

NOV 16 1978

X:PC

202 West 78th Street
New York, N. Y. 10024
November 14, 1978

Doug Jenness
Socialist Workers Party
14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014

Dear Doug:

As I mentioned in my phone conversation with you today, I've enclosed a copy of my remarks on the Upper West Side branch floor early in the October 30th discussion on the E.C. proposal to drop Hedda Garza from provisional membership.

I've thought a great deal about this matter since then and have come to the following conclusions:

1. I stand behind everything I said on October 30th and, if anything, feel even stronger that a serious error has been made by the Organizer and E.C. in the way this entire matter was handled.

2. There is no excuse for not having had the branch discussion taped, particularly in view of the fact that the previous week's meeting in which the question first came up was taped. It had to be clear to the E.C. that there would be considerable discussion on both sides of the E.C. proposal and that not taping it would make it difficult to re-create the reports and contributions later.

3. This is the first time in my 12 years in the party that I have seen so arbitrary a procedure used to deal with a question of membership. I am deeply disturbed by what happened and believe it violates our democratic norms.

4. Since tapes are not available of the Upper West Side discussion itself, I feel it important to note that many branch activists (at least 13 of those present for all or most of the October 30th discussion) are opposed to the way this matter was handled by the Organizer and the E.C. and that a proposal to drop Hedda was brought in on flimsy and inappropriate grounds. such

5. I believe the branch leadership had a responsibility to all the comrades to approach this issue with full political clarity. As such, the parameters of the discussion should have been clearly laid out at the start -- that in discussion was Hedda's status as a provisional member, not the role she played in the FAPO tendency, the IT - LTF faction fight, RMOC or in any other organization or past internal dispute. It was disorienting to the newer comrades who weren't around during these earlier events for the E.C. to drag them into the discussion and, in any case, irrelevant to the matter at hand.

The net result of this approach was to heat up the discussion unnecessarily by opening up past sores. It also made it appear that Hedda was on trial -- and a star chamber trial at that.

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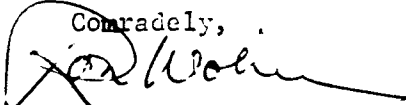
6. Since I've never before gone through a situation like this, I'm not sure of the procedure the party should use in correcting what I and many other comrades view as a serious error. I leave that to you and the Political Committee to discuss and develop the best way to proceed.

But I want to be clear on the result I'm in favor of: the immediate reinstatement of Hedda Garza as a provisional member for the reasons outlined in my enclosed remarks and because I believe that errors in both procedure and judgement were made by the Organizer and E.C. in this matter.

It seems to me that it might be better to transfer her to another branch in the local to accomplish this reinstatement most effectively. When personality conflicts between an organizer or other branch leader and a branch member arise, intra local transfers have been used in the past to ease the tension and take both individuals' feelings into account. I'm not necessarily advocating this, especially since for many political reasons Hedda's assignment to the Upper West Side branch makes sense, but I believe it should be considered.

Of course, I am available to discuss this entire situation with you or the P.C. at greater length if it would be helpful. In any case, I'd appreciate hearing from you with the Political Committee's reaction to my comments and those of other comrades who feel that errors were made in the procedures used to drop Hedda Garza from provisional membership in the party.

Comradely,



Ron Wolin

encl.

RON WOLIN'S REMARKS ON UPPER WEST SIDE BRANCH FLOOR -- 10/30/78

I was very surprised -- based on last week's discussion -- to hear Mike's report and the Executive Committee proposal to drop Hedda from provisional membership. It's a very serious step and one which raises many questions.

First, I think it's correct that Hedda not be present during this discussion. I agree that only the party membership can decide who is to be a member and if that individual will be a loyal and disciplined comrade.

Next, I want to separate out past issues from those under discussion currently and suggest this be done for the rest of the discussion. IT - LTF differences in the past are not what's at issue here. I have various feelings on these matters also, but will refrain from bringing them up. I call on everyone to do the same. What Hedda said in 1973, '76 or earlier is not relevant to what we're discussing tonight.

Hedda has been in our branch a short time, maybe three weeks. What about her work in Chelsea for months? Obviously she carried out her assignments well from the reports we've gotten. There were no questions raised about her loyalty to the party or her agreement with our program.

She may have subjective problems, but many people within the party do/ ^{since we reflect external conditions} That's no reason in itself to drop her. After all, isn't it capitalism and the tremendous pressures and alienation of the system that helps to create all our subjective problems? Isn't that one of the important reasons we all joined the Socialist Workers Party? Because we believe it's only through the party and a complete restructuring of society that we can get rid of an environment that distorts and destroys human beings.

We can't substitute psychology for politics and I don't believe it gets us anywhere to try to analyze Hedda's personality and make projections from that.

Now -- sometime since last Monday's branch meeting -- a majority of the E.C.

calls for dropping her from provisional membership. In my mind it's at least an ill-advised move and could be a serious mistake.

If we didn't think Hedda was a loyal, disciplined comrade how could she have been offered and given the key assignments we all voted on during the past few weeks? As I recall, no one voted against her being assigned to the campaign committee, the antinuke fraction, Marroquin and Harris defense work.

What did Hedda do in the past week or two that caused a total reassessment of her ability to carry out her assignments or function as a provisional member? Mike and the Executive Committee have failed to bring up any real evidence to warrant dropping her.

Then there is the question of Hedda as a human being and experienced revolutionist. She is too valuable a comrade to be treated so precipitously. Her 16 years of loyal party building, as Barbara mentioned, counts for something. I was campaign manager for one of the campaigns in which she ran for Congress, I believe. She did a hell of a job and was always ~~been~~ an excellent party spokesperson. Recently, she played an important role in the recruitment of Barbara, Lisa and perhaps others. We are simply too small a party to turn someone/who ^{away} we all admit is a revolutionist and a supporter of our program.

My proposal is that we don't agree to ending her provisional membership and that instead we continue to work with her...see how the work goes. Let's lower the heat of the discussion. A big mistake could be made. Time is on the side of the party. There's no reason for us to act now to send Hedda into political isolation -- because that's what is being proposed.

There is not enough proof that Hedda is not going to be a loyal, disciplined member from her current actions...and that's what must be shown. We can't say she represents an "embryonic cliquist" and use that as sufficient reason to end her provisional membership.

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X: PC

November 14, 1978

Doug Jenness
Political Committee, SWP
410 West Street
New York, N.Y.

NOV 17 1978

Dear Comrade Jenness:

I recently learned of the decision by the Upper West Side branch to drop Hedda Garza from provisional membership in the party. This decision has particularly shocked and angered me. Although I am not a member of the UWS branch, and I did not attend the meeting where Hedda was dropped, I can provide you with incidents surrounding Cde. Garza's application in the Chelsea branch. I think these occurrences may shed some light on the unusually factional reasons why her provisional membership was stripped from her in the UWS branch. In doing so, I will relate only ~~the~~ incidents which I personally witnessed.

As you may know, I opposed the procedures which separated the Internationalist Tendency from our movement in 1974, although I generally supported the political positions of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction. The factional struggle which rent our movement was a great source of pain to me. I was therefore very pleased when both major factions agreed to dissolve and I was heartened by the serious efforts made by both sides to heal old wounds, splits and divisions in a number of countries after nearly a decade of factional strife.

Consequently, I was pleasantly surprised when I learned that Cde. Garza was assigned by the LEC to work with the Chelsea branch. Her decision to seek provisional membership in the SWP seemed to me to be one small facet of the larger world-wide effort to put the factional battles of the past behind us.

Although disposed to approach her with a comradely attitude, I did not at all give her a "blank check" to write her own ticket into the party. I wanted to be certain in my own mind that she had fundamental political agreement with the party and FI, and that she was willing to adhere to our method of functioning. The IT had committed too many acts of indiscipline for me to not to be concerned about this. The only way I could determine her attitudes on these questions was to take the time to sit down and talk to her about them. Hedda proved very receptive to my initiatives, and we discussed our views on a whole range of issues. Through these discussions, I became convinced that Hedda did indeed have fundamental political agreement with the SWP and FI. I also realized that she was loyal to the party and would abide by its discipline. On several occasions she stated that the IT had committed very real violations of our democratic-centralist norms and she understood that the party had to take action against people violating its norms of functioning. She felt, however, that the expulsion of the IT without charges, trial, etc. had also been incorrect, but

happened in the midst of a faction fight and was a thing of the past.

Unfortunately, it gradually became clear to me that my approach of judging Hedda on the basis of her present attitudes rather than those of the past was not shared by many members of the Chelsea branch, particularly by members of the branch's Executive Committee. As the leading comrades in the branch, and the people directly responsible for integrating Hedda into the life of the branch, I expected the EC members to take positive initiatives. They failed to do this in two respects.

Firstly, they did absolutely nothing to make her feel at ease around the branch by setting an example to other comrades by allowing her to get to know them and vice versa. They barely spoke to her let alone socializing with her, allowing her to remain some mysterious stranger who regularly popped in and out of branch functions. My suggestions to change this met with indifference. I recall raising the subject with Cde. Mike Maggi, the Chelsea organizer. I reminded him that he himself had motivated such a posture from the branch floor, but he replied that he could not force people to socialize with Hedda Garza if they did not want to.

Secondly, the EC members failed to initiate any political discussions with Cde. Garza which would have permitted them to judge her on the basis of her present attitudes, Comrades appeared to be more concerned with her past "sins." In fact, only one EC member even bothered to set up a meeting with Hedda precisely to discuss both her present and past views and attitudes. (This was Cde. Louis P., presently a member of the Kansas City branch.) He met with Cde. Garza about one week before the EC discussed her request for provisional membership. He was determined to support her membership after he spoke with her.

Thus, Hedda was expected to function in a branch where the leadership was indifferent to her attempts to open up a dialogue with party comrades. Upset by this virtual isolation and lack of interest, she expressed her dismay to me and a few other comrades. These "complaints" were often cited as proof of an "anti-leadership attitude."

The underpinnings of this problem was not completely revealed to me until the ~~was~~ question of Cde. Garza's application for provisional membership came before the EC in February of this year. For reasons completely unrelated to Hedda's application, I was invited to attend the meeting, so I possess first-hand knowledge of how the EC reached its decision.

Cde. Maggi presented a report to the EC in which he urged that Cde. Garza's application be rejected (although he did not rule out acceptance of the application at a later date). He placed particular emphasis on two factors: the question of loyalty to the party and activity in the branch. This approach seemed odd to me because in every other case of IT reapplications, as far as I know, branch ECs have sometimes delayed putting the question before the branch but have never recommended that

an applicant be rejected. Michael said that one reason for questioning Hedda's loyalty was that she attempted to do contact work "behind the back of the party." He strongly insinuated that her motive was to build up a personal following.

In point of fact, I was present when Hedda informed EC member Jeannie Weissman that a comrade from England who she did not know had asked to come over with greetings from mutual friends in England. Eric P. arrived and in the course of their discussion, he told her that he had been around the Spartacist League in the U.S. before he went to England. He had heard that Hedda had recruited Bob Pearlman to the party before she had even reapplied herself, and he asked her to call a woman friend of his, Barbara K. and try to bring her closer to the party. Barbara had heard Hedda speak in defense of the SWP at a forum sponsored by the Marxist Education Collective and had been impressed with what Hedda had to say. Barbara had also been around the SL. A tentative lunch appointment was made for Hedda and Barbara to meet. Both Jeannie and I asked her if she had informed Michael about these events, and she told us it had just happened and she was about to discuss the possibilities with Michael since there were several dissident SLers around New York.

On the EC, however, Michael stated that he forbade her to meet with Barbara alone, but that he relented after much arguing. The fact that Hedda had made contact with Barbara before consulting him, he said, demonstrated that she was working behind the party's back in a disloyal manner. The fact that she convinced Eric P. to join the party and asked Michael's advice and aid with Eric's contacts held no weight.

Also according to Michael M., Hedda's lack of political activity in the branch over a eleven-month period was illustrated by her three-week vacation in Europe during the summer of 1977. She should have concentrated on branch work instead, he said. He also insinuated that the money should have been used to raise her sustainer. This trip to Europe was her first and only vacation there, and she financed it by subletting her apartment in New York and staying with friends before going to the Oberlin convention. The only assignment Hedda had been given, despite requests for more, was on the forum committee, where the comrades who worked with her felt she had done an excellent job.

The level of most of the discussion of Michael's report was abysmally factional and can hardly be dignified by the term political. Here are a few examples:

Cde. Jerry Kerr, the branch's Militant sales director, raised doubts as to whether Hedda actually sold the papers she signed out. He felt that it was "strange" that he had never personally witnessed her selling an issue. He raised the possibility that she was throwing the papers out and claiming to sell them. Many comrades have before and since sold alongside Hedda and are very aware that she is a good salesperson.

Because of the coldness and hostility so prevalent in the branch, Hedda had sold with comrades who were a bit friendlier; Jerry did not number among these.

Cde. Dave Weissman stated that her IT history made her loyalty suspect and said that he thought she should never get into the party. It is interesting to note that neither Cdes. Kerr, ~~Smith~~ or Weissman and Weissman were members of the Trotskyist movement during the faction fight. The Weissmans, in fact, were members of an opponent organization, the Workers League, at that time, yet they all displayed what one can only call a ~~an~~ factional attitude, a concern for the past and not the present. The Executive Committee brought in their negative decision on Hedda's membership, and the branch, almost none of ~~whom~~ ^{whom} had ever conversed with Hedda, accepted the ECs recommendations. (I was the only member who voted for her admission).

Shortly thereafter, Michael asked me into his office for a meeting. There were a number of comrades transferring out of New York to strengthen other branches. Consequently, several ~~a~~ leading comrades in Chelsea, including several EC members, were being asked to transfer to other branches within the Local to make up the slack. Since I live in Brooklyn, would I be willing to transfer to that branch? I listened to his motivation, asked a few questions, and agreed to transfer.

Later that evening, I began to reconsider my decision. From a political point of view, the decision seemed a sound one. However, I began to worry about the effect my transfer would have on Hedda's morale since I was one of the very few friends she had in the branch. I called Michael and discussed ~~my~~ my hesitations with him. He told me not to worry, that he would personally see to it that other comrades spoke to Hedda. Besides, he ~~a~~ said, comrades were very impressed with her performance after the EC and Branch decision on her membership. He told me that after the vote he had thought that there was a 90% chance that Hedda would try to make an international scandal over the Branch's refusal of her membership application and a 10% chance that she would go to Europe or Canada to join a section there. However, if anything, he said that her participation in branch functions had increased. Because of this, he ~~a~~ assured me that he would have no problem presenting a positive report on her request for provisional membership after the spring sales drive if her level of activity stayed the same. Reassured, I accepted my transfer. Unfortunately, Michael did not keep either promise. I learned that when the sales drive was over, he refused to discuss her application and she remained as isolated as ever except for the friendship of people she had recruited to the branch!

Hedda continued to maintain her high level of activity and Michael continued to resist her membership requests. Finally, the situation became so transparent and bizarre that growing numbers of comrades began to insist that her application be taken up and accepted. This finally led to her provisional membership.

From my own personal experience in Chelsea, and from what I have learned about the events which occurred in the UWS branch, I can only conclude that Hedda was ~~dropped~~ dropped from provisional membership after only six weeks because of the undying factionalism of Cde. Maggi and others who refuse to put the past behind them.

I therefore strongly urge the Political Committee to investigate all aspects of this affair.

Comradely,

Kurt T. Hill

Kurt T. Hill
Brooklyn Branch, N.Y. Local

c.c./file