

5/27/72

To the AC

If there is no objection, will you please show these Post-Plenum Notes to members of the PC? Thank you.

Comradely,

George Breitman

POST-PLENUM NOTES

TWO PARTY SYSTEM; WALLACE MOVEMENT. As I said to Barry before he gave the summary of his political report, these are two important elements in the total political picture in this country which we have failed to analyze or handle sufficiently in our propaganda. In his summary he mentioned the first as a subject that the PC should take up soon. In the past, it is true, we have speculated^{on} or predicted the ending of the two-party system (1948, 1968) and it turned out that we were premature. But that is no reason why we should ignore this question now. I thought we underhandled the Wallace question in 1968, and think our failure to deal with it and the questions it raises in 1972 sticks out like a sore thumb.

THE LULL AND THE DECLINE IN LITERATURE SALES. I don't understand why some of the comrades feel so uncomfortable with the concept that there has been a lull (meaning a suspension or decline of radical activity in various areas, not necessarily in radical consciousness or thinking) since around the autumn of 1970. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Do comrades feel that recognizing the lull is a sign of pessimism, or that it puts our analysis of the radicalization into question? In that case, perhaps more discussion of the question is needed than it got in the PC or plenum. One thing that might be added, to help put the whole question into proper perspective and to help guard against mechanical thinking on the subject, is the fact that during precisely this period of lull (since the autumn of 1970) the SWP experienced the greatest numerical growth it has experienced during a ~~like~~ similar period of time in the last quarter of a century. So there can be a period of lull and considerable party (or YSA) growth simultaneously. (Of course if the radicalization were to stop altogether -- in consciousness as well as activity -- and were to stay stopped for a considerable period of time, then we could expect adverse reflections of this in the party eventually.) Barry's remarks on the subject at the plenum were as brief as possible, and I don't think he was right when he pointed to women's liberation as an area where radical activity had increased; so far as activity is concerned, I don't think there has been an increase since August 1970. Betsey's report on trends in literature sales ^{was} ~~was~~ for me even surer evidence of the complications we can make for ourselves by refusing to accept ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ the truth about the lull. Total sales, according to the written report, showed a very small decline from 1970 to 1971; in general, it was about the same, that is, for the first time in 3 or 4 years, sales stood still for the year whereas in the previous years there had been healthy gains each year. Standstill is another name for lull, isn't it? Among the Pathfinder titles, again according to the written report, paper books and cloth books showed a tiny increase, while pamphlets fell from 205,000 in 1970 to 130,000 in 1971, a decline of 75,000, or more than one-third. This took place during a year when our sales and promotional force had been expanded considerably. What happened? Betsey's attempted explanation, obtained from Pathfinder comrades evidently, was very lame and irrelevant; The publishing industry as a whole experienced a downturn^{upn} in 1971, we didn't publish as many new books as in 1970, we didn't publish as many "best-sellers" as in 1970, etc. What bearing does any of that have on our sale of pamphlets, most of which occurs through the branches and not outside bookstores? None at all. What happened, very plainly, is that in 1971, when we had a bigger sales force and more promotion, etc., fewer people came looking for our literature than had done so in 1970; that is, the explanation is political, and can be traced from the lull that occurred that year. Pamphlets are our main staple, our main direct link to nonparty purchasers of literature; when their sale declines drastically, it behooves us to find out why; and you can't find out why if you distract yourself with irrelevancies and refuse to face the facts.

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY. This is a useful instrument for learning what is happening to the party. It would be even more useful if it represented the whole membership, rather than 82 percent. Even the U.S. Census does better than that. Can't we? I think it could also be improved by asking for additional information, or by including it if you get additional information. For example, what is the turnover rate of party membership, or rather, how many join and how many leave per year? 40 percent of the members are in the YSA, but only 15 percent are students; what are the other 25 percent of the SWP-YSA members doing? Almost 52 percent of the members are 25 or younger, but only 40 percent are in the YSA; can 12 percent be 25, and if the 25-year olds are fewer than 12 percent, how many are eligible to be in the YSA but aren't, and why? It would also help if you would give comparative information on such things as job information and union membership -- that is, not only this year's figures, but last year's, or last convention's.

SUB RENEWAL CAMPAIGN. I am in accord with the conclusion that we should not repeat the kind of sub renewal campaign tried earlier this year. But I cannot accept the explanation given for its ineffectiveness (the difficulty of finding the subscribers, who move around a lot, like the rest of the population). No doubt, this is a factor, but hardly the major factor. At least two others strike me as more pertinent, although they were never alluded to in the report. One is an economic factor: It is much harder to part with \$6 than \$1, even for students. Second is the "interest" factor: The great majority of the people taking special subs, now as in the past, are not won over to the paper by receiving it through the mail for 10, 12 or 14 weeks. Our failure to show awareness of these factors can lead to unnecessary disappointment.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN. All the signs that can be measured from the sidelines indicate that the present campaign is the best we have ever conducted. Of course the most important data -- the number of recruits to the YSA and SWP -- cannot be compiled until after the election, perhaps two or three months after the election. I agree with Comrade Rose's estimate that the YSA's potential for recruiting from the campaign is "unprecedented" this year. The favorable political situation and the first-rate base on which the campaign has been conducted so far confirm this estimate. I don't think we can do anything more useful this year than to help the YSA achieve the maximum potential.

BLACK WORK. Our Black work has been neglected, relatively, if we examine it alongside of our Chicano work in recent years. I think a remedy includes the assignment of some comrade, not necessarily a member of the PC or AC, to supervise or coordinate this work, as has been done with Chicano, ~~and~~ women's, etc. work. I also think that attention must be extended beyond the campuses for this work, as Comrade Boutelle said at the convention. A good deal of discussion is needed here, as soon as possible -- before Oberlin, if possible, so that if a modest plan of action can be agreed on before then, it can be presented there.

TRANSFERS TO CONSULTATIVE STATUS. While Comrades Dobbs, Kerry and Novack exemplify the old Roman virtues of modesty and their wishes should be respected, I wish that there was some better way for the party to mark their transfers to consultative status, through which the party members could express their appreciation of these comrades' contributions. The audience at the plenum was really too restricted. Can something be done on this as a follow up at Oberlin? I raise this question from a political not a sentimental standpoint.

George Brettman 5/72