist faction is in the main adequate for countering the IMT's program.

What is most apparent about the IMT's position on popular frontism is that the IMT cannot distinguish between a capitalist electoral formation and a proletarian one. The IMT does not understand that an electoral formation which is *open* to the bourgeoisie is a *class-collaborationist formation* even if its main components are workers' parties. This is not surprising in light of the inability of the IMT leaders to distinguish between a Trotskyist strategy and a non-Trotskyist one, as on the question of guerrilla warfare and armed struggle.**

** This is not yet the time for a full discussion of the Cuban question, but it is worth noting that Ernest Germain has for a long time been unable to distinguish Castroism from Trotskyism. Germain in 1967 wrote that the "Second Declaration of Havana" had a perspective that "proclaims the necessity of the proletariat to conquer power" and was "in the Trotskyist tradition." (*Marxism Versus Ultraleftism*, p. 42.) In actuality, the "Second Declaration" proclaimed the necessity of only an "anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic" revolution, not a socialist revolution, and predicted that a section of the national bourgeoisie (though not the entire class) would participate. This it would do if the workers and revolutionary intellectuals would put themselves in the vanguard. (See Havana edition, p. 34.) This perspective is not the Trotskyist one and is inconsistent with the theory of the permanent revolution—whatever else one might wish to say in favor of Castroism.

It will be hard for us to explain the basic nature of class-collaborationism and convince the European sections to change their line if we have an unclear theoretical position ourselves on the Black party question. It will also be hard to defend our correct position on the combined character of the American revolution and the progressive character of Black nationalism against the IMT's attacks if we have the wrong position on the Black party question. Therefore it is essential to resolve this contradiction of ours soon.

VI. Conclusion

Instead of calling for the formation of an "independent Black party" and supporting "independent Black candidates" regardless of their ties and background, we should call for an alliance of nationalist forces with (for example) Black trade unionists in the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists for the purpose of launching independent Black labor campaigns in the elections. "For an independent Black workers' party" would be a suitable slogan to use.

Such a party may not actually come into being. There is not much motion visible today in the direction of forming any kind of Black party. But with such an electoral tool as a Black labor party, even a small one, the Black masses would be able to bring pressure to bear for the formation of a labor party based on the entire trade union movement. Even by itself, a Black labor party could win great gains for the Black nationality. The same is true for the Raza Unida party, conditional on its concrete ties to Chicano workers. The slogan would be of great educational value to us.

For us to have such a perspective would correct our error of calling for the formation of a party of undetermined class character. Thus the correct position which the party has on Black nationalism (shedding light on the nationalism of the oppressed in many countries) and on the combined character of the coming revolution will be rounded out by a correct position on independent political action.

The Political Committee should revise the text of the NC draft resolution on Black liberation so that the error can be corrected as efficiently as possible at the convention. A full discussion of this question in the pre-convention discussion period can be very useful as well.

ON BEATING A DEAD HORSE: A REPLY TO COMRADES BEREN AND KNOLL

By Lee Smith, Lower Manhattan Branch, New York
Local
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The general line of the Memorandum on Gay Liberation adopted at the 1973 SWP convention is correct. Nothing that has happened since the last convention—including nothing in the calendar of gay liberation activities chronicled by Comrades Beren and Knoll—warrants a new or different appraisal of the gay liberation movement by the party. It would be a mistake to have a separate discussion and vote on the Draft Resolution on Gay

Liberation at the convention, and it is unlikely that many—if any—delegates would be inclined to vote for such an agenda point. The reason, plainly stated, is that the resolution and accompanying articles by Comrades Beren and Knoll amount to beating a dead horse. They offer nothing basically new that was not a part of the last discussion on the same question; indeed, much of Comrade Beren's article, "In Reply to Barry Sheppard on Gay

Liberation," consists of long quotations from previous discussion bulletins.

Despite the redundancy of these contributions, while most branches will probably not decide to hold separate discussions on the subject, it may be worth something to spend a *little* space in the bulletin reviewing the last discussion. Comrades Beren and Knoll state they "plan to emphasize a calm, reasoned, and loyal discussion." Such a discussion will be a departure in tone from the heated and overly subjective discussion generated by some advocates of the Thorstad—Green resolution in 1973, not excluding this writer. And there may be some value in a subdued replay of the arguments against the party's present line, stripped of the excessive emotional heat.

Unfortunately, hangovers from the worst aspect of the last discussion persist in the present contributions. The worst aspect of the last discussion was the tendency to look behind comrades' stated positions for their "real positions," and to carelessly attribute hidden motives to actions taken by the party, instead of taking the actions at face value. As Comrade Sheppard pointed out then once things are no longer taken to mean what they say, the whole fabric of a democratic discussion begins to unravel, argumentation degenerates into gossip.

Comrade Beren quotes Comrade Harry Ring in an instance of this very error, talking about the two reasons used in political argumentation—"a 'good' reason and a real one." Moreover, Beren himself asks if it is any wonder why the Memorandum's rejection of "all forms of bourgeois prejudice against gay people" is "considered lip service?" He does not say by whom, but evidently counts himself among them. But that is what the Memorandum says, and, by adopting it, that is what SWP says. If anyone voted for rejecting all forms of bourgeois prejudice against gays while secretly harboring some form of bourgeois prejudice against gays, that does not affect the party's line—any more than it would make the party anti-Semitic if someone voted for a resolution of support to the Palestinian self-determination struggle out of a secret hatred for Jews. The party's line is what the documents say, and what the party does, not anything any one comrade imagines to be in the back of the mind of another.

There is another, rather mysterious example of this kind of argument. In their introduction to their draft resolution, "Concerning the Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation," Comrades Beren and Knoll "urge all those who agree with us to take an open stand, informing the leadership and ranks of their position." Nothing wrong with that. But then we come to the conclusion of Beren's "Reply" and read: "Those comrades who are convinced that the party should reverse its position have a particular responsibility to the party as a whole. Yes, you must *intervene* in the discussion if the course is to be altered." What is the implication? That there are comrades in agreement with the draft resolution put forward by Comrades Beren and Knoll who are keeping that agreement a secret. And what is the implication of *that*? That the secret supporters of the resolution are afraid? Of what? This is exactly what is not needed in any rehash of the previous debate on gay liberation.

Old Wine in a New Bottle

Subtracting the hangovers of inferred secret motives, what Comrades Beren and Knoll offer is: (1) a repetition of

the argument that the SWP should go on record in favor of homosexuality as being just as good as heterosexuality. (They say the party should "understand the real meaning of gay pride.") (2) an argument that the gay movement is not "peripheral," toned down almost to the point of a semantic quibble. (3) an argument that the party should step up its intervention into gay liberation activities and that in the last two years "We *have* missed some real opportunities...."

"Political Approach to Gay Pride"

Comrades Beren and Knoll in their draft resolution would have the party "solidarize with the slogan 'gay is just as good as straight'" and Beren in his "Reply" claims that not doing so is taking the "*wrong political position* in evaluating gay pride." Even the truncated quotes from Comrade Sheppard used by Beren in his article make a good case against the party's taking a position on whether homosexuality is as good as, better than, or inferior to heterosexuality. The unmistakable *logic* of the party's position of unconditional support to the struggle for full human and democratic rights and rejection of all forms of bourgeois prejudice is that it is every person's *right* to decide if "gay is good" for him or her. But the SWP "seal of approval" is irrelevant to the development and force of gay pride. It is not our business to pass on the relative merits of one form of sexuality as against another. And it would make no difference to the gay movement or to our relation to the gay movement for us to "solidarize" with gay pride by adopting the ambiguous slogan of "Gay Is Good."

The way we solidarize ourselves with gay pride is by backing the political *actions* aimed against the concrete oppression faced by gays, actions that manifest gay pride *politically*. That is our business. No one is ashamed of his or her homosexuality because the SWP has not said "Gay Is Good." And the SWP's saying it will not make anyone who is ashamed proud. As a political party, our role is to encourage and aid the development of gay pride by engaging in political action against the oppression that gives rise to feelings of shame and guilt, not to make pronouncements about the value of any kind of sexual behavior.

All sexuality in sex-repressive class society is compulsive and distorted. The range of "choice" or "preference" in the sense of a conscious decision is extremely limited by this fact. All sorts of false, utopian notions that deny the compulsive nature of sexuality in our society abound, both within and outside of the gay liberation movement. It would not only serve no purpose for the party to entangle itself in this can of worms, it would be counterproductive and would take us away from our correct province as a political organization. Our present line is sufficient and correct with regard to gay pride. Comrade Sheppard is correct in stating that insofar as the gay movement is preoccupied with the issue of the merits of homosexuality, it represents a turn away from politics. Slogans such as "Pass the gay rights bill" or "End job discrimination against gays" are better slogans than "Gay Is Good" *for the gay movement itself!*

Peripheral or Central or Neither?

The line of the Gay Memorandum clearly distinguishes

the gay liberation movement from other movements whose composition and demands automatically put them at the very center of the class struggle, such as the Black liberation movement, the women's movement, or the struggle against imperialist war. Comrades Beren and Knoll accept the distinction, but feel that the periphery of the class struggle is an unacceptable alternative to the center of the struggle.

And, in fact, their draft resolution quotes a phrase from the introduction of *Towards An American Socialist Revolution* in an attempt to place the gay liberation movement "at the center of [the class struggle's] advance." The actual quote from Gus Horowitz's introduction applied to the entire radicalization of the 1960s and early 1970s, of which the gay liberation movement was a part. And, at the time, the struggles that were a part of the radicalization were indeed at the center of the advance of the class struggle. It was the antiwar movement, the Black movement, the Chicano movement, the women's movement, and the prison rebellion, gay liberation, and other struggles that fueled and were reinforced by the radicalization that penetrated the masses and shook up the political life of the United States.

That radicalization continues to extend itself and to deepen, even as it has contributed to the more profound radicalization now beginning to take place in reaction to the generalized crisis of world capitalism—the radicalization of the working class as a class.

To quibble about the term "peripheral" in the context of the radicalization of the working class is just plain silly. Gay liberation is in no sense *central* to the major battles appearing on the horizon. That does not mean it is not important, or that it will go away, or that we should ignore it. It only means that it is not central. Comrades Beren and Knoll state that the demands of the gay liberation movement will not be met under capitalism. That is true, but it does not place gay liberation at the center of the class struggle. There is little that will be completely won under capitalism. From here on in, the capitalists will be trying to take back much of what has been won already. The fight of the working class to maintain its gains and advance its class interests will revolve around the fundamental issues of the capitalist exploitation of labor. The self-determination struggle of oppressed nationalities, the fight of women for equality, and the fight against imperialist war merge with these fundamental questions in a way the gay liberation movement does not. Recognizing this incontrovertible fact does *not* demean the gay liberation movement; it only places it in context with a rounded perspective and sense of proportion.

As a class-struggle left wing develops in the labor movement, gay liberation will be one of myriad issues on which it will take a stand. A class-struggle left wing that will aspire to lead the whole class into a confrontation for state power will take positions on *all* issues. But the *key* questions that will be *central* to forging a class-struggle program remain distinct from the other issues.

Should We Be Doing More?

The most concrete aspect of the draft resolution and accompanying articles is the criticism of Comrades Beren

and Knoll of the party's actual activity—or lack of it—in the gay liberation movement since the 1973 SWP convention. But, while this section is more concrete, it is no less confused. The draft resolution says we should "have an open-minded and flexible attitude toward intervention," that "where we have the forces, we should intervene in building actions around specific issues . . . attend meetings and work with existing groups or coalitions," but we "should not at this time take the initiative in launching a national campaign . . . Nor should we take central organizational responsibility." It says a "large-scale colonization of the gay movement would be inappropriate."

Concretely, the document calls for fractional interventions at local and national conferences, where we would advocate mass actions. Presumably, our fraction representatives would tell people at these conferences: You should organize a mass action around such and such a demand. If the response were favorable, he or she would then explain to those present that we could assume no central responsibility for carrying out the action we had just helped call for. In particular, the resolution states we should become involved in plans for Gay Pride Week next year. The resolution also advocates stepped-up coverage of gay liberation in our press and "thinking out our relationship" to two international conferences, one in Norway and another in Puerto Rico. It seems a bit mixed-up.

While it is entirely possible that our press should have reported some of the events listed in the resolution's calendar, and that some local opportunities for intervention have been missed in the last two years, this is a separate question from the perspective of fractional interventions into conferences or Gay Pride Week, and from the draft resolution as a whole.

The line adopted with the Memorandum allows for local interventions and for press coverage of gay liberation activities. Comrades Beren's and Knoll's resolution would—in addition to taking the wrong position on "Gay Is Good" and muddling the distinction between gay liberation and movements more central to the class struggle—cut across the very "flexible attitude" they claim to favor, laying down as obligatory tasks that are either beyond our abilities (without sacrificing other priorities) or not politically fruitful or both. The fact is that, if we have missed opportunities vis-a-vis gay liberation in the last two years, they are not the only—or the most important—we have missed. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the reason they were missed lies in the Memorandum. It is more likely that the reason is the same as that for our other missed opportunities—basically, we are still much too small. On balance, reviewing the party's record since 1973, taking into account the calendar of gay liberation activities in the resolution *and* all of our other activity, there is more argument for the view that the Memorandum has passed the test of events than for the opposite conclusion drawn by Comrades Beren and Knoll.

Just as it would be a diversion from our purpose to adopt the positions put forward in the Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation, it would be a diversion from the potentially rich discussion of the exciting period now opening up to spend much more time or energy on beating a dead horse.