

Information, Education & Discussion

# Bulletin In Defense of Marxism

Published by expelled members of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.A.)  
who have organized themselves as the Fourth Internationalist Tendency

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All members of the party must begin to *study*, completely dispassionately and with utmost honesty, first the essence of the differences and second the course of the dispute in the party. . . . It is necessary to *study* both the one and the other, unfailingly demanding the most exact, printed documents, open to verification by all sides. Whoever believes things simply on someone else's say-so is a hopeless idiot, to be dismissed with a wave of the hand.

[from Lenin's article "The Party Crisis," written January 19, 1921. For another translation of this passage, see *Collected Works*, vol. 32, pp. 43-44.]

[Reprinted from Trotsky's *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)*, p. 247]

The Bulletin In Defense Of Marxism is published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, composed of members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party for opposing the abandonment of Trotskyist principles and methods on which that party was founded and built for more than a half century.

Denied the right, specified in the SWP Constitution and by Leninist norms, of full and free discussion of all programmatic changes, we were subjected first to gag rules and slander and finally to wholesale expulsions to facilitate the leadership's imposition, without any sanction from the members or a convention, of their revisionist line.

We are now forced to carry on this discussion from outside the SWP. Our intent is to foster discussion within the SWP by those sincerely seeking to defend and reinstate a revolutionary Marxist program, and to bring about our own reinstatement. We firmly believe that the present leadership of the SWP cannot avoid that discussion in the long run by organizational measures and expulsions. These issues will be on the agenda as the inadequacy of the new line to deal with the political reality in the U.S. and the world becomes more and more obvious to the members.

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

No. 4 of the Bulletin records important advances: the founding of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (F.I.T.), and the forming of a nationwide organizational structure. Accordingly, the Bulletin has undergone necessary change. It is now the official publication of the F.I.T. and is published under the direction and control of its newly elected editorial board, listed on the inside cover. The editor, character, and policy remain unchanged.

Our first article reports the founding of the F.I.T., how it was organized, what it stands for, and what distinguishes it from the three other political currents that emerged in the Socialist Workers Party. The second item, "Why We Are Building the Fourth Internationalist Tendency" by Adam Shils, is closely related to the first. Shils lists the post-World War II revolutionary events that we are compelled to try to understand and explain, and that are the precursors of contemporary political reality which the revolutionary Marxist party seeks to transform.

The next four articles in this issue are about various aspects of the recent political purges in the Socialist Workers Party. Under this general heading we include a statement by the Political Bureau of the SWP, a self-justification. This appeared first in Party Organizer, primarily for the indoctrination of party members. We reproduce it here for the information of our readers as an example of how twisted logic serves poorly to hide undeclared motives.

Other items on this subject reveal the motives of the SWP leadership, what prompted the most recent purge, and what the effect upon the party and its present membership will be. The answer by Steve Bloom to the self-serving statement of the PB scores their transparent jesuitry. And since any semblance of credibility in the PB statement must rest solely upon faith in their cooked-up version of what happened at the December 3-4, 1983, California State Convention of the SWP, we submit the accurate account of what happened there by Evelyn Sell, a convention delegate and victim of the purge. The last item in this group is a report on the charges leveled against Gerardo Nebbia by central leaders of the SWP. Comrade Nebbia was charged with being an "agent" of the Healyite "disruption operation" against the SWP, and summarily expelled without knowledge of the charges or a chance to refute them. As reported to a membership meeting of the SWP's New York-New Jersey District the charges were based on alleged evidence that could not be disclosed for "security reasons." This is a page out of the FBI's book on standard frame-up procedure.

The third group of items is Suppressed Documents. Four such documents are in this issue; more will appear in future issues. The first is a speech Frank Lovell gave at the February-March 1982 NC plenum where he was brought before the Control Commission and accused of violating the new "norms" first introduced by the Barnes faction at that time. The second is an unpublished 1966 letter by James P. Cannon which Lovell cited and asked the plenum to enter in its records. The third and fourth are statements by Bloom and Lovell at the August 1983 plenum where they were ousted from the NC and the party. All four documents are published here for the first time. A more detailed introduction to them will be found on page 29.

The concluding item belongs to another category, our review section. This time George Breitman reviews and recommends a valuable book by Paul Le Blanc entitled Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua, which refutes both opportunist and sectarian interpretations of Trotsky's theory as applied to events in Nicaragua today. We hope to have more such reviews and contributions in future issues.



## Fourth Internationalist Tendency Is Organized Nationally

On the weekend of February 3-5, expelled SWP members from several cities met in Minneapolis in response to the January 17 call for the formation of a Fourth Internationalist Tendency (see letter by Naomi Allen, George Breitman, and George Saunders in Bulletin No. 3). As a result of recommendations from this meeting and subsequent decisions by local groups, the F.I.T. was constituted as a national organization and has local committees functioning in nine cities. Its members are discussing final formulations of the F.I.T. platform, to be printed in Bulletin No. 5.

The members of the F.I.T. all agree that its political priority is to participate in the absolutely essential process of theoretical and programmatic discussion which has been placed on the agenda by the Barnes leadership's attack on Trotskyism. Always in the past, when revolutionary Marxists have been faced with a fundamental programmatic challenge of this kind, the response has been to subordinate everything else to a defense of our theory.

This is because we understand that the program is the party, and defense of the party means first and foremost a fight to defend the program. Nothing else the party does, important as it may be, can actually lead to our goal -- the overthrow of class society and the initiation of a new era of human solidarity and liberation -- if we lose sight of the basic lessons of the past codified in the historic program of the SWP and the Fourth International.

The last time our movement in the United States faced a challenge of the same theoretical scope as the one presented today by the Barnes leadership was during the 1939-40 fight against the petty-bourgeois opposition of Burnham-Shachtman-Abern. At that time the response of Trotsky and Cannon was the same as we propose today -- mobilize the ranks of the party, take on the programmatic challenge as our number one priority, and defeat the revisionists politically.

In the 1939-40 struggle the proletarian Marxist current was a majority in the party leadership and ranks, although a slim majority. Today we are, at least so far, a small and persecuted minority. The active and most conscious supporters of Trotskyism have been expelled, and the leadership has substituted a campaign of slander and personal vilification for informed political discussion and debate. All of this makes our task more difficult and changes the forms that our programmatic and theoretical struggle will take. But it does not alter the basic content of the fight that must be waged to maintain the SWP as a revolutionary party.

The F.I.T. does not want to put any organizational barriers in the way of the necessary discussion of political program with the members of the SWP. We are not trying to build a new organization in opposition to or as a substitute for the SWP. We have, however, been forced to organize ourselves outside the party because we have been bureaucratically expelled. In each city where supporters of our tendency exist we are constituting local organizing committees. We have also elected a National Organizing Committee and three national coordinators (Steve Bloom, Bill Onasch, and Evelyn Sell) to help organize our work and to guarantee that we function in a cohesive and centralized fashion.

The F.I.T. campaigns for readmission into the party of our tendency members and of all others unjustly expelled for their political views as part of the leadership purge. We have endorsed the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism which was



started in December by Frank Lovell, and we will continue to publish it and other materials as our major contribution to the discussion in the SWP and the Fourth International. Other priorities will be our own education and the circulation of International Viewpoint, the biweekly magazine that reflects the views of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

We plan to actively support and participate in the public campaigns of the SWP, most importantly the 1984 Mason-Gonzalez election campaign, but also in defense work, Militant sales, forums, etc. And we hope to work in a fraternal way with party members who participate in their unions, in Central America and Caribbean solidarity work, women's liberation activities, the Black struggle, and other mass movements where we too will be present and active.

The creation of the F.I.T. means that there are now four organized currents that have developed within the SWP during the last three years, since the 1981 national convention of the party.

The largest of these, of course, is the cadre which continues to support the Barnes leadership and its stated objective, the creation of a new mass Leninist international around the Cuban and Central American revolutionaries. These comrades have shown that they are willing to accommodate themselves to sweeping programmatic revisions and to an ever-escalating series of attacks on Leninist organizational norms. The slander campaign against oppositionists has influenced many party members who are prejudiced against us in advance of any serious debate over the differences.

But it is essential to keep in mind that this current is still evolving, still in search of easy answers to the complications of world politics. Many of those who have supported the SWP leadership up to now have done so without yet fully grasping the extent or significance of the attack on Marxist continuity by Barnes and his closest associates.

We can expect further innovations from this leadership which, along with new developments in the domestic and international class struggle and the unfolding of the political discussion leading up to the next party convention and the world congress, can profoundly influence the ranks of the party.

The smallest current that has emerged from the turmoil in the SWP is a grouping, led by Pedro Camejo, which is trying to organize a non-Leninist formation called the North Star Network. Camejo has made some correct criticisms of the abstentionist policies pursued by the SWP leaders in U.S. politics. But he incorrectly sees this as the primary problem, rather than a specific manifestation of the political improvisations typical of the Barnes faction. Barnes is engaged in a retreat from the traditional SWP program -- an operation which is dictated by the more fundamental rejection of Trotskyism and the Fourth International on a world scale. In fact, Camejo has expressed many of the same programmatic misconceptions as the Barnes group, and shares with them all their doubts about the historical validity of Trotskyism.

Most of the ex-SWP members in the Camejo current were not expelled from the SWP; they resigned because of discouragement at the prospect of trying to change the party's course or leadership, which they consider hopeless. With this defeatist attitude they are unable to have any beneficial effect on the outcome of the struggle to save the SWP.

This brings us to the fourth current, Socialist Action, whose members were expelled from the SWP at the same time and under the same pretext as the F.I.T.'s



members. Like the F.I.T., Socialist Action advocates defense of the political heritage of Trotskyism and the Fourth International. Unlike the F.I.T., Socialist Action does not consider its main priority to be the political debate with the Barnes leadership and the struggle to defend the revolutionary Marxist program of the SWP. The first issue of its monthly paper, also called Socialist Action, contained a lengthy declaration ("Who we are, what we stand for") which reviewed the history of the SWP and then hastened to assure its readers that "it is not our intention in future issues of Socialist Action to dwell on differences with the Socialist Workers Party." Although Socialist Action describes itself as "a public faction of the SWP," it acts like a rival party and seeks to replace the SWP. It sees its primary tasks and greatest opportunities in the broader class struggle in the United States. (For further comment on Socialist Action, see the article by Adam Shils.)

The fact that these four currents now exist in separate organizations is solely the responsibility of the Barnes faction. There is in fact insufficient political basis for this split that has been imposed on the revolutionary party by that leadership. Only a thorough discussion and decision by the party membership can resolve the differences. And only if we find that the disagreements are irreconcilable and of a principled nature after such a thorough discussion would a split be justified. We believe that the F.I.T. is the only one of the four currents that operates in accord with this concept of revolutionary unity.

It must also be noted that in addition to the forces adhering to any one of the four organized currents, hundreds of disillusioned individual members have left the SWP during the last few years. Many left because they were tired or had lost interest in revolutionary politics. Some were discouraged by the party leadership's inadequate and often irrelevant responses to the most pressing problems of the revolutionary movement, or by the changed atmosphere within the party. A few of these ex-members will be reactivated as a result of a thorough political debate on all decisive issues, but many more are likely to return to the struggle as a result of a new resurgence of the mass movement. We welcome the return of all comrades to revolutionary political activity without in any way diverting our attention from the present SWP membership as our main focus.



Why We Are Building the Fourth Internationalist Tendency  
By Adam Shils

To understand the background of the formation of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency we have to examine the course of world politics over the last sixteen years, and its impact on those who have been trying to build revolutionary organizations in the working class of the advanced capitalist countries.

May 1968 saw an upsurge by French workers and students that seemed to push aside any ideas that the working class in the advanced capitalist countries was becoming middle-class or being by-passed by Third World struggles. Subsequent events tended to confirm the idea that workers' revolution was a realistic prospect in the West. We saw the "Hot Autumn" in Italy in 1969, the physical occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders by Scottish workers in 1970, and a miners' strike that brought down a government in Britain in 1974.

Young people poured into Marxist organizations that espoused the centrality of the industrial working class as an agency of social change. In 1974-75, the upsurge of the Portuguese working class confirmed the hopes of this new generation of revolutionaries for working-class action and power. To many active in revolutionary politics at that time, it looked as if the struggles of the late sixties and early seventies would lead more or less directly to a fundamental crisis of advanced capitalist society.

Unfortunately, history unfolded rather differently than socialists had hoped it would. The strength of bourgeois-democratic institutions and the formidable power of the reformist leaders of the working class gave the Western European capitalist countries a respite from the battles of the early seventies. The death of the Spanish dictator Franco in 1975 did not lead to the hoped-for upsurge of working-class combativity. The struggle for workers' power in the capitalist countries was certainly going to be a much longer process than the new revolutionaries had expected.

At the same time, the Third World was shaken by a series of revolutionary events. In May 1975, the troops of the National Liberation Front entered Saigon, signalling the victory of the Vietnamese revolution. In early 1976, the Angolan nationalists aided by Cuban troops beat back the South African invasion of their country. In January 1979, the Shah of Iran fled Teheran and one of the most pliant of the U.S.-backed dictatorships fell. In March 1979, the revolutionaries of the New Jewel Movement seized power from the corrupt Gairy regime in Grenada. Finally, in June 1979, the Somoza dictatorship of Nicaragua fell to the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

The Cuban Communist Party played an important part in these events. The Cubans played a crucial role in Angola. Castroism provided the ideological framework for the activity of the Grenadian and Nicaraguan revolutionaries. The Cubans had always strongly supported and been politically linked with the Vietnamese leadership.

This, then, was how the political situation at the beginning of this decade looked at first glance: slowness of the Western labor movement and rise of the colonial revolution, with the Cubans playing a key role in that revolution. It was in this context that the main leaders of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) centered around National Secretary Jack Barnes began to make some decisive policy reevaluations.



The SWP had placed great hopes on a rapid "moving to center stage of the industrial working class" and the "deepening proletarianization of U.S. politics." The pace of these events was not as rapid as the SWP leadership had hoped. Frustrated with the difficulties of building a class-struggle left wing in the labor movement, they saw the Cuban leadership as an ascendant and dynamic force. They also saw the military struggles of the workers' states and Third World liberation movements as "where the action is." They believed that the traditional Trotskyist emphasis on the independence of the working class and the centrality of proletarian democracy in the revolutionary process was separating the Fourth International from the "real course of world revolution."

These were the factors that led the SWP to adopt the view that the Cuban communists and their supporters represented a political center around which a new, "mass Leninist international" would be built. The SWP leadership sees its identity with the program and organization of the Fourth International as an obstacle to this regroupment. They therefore adopted the view that "our movement must discard permanent revolution," as Jack Barnes put it in a speech in Chicago in December 1982 ("Their Trotsky and Ours," New International, Volume I, No. 1, p. 13). The theory of permanent revolution is the linch-pin of Trotsky's Marxism.

Barnes also argued in the same speech that "probably 80 percent of those on a world scale who present themselves as Trotskyists --maybe it's 70 percent, maybe it's 90 percent--are irreformable sectarians" (Ibid, p. 69). Such a high percentage would include most of those organized in the Fourth International.

At the same time as the programmatic changes were occurring, the SWP leadership gradually removed the membership from positions of daily responsibility in the labor, antiwar and, in fact, all other social movements. The party adopted an abstentionist position on those movements.

This orientation of the party leadership threw the party into a crisis. Almost half the membership has either resigned or been expelled since 1977. The big question is: What should be done about this?

The first point to understand is that the questions that the SWP majority raises are not inconsequential or irrelevant. How should the Fourth International relate to revolutionaries from different traditions? Why has the colonial revolution been at the center of world revolution? Has the theory of permanent revolution been refuted by the post-World War II social overturns? What is our attitude toward the deformed and degenerated workers' states? Is Trotskyism outmoded, a dogma from the past?

These questions arise from big events in world politics. In fact, probably the majority of revolutionaries in the world would give broadly similar answers to those given by the Barnes leadership to many of these questions. Even if the SWP leadership was not raising these problems, the Fourth International would still have to respond to them. The challenge Barnes poses to Trotskyism is a reflection inside the Fourth International of the uneven development of the world revolution. Trotskyism certainly has the potential to explain these new phenomena.

Answering this challenge is an essential precondition for saving the SWP and preparing the future growth of the Fourth International. We cannot just assert the correctness of our ideas, or repeat the



lessons of the past from memory. We need to show how our orientation simultaneously explains and is enriched by new developments in the class struggle. This requires a painstaking and careful process of education, discussion and elaboration. This is the central task and activity of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency today, one which we believe should be vigorously undertaken by all Fourth Internationalists in the U.S. and throughout the world.

In placing this ideological struggle at the center of our work, we are helping the entire radical movement. The whole American left is in a shambles. Many self-styled "Marxist-Leninist" organizations in this country support the Jaruzelski government in Poland against Solidarnosc. This contrasts with the widespread support for Solidarnosc in the rest of the world.

One of the big debates on the left is not whether or not to support Jesse Jackson's campaign for President, but whether or not to support Walter Mondale! Every movement, be it CISPES, the Freeze movement, or the National Organization for Women, is faced today with great pressures to get involved in the Democratic Party primaries. A strong ideological campaign that involves taking up the issues of workers' democracy in Eastern Europe and class independence in this country would help the radical movement to get out of the impasse that it is in today.

Due to the fact that supporters of the F.I.T. and other Fourth Internationalists have been expelled from the SWP, there is another issue that needs to be clarified. This is the question of "party or faction." There is a lot of confusion about this. The Leninist position is very simple: a party should only be split when a clear betrayal of the working class has occurred on a decisive event. Therefore, Lenin only left the Second International in August 1914, when most of its sections supported their own bourgeoisies in World War I, even though the Second International had adopted incorrect positions on any number of issues before August 1914. Trotsky fought inside the Communist International against the development of Stalinist policies on workers' democracy in the USSR, the need for an internationalist foreign policy and on a host of other issues. Trotsky and the Left Opposition decided to form a new international only after Hitler came to power because the Communist International had instructed the German Communist Party not to make a united front with the Social Democrats against the Nazis. There was no reaction against this within the ranks of the Comintern. This is clearly a very different policy than the caricature of revolutionaries always splitting on every point of disagreement. Inner-party struggle should continue until a party takes a clear stand on the wrong side of the barricades.

This was the reason why for nine years the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were both factions of the same party, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. A moment's thought shows that the SWP has always been on the working class side of the barricades. Therefore, all American Trotskyists should be in the SWP, fighting to correct the party's course. We have been removed from the party against our will due to the bureaucratic expulsion, and have therefore had to take the step of organizing the F.I.T.

The perspective of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, then, is waging a vigorous theoretical and programmatic struggle to respond to new developments in the world and the SWP while at the same time fighting for revolutionary unity by campaigning for reintegration of all unjustly expelled members into the party. Each F.I.T. member is



pursuing his or her appeal individually through regular party channels, and collectively through our world movement.

These perspectives are not shared by another organization started by expelled SWP members, Socialist Action (S.A.). S.A. believes that the main task of American Trotskyists is to build a new revolutionary organization. Therefore, the main activities of S.A. members are building up the internal apparatus of their organization and working in the mass movements.

This orientation seriously underestimates the necessity of an ideological struggle in defense of revolutionary Marxism. If Trotskyist ideas are to become a pole of attraction in either the SWP or the radical movement, these ideas must be nurtured and developed. People in a country of 235 million will only be attracted to a small revolutionary organization if it has some important and unique explanation of major world events and not simply because the organization has an efficient structure or because its members do useful work in the mass movements.

S.A. activists also disagree with the F.I.T.'s strong emphasis on the SWP. Working with, and engaging in political discussion with, the SWP is crucial if America's largest revolutionary organization is to be preserved as a party that defends the struggles of all sections of the working class. It is wrong to give up the fight to save a party which represents over 50 years of revolutionary continuity in this country until that struggle is clearly and decisively lost. All efforts must be made to engage the membership of the SWP in the discussions necessary to win them back to Trotskyism and mobilize them in defense of the party.

Some comrades have said that the F.I.T.'s differences with S.A. are only differences of strategy and not of program or principle, and that it is therefore wrong for the F.I.T. to organize independently. Shouldn't revolutionaries only form a separate organization when a class line has been crossed? This is absolutely true if we are speaking about separate parties. However, forming a separate party is a very different thing from forming a separate faction.

S.A. defines itself as a faction, a public faction of the SWP. Membership in a faction demands much greater cohesion and agreement than does membership in a party. Lenin explained this clearly: "As a faction, i.e. as a union of those who think alike in the party, we cannot work without unity on fundamental questions. To break away from the faction is not the same as breaking away from the party. Those who have left our faction are by no means deprived of the possibility of working in the party" (quoted in Cannon's The Left Opposition in the U.S., p. 254). The differences on the ideological struggle and on orientation towards the SWP do necessitate two separate groups within the expelled SWP opposition today. We hope to convince our fellow Fourth Internationalists in S.A. of the need to change their orientation.

The U.S. today desperately needs a strong revolutionary party. Think of what an active and democratic organization of some thousands of militants could have done to mobilize independent mass action in the streets against Reagan's war moves in Central America, to campaign for freedom for political prisoners in Poland, to challenge the recent layoffs of 15,400 steel workers, and to organize solidarity with the Greyhound strikers. One must know where to begin the work of building such a party. The struggle to develop classical Marxism and to save the SWP are where that work begins today. Our tasks are clear.



# End of the Split Operation Against the Party

## Political Bureau Statement, adopted January 21, 1984

At its meeting in August 1983 the National Committee suspended four National Committee members — Lovell, Weinstein, Henderson, and Bloom — from the party for their secret factional activity. At the same meeting, the National Committee noted that these four National Committee members were responsible for a split operation that had been directed against the party for some time. This operation included both individual resignations and flagrant violations of party discipline and organizational principles resulting in expulsions.

At its November 1983 meeting the National Committee noted that the four suspended NC members had launched a public organization, Socialist Action, and that the splitters were increasing their disruption campaign from outside as well as inside the party. The National Committee further decided that membership in, affiliation to, support to, or collaboration with Socialist Action or any of its members, unless authorized by the National Committee, is incompatible with membership in the SWP.

On December 22, 1983, the Political Committee initiated action to bring the split operation to an immediate end. The action was completed in the first part of January by which time all the members of the secret faction still operating inside the party had been expelled.

The Political Committee decision to immediately end the split operation resulted from a sequence of events beginning at the California state convention of the party on the weekend of December 3-4, 1983, which led to the expulsion or resignation of every supporter of the secret faction in California.

### California state convention

The state convention had been preceded by more than 60 days of written and branch discussion. A counter-resolution to the one presented by the state committee was submitted by three members of the San Francisco branch. The supporters of this counter-resolution contributed the majority of pages to the discussion bulletin and made presentations in all the branches of which they were members. At the end of the discussion period the minority received 11 percent of the vote statewide. It had supporters in three of the six California branches. They caucused in each of these branches to elect a total of five delegates who were ratified by their branches. The minority delegates at the convention caucused to elect their reporter and decided on the line of his report.

In his report, summary, and subsequent interventions at the California state convention, the reporter elected by the minority caucus to present its line put forward a split perspective of political support for and intent to collaborate with Socialist Action and its individual members. No minority delegate took the floor at any time during the convention to repudiate the split course advanced by their elected reporter; all voted for the general line of the minority report.

The state convention voted to refer to the incoming State Committee the consideration of the full implications of the action by the minority delegates and instructed it to take appropriate and immediate action.

The next day, December 5, the California State Political Bureau met and charged each of the six members of the minority delegation with "disloyal actions in failing to take the floor before

the convention to repudiate the split statements" of their reporter. The bureau scheduled the trials for December 10.

The State Political Bureau considered similarly charging all those in California who had voted for the minority resolution and had caucused to elect the minority delegates. But since the minority resolution, support for which determined minority delegate representation, had not included the split line advanced by the reporter for the delegation, the California State Political Bureau instead decided to first give each member who caucused to elect the minority delegates the opportunity to repudiate the split action of the delegation they had elected.

During the next few days, however, every single member in California who had voted for the minority resolution prior to the convention refused to repudiate the disloyal action of the minority delegates. Charges were filed against each of these comrades. At its meeting of December 10 the California State Committee tried and expelled 16 members for disloyalty. On December 17 two more members were found guilty by the State Political Bureau of the same charges and expelled. One other member who had voted for the minority resolution resigned.

Every single one of the individuals who voted for the minority resolution had previously identified themselves, over a period of many months, as a supporter of either the Weinstein-Henderson or the Lovell-Bloom wing of the secret faction. In addition to those who voted for the minority resolution, four other members of the party in Los Angeles had identified themselves as supporters of one of these formations but were not part of the minority caucus because they had not been present for the vote in their branch. Thus, they were not asked to repudiate the action of the delegation. Nevertheless two of the four resigned with a statement that they would not have repudiated had they been asked. One other had been charged and was subsequently expelled for publicly walking out of the Farrell Dobbs memorial meeting and collaborating with members of Socialist Action. He stated in the course of his trial that he would not have repudiated the action of the minority delegation had he been asked.

(The fourth comrade was on a long-term medical leave of absence. When he was interviewed by a Political Committee delegation on January 4 he too refused to repudiate the action of the delegation and was expelled by the Political Committee.)

### Escalation of split operation

Thus, within a period of less than two weeks, the scope of the split rapidly escalated from the minority reporter at the state convention, to the entire minority delegation, to the entire minority caucus state-wide, to every single member in California who had at any time identified himself or herself as a supporter of either the Lovell-Bloom or Weinstein-Henderson wing of the secret faction. This was new evidence of the inside/outside operation being organized against the party by an utterly disloyal formation led by the four former National Committee members suspended from the party by the National Committee in August 1983.

Three additional incidents that occurred at the same time provided further verification of the split operation.

1) The first issue of the newspaper *Socialist Action* appeared early in December carrying an article by an unnamed San Fran-



cisco bus driver about the Greyhound strike. There could be no doubt that the unnamed author was the same individual who had been elected by the minority delegates at the state convention as their reporter. He had given the article to *Socialist Action* well before the California state convention.

2) When leaders of the Los Angeles branch went to the apartment of one of the minority caucus members to deliver written charges to her, she and one of the Los Angeles minority delegates to the state convention were there meeting with two of the Southern California leaders of *Socialist Action*.

3) On December 10, the Manhattan branch organizer informed Berta L. that charges had been brought against her for boycott of party finances and activity. Berta L. informed the organizer that "In light of what has transpired in California," she wanted it known that she "intended to work with" *Socialist Action*. No report of what had transpired around the California state convention had been made to the Manhattan branch or any branch outside California at that time. Berta L. said she was not a member of *Socialist Action*, nor was she resigning from the SWP since her reading of party norms indicated that her planned collaboration with *Socialist Action* was not incompatible with party membership — regardless of decisions by the National Committee. An additional charge of violating the National Committee motion concerning collaboration with *Socialist Action* was filed against Berta L., and she was found guilty of all charges and expelled by the Manhattan branch December 11.

#### Political Committee action

When the Political Committee, at its meeting of December 22, received the full report on this sequence of events that began at the California state convention, it drew the obvious conclusions:

1) The disloyal conduct of every single supporter in California of the secret faction was not an aberration, unique to California.

2) The actions taken by every single member of the secret faction in California were definitive proof of the disloyalty of the adherents of this formation nationwide.

A secret faction is not a legitimate faction with a political platform and defined membership, that just happens to be secret. It is an underground factional operation carried out by a political combination of sometimes multiple cliques and groupings whose dislike for, and bitter conflict with, each other are second only to what unifies them — hatred for the party and guilty knowledge of each other's disloyal activities. A secret faction is by definition an unprincipled combination that places covering up for each other's disloyal actions (whether they agree with them or not) ahead of loyalty to the party.

At its December 22 meeting, the Political Committee considered two possible courses of action to end the split operation. One was to expel the entire secret faction immediately. The other was to meet with every proclaimed supporter of the various wings of this formation before bringing charges, giving them the opportunity to repudiate the action of the California delegation, and thereby to break from the disloyal split operation.

The Political Committee decided on the second alternative. It voted to "draw up a list of minority supporters in every branch; prepare questions to be put to them and organize Political Committee delegations to meet with every individual on the list as rapidly as possible."

The course followed by the Political Committee was the opposite of asking for an abstract affirmation of intent to act in a loyal manner — a "loyalty oath." Such a procedure would be an abomination of our organizational norms and principles. Every member is assumed to be loyal from the day they join the party onward and are responsible to act accordingly. No one ever asks them to repeat it, to say it on the branch floor, to put it in writing,

or anything else.

Nor were comrades asked to say what they would do in a hypothetical situation. They were not asked to say what they would have done had they been delegates at the California state convention. Posing such questions would be contrary to our norms also. Instead, they were told what had happened, informed that the party's elected leadership bodies viewed it as a split action, and asked if they repudiated it.

#### Secret faction and disloyal actions

The Political Committee had decided to bring charges of disloyalty against comrades who by their own actions in their branches had identified themselves as part of the secret faction splitting operation. This was not because they were directly responsible for what someone said or didn't say in the California state convention, nor did they bear the same responsibility for the delegates' actions as caucus members in California who elected delegates to represent them.

The charges of disloyalty were based on the new evidence of the inside/outside split operation by the adherents of the secret faction. Their actions provided indisputable proof of their disloyalty. As the party's organizational resolution, adopted in 1965, states: "... loyalty is far more than an abstract idea; it is a standard of political conduct. The party's whole democratic-centralist structure is founded on the rock of organizational loyalty. Without loyal members the party, as a voluntary organization, would have no basis upon which to maintain the necessary discipline in carrying out its revolutionary tasks. Disloyal people don't believe in the party, they won't pitch in selflessly to help build it, and they will resist and evade discipline."

This bedrock of our organizational principles has been persistently challenged by the Bloom-Lovell wing of the secret faction from the beginning.

At its August meeting, the National Committee upheld the party's organizational principles when it suspended Bloom, Henderson, Lovell and Weinstein for refusing to inform the National Committee of the differences among them that led to the disintegration of their faction. This disloyal cover-up was a particularly flagrant act of contempt for the party since each wing blamed the disintegration on the other, in identical terms. The NC pointed to the insistence of the four on keeping their platform differences secret as proof of a secret factional operation against the party and the Fourth International.

The National Committee did not expel the entire secret faction then, nor did it ask the adherents of the various wings of the secret faction to repudiate the action of the four National Committee members. The unconditional suspension from the party of the leaders of the split operation was an unambiguous final warning to every single one of its adherents. But in light of the developments around the California convention, it was obvious that there had been no change in course: The adherents of the secret faction had forfeited their right to membership. Under these conditions the Political Committee had one single overriding responsibility to the party — to bring the entire disloyal splitting operation to an immediate end.

Between December 23 and January 4, a total of 37 members who by their conduct had unambiguously identified themselves as part of the secret faction were talked to by delegations organized by the Political Committee.

Each was informed by the Political Committee representatives of the action of the minority delegation at the California state convention and the fact that the Political Committee considered it a split action, and each was given the opportunity to repudiate this concrete manifestation of disloyalty by the California minority delegation. Such a step was a prerequisite for the party to accept the possibility that an adherent of the secret faction had de-



cided to turn her or his back on a disloyal course of conduct.

On the basis of the responses given, written charges were filed with the Political Committee.

Each individual who refused to repudiate the actions of the California minority delegation was given charges in writing.

Each was informed that the Political Committee assumed jurisdiction under Article VIII, Section 3 of the constitution, and told when the trial was scheduled.

Each was informed that any statement to be considered by the Political Committee could be mailed or telephoned to the national office and that it would be distributed to the Political Committee members.

Only two comrades, Naomi A. (Brooklyn), and Alan W. (at-large), requested to come before the Political Committee in person. The Political Committee voted to give each comrade time to make whatever statement they wished to the Political Committee, but neither appeared nor called to say they had changed their minds.

### Expulsion of disloyal members

The Political Committee considered each case separately and reviewed whatever statement had been submitted by each comrade charged. The Political Committee expelled each of those found guilty of "disloyalty for refusing to repudiate the action of the members of the minority delegation at the California state convention, each of whom refused to repudiate their reporter's split statement of intent to collaborate with Socialist Action and its individual members."

With these actions to bring the splitting operation inside the party to its conclusion, the Political Committee has carried through what amounts to a re-registration of the party membership.

The splitters spelled out their attitude toward the party in an "Open Letter" to party members dated November 18, 1983 (appended). This statement is stamped by their utter contempt for the membership of the party, and reveals clearly that the splitters have given up hope of winning any support within our ranks.

The split operation against the party which developed over three years, includes numerous components. The four suspended

National Committee members organized Socialist Action. They put out a newspaper, *Socialist Action*, in San Francisco and a mimeographed magazine in New York under the title, "In Defense of Marxism." Others have joined the North Star Network led by Byron Ackerman, Pedro Camejo, and Gene Lantz. As has been true from the beginning of this secret faction operation we are ignorant of how many people and internal groupings, circles and cliques are involved and who adheres to which.

In their public leaflets, newspapers, and magazines the splitters are carrying out a provocation against the party, identifying themselves as a "public faction" of the party or otherwise claiming to remain some category of member. This false portrayal of themselves is a legal danger to the party, which is why the National Committee decided in November to print a public statement calling attention to this provocation and disavowing any legal or political responsibility for the splitters.

### Close of a chapter

With the termination of the split operation, this chapter in party history is closed and behind us. We have no interest in political relations of any kind with them. We now turn our backs on the splitters. We turn to the many party-building openings before us in deepening our turn to industry and the industrial unions, building the Mason-González presidential campaign, defending the workers and farmers of Central America and the Caribbean against the steadily escalating imperialist attack, and all the other work we are engaged in.

At its November meeting, the National Committee decided that all the members of our movement would break totally all political relations with the splitters. Any violation of this decision is incompatible with membership in the Socialist Workers Party.

For comrades information we are appending a list of those who were part of the split operation. We use the full names of those who are publicly identified in one of their own widely distributed newspapers, magazines, or open letters.

Freed of the one thing that held them together — their mutual hatred for the Socialist Workers Party and commitment to cover up for each other's disloyal actions — they will now go their various ways.



Who Is Responsible for the Split in the Party  
In reply to the SWP Political Bureau  
by Steve Bloom

The Political Bureau of the SWP, in its statement printed above, claims that it has expelled a disloyal secret faction, which engaged in flagrant acts of indiscipline in violation of the party's organizational principles, and was determined to split from the party. This is completely false. Those labelled "splitters" are not the initiators of a split, but its victims. It is the Barnes leadership of the party which is solely responsible for what has occurred.

The fundamental premise of this frame-up against loyal comrades engineered by the SWP leadership is the charge of secret factionalism. This charge was first levelled against two opposition tendencies in the SWP National Committee at the February-March 1982 NC plenum, and has been raised repeatedly since that time against those who hold minority viewpoints inside the SWP.

But what are the facts? Far from trying to organize secretly, those of us who oppose the political course of the Barnes leadership made repeated attempts to initiate a discussion and present our views to the party as a whole. When the Militant, in November 1981, published the first article by Doug Jenness--which initiated public changes in the party's attitude toward Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution--we proposed a literary discussion inside the party. The majority leadership rejected this proposal.

We submitted platforms and resolutions expressing our point of view to every one of the five NC meetings from February 1982 to August 1983, and repeatedly asked that they be made available to the party membership. The majority leadership consistently voted to keep them secret, limiting circulation to the NC. At the May 1982 NC meeting a motion was passed that the membership could not even be informed of the fact that the two opposition tendencies had formed an Opposition Bloc and submitted its platform (see Bulletin IDOM #3).

When eighteen members openly tried to organize a tendency to participate in the pre-World Congress discussion and presented their platform to the NC in June 1982, the Barnes leadership ordered us to "cease and desist," on pain of expulsion. And when we proposed, in the PC and the NC, to issue the traditional call for the regularly scheduled party convention in the summer of 1983, in order to discuss and decide the disputed questions, the majority leadership of the party, afraid to allow any semblance of open debate before they had expelled us, voted to postpone that convention; and they voted three months later to postpone it a second time.

At every opportunity, we of the opposition attempted to place our views before the party as a whole for consideration. This fact has been well documented through the material published up to now in the Bulletin IDOM, and even more of this material will be published in subsequent issues.

It is hardly credible, given the record, for the Political Bureau to accuse us of attempting to organize a "secret faction." The only reason they can even try to get away with such charges is that they have hidden the real record from the party ranks.



And this is not all they have hidden. In fact, a strong case can be made that it is the Barnes leadership itself--which clearly began to rethink its perspectives on permanent revolution before the 1981 party convention but consistently denied that it was doing so--which is guilty of concealing its views from the party and of organizing behind the back of the party to impose those views without a discussion.

So the charge of "secret factionalism" is completely false. And an investigation of the facts exposes the web of lies which the Political Bureau uses to support that charge. Here we can only cite a few of the more flagrant examples:

1) The PB asserts that the "secret faction" was a single, organized current that included everyone who has at any time in the last few years raised a question about any aspect of party policy; and since this would include diverse elements, representing an array of political views, the PB charges that this opposition constitutes an "unprincipled combination." It is correct that there were, and still are, multiple tendencies and currents which have arisen in the SWP in opposition to the policies of the Barnes leadership. But the idea of a single "secret faction" which included all such tendencies and currents and controlled everything that happened is a fabrication. Once it has been dreamed up, the PB can easily assert that this non-existent faction was an unprincipled combination.

The majority leadership itself has consistently prohibited any organized expression of these tendencies and currents since the 1981 convention (except at the NC level for a limited period). Because of this some opposition to official policies has, as would be expected, become manifest in a dispersed and uncoordinated way, even occasionally revealing significant disorientation on the part of individual members. But whenever any organized opposition attempted to express itself, either in the NC or in the party as a whole, it always presented a clear and coherent political platform.

2) The PB declares that there was a conscious "split operation" for which the four suspended NC members are responsible. But here again, the prohibition against any "organized tendency activity of any kind" which was imposed explicitly on the four (and implicitly on all other members of the party) in March 1982 made it impossible for the NC members or anyone else to function effectively as a leadership for the opposition. Under such circumstances we can hardly be held responsible for what occurred.

If there has been a problem with the maintenance of party norms then the real responsibility for this rests squarely with the Barnes leadership--which is itself guilty of violating the most basic norms of leadership functioning by introducing its programmatic changes without allowing the membership to discuss them. It is not at all surprising, given these open revisions, and given the prohibition on discussion and other violations of democratic norms by the central party leadership, that resistance developed within the ranks --finding different expressions in different party branches. Indeed, it would have been surprising if this had not occurred. No conspiracy theories are necessary to explain what has been happening in the SWP.

3) Connected to the last point is the charge that there were "flagrant violations of party discipline" by those who have been expelled. This is allegedly the form that the "split actions" took.



It is, of course, impossible here to go into the dozens of cases of frame-up charges brought against oppositionists. But the record of this scandalous purge operation (not "split operation") exists. Some of that record has already been made known, and more of it will be.

Those who disagree with the party leadership were expelled on such charges as "boycotting party activity" despite the fact that in many cases they were far more active in their branches than others who were not expelled; those who were allowed to remain in the party had raised no question about the political course of the leadership. Dianne Feeley, who repeatedly but unsuccessfully tried to meet with the Pittsburgh branch leadership to discuss the event she was helping to organize for International Women's Day in 1983--an event that was hailed in the Militant as exemplary--was expelled for failure to function in collaboration with her branch.

Ann Menasche of San Francisco was expelled for "unauthorized" distribution of a poem which she had written, at a memorial meeting for Anne Chester organized by the party (she gave it out to some friends who requested copies). Anne Teasdale Zukowski was ousted from the Iron Range branch because she answered a question asked by a member of the YSA. James Kutcher was harassed and ultimately expelled from the party in Manhattan in a series of events which began with an alleged incident of "violence" by him, even though the "victim" of this supposed violence denied from the outset that it ever took place. The party leadership insisted that Kutcher was guilty anyway.

This list could go on, but it is clear to any objective observer that the central leadership of the party, in order to avoid a discussion of its programmatic revisions, has been making a concerted effort to rid the organization of those who might question or resist the new line. Organizational pretexts have been found to justify this political purge, so that members who do not want to confront the reality of what is going on can find excuses and rationalizations; but the mere assertion in the PB report of "flagrant violations of discipline" cannot hide the ugly truth.

4) The PB repeats the charge used as a justification for the suspension (in reality a de-facto expulsion) of the four opposition NC members in August 1983, that we insisted "on keeping our platform differences secret" and "refus(ed) to inform the National Committee of the differences among" ourselves. The fact is, however, and we explained this clearly to the NC at the time (see our statement on page 40), that we had no new differences in the area of basic programmatic issues or platform, but that we did find ourselves unable to agree about how to pursue the inner-party struggle for the platform we had agreed on when the Bloc was formed in May.

The Opposition Bloc--which was in fact a bloc of two different tendencies in the NC and not a unified faction despite the claims of the Barnes leadership--had been able to come together in anticipation of the opening of the pre-convention discussion. With a prospect of the entire membership becoming active participants in the discussion, the two NC tendencies were able to agree on a common course of action to pursue the fight for the major programmatic positions we shared. But with the postponement of the convention at the May NC plenum, and the anticipated further postponement at the August plenum, the original



differences which had been the basis before May for two separate tendencies in the NC re-emerged. And this, in turn, necessitated the dissolution of the Bloc and the resumption of independent activity by those separate tendencies in their own names.

It should not be surprising, in such circumstances, that "each wing blamed the disintegration on the other, in identical terms," as the Political Bureau statement puts it. But this is hardly proof of "secret factionalism" or attempts to "keep our differences secret from the party." The differences between the two tendencies were well known to every member of the party leadership, and the charges that were raised against us to justify our suspension were simply a smokescreen.

The alleged basis for the recent mass purge--that comrades wouldn't agree to repudiate others and characterize them as disloyal on orders from the PC--is likewise a pretext, and a rather flimsy one at that. The statement that members were required to endorse in order to remain in the party was deliberately worded so as to require agreement with a finding of fact about what occurred at the California state convention, and with a political characterization of the actions taken by the minority delegates as disloyal to the party. This wording was quite deliberate. The party leadership was well aware that any self-respecting revolutionary would find it repugnant to accept such a demand for repudiation without documentary evidence of what actually took place in California, and without access to explanations, by the specific comrades involved, of why they took the action that they did. (As the article by Evelyn Sell in this issue of the Bulletin IDOM points out, the charges of "disloyalty" and "split actions" against the minority in California have no basis.) The fact that the overwhelming majority of those interrogated refused to repudiate under such circumstances is, again, hardly proof of the existence of a secret faction.

The PB states that "the Political Committee has carried through what amounts to a re-registration of the party membership." That contention is utterly false. A re-registration is universal. It applies to all, and requires an affirmation by every member in order to remain in the organization. The Barnes leadership did not demand statements from all the members--but only from some of them (those who were on a confidential list in the National Office). The reason for their selectivity is obvious. They knew that not only oppositionists and dissidents would refuse to make repudiations under these circumstances, but also many of the Barnes leadership's supporters would have trouble acceding to such a demand. That was why they carefully confined their interrogations and demands for repudiation to members who have raised, or might raise political questions: "The Political Committee had decided to bring charges of disloyalty against comrades who by their own actions in their branches had identified themselves as part of the secret faction splitting operation."

This statement by the Political Bureau is the clearest proof of the political nature of these expulsions. There was no evidence of misconduct against those who were the victims of the recent purge, not even the dubious sort of evidence that had been invoked in previous expulsions. The party leadership itself had prohibited rank and file members from formally affiliating to any organized tendency or grouping, so it cannot be on the basis of any such affiliation that they deter-



mined who had "identified themselves." The "actions in their branches" which made members targets of the PC were the expression of political views at variance with those of the leadership. This is, in fact, the only "evidence" that can be produced of a secret faction--that comrades in various parts of the country shared a similar commitment to the traditional revolutionary Marxist program of the SWP, and insisted that the changes in that program being made publicly by the party leadership be presented to the organization as a whole for discussion and decision.

A leadership that was truly confident in itself and its ideas would welcome such a debate, and organize the discussion--rather than expelling its political opponents. That would be the way a Bolshevik leadership would solve the current problems faced by our party. Even now, if the Barnes leadership would agree to a truly democratic discussion with its opponents it would find that there are no longer any problems--either real or imaginary--with "secret factions" or "splitters."

There is one particularly striking aspect to the methodology which has been employed during this frame-up campaign. An event occurs (for example, the Opposition Bloc dissolves, or the minority reporter to the California state convention makes a statement). The majority leadership then unilaterally interprets that event, and draws conclusions about it (that there must be fundamental programmatic differences in the Bloc which are not being expressed, or the entire delegation to the state convention is involved in a "split operation").

The leadership does not treat these speculations as hypotheses, which need to be tested and proven, but as absolute and incontrovertible facts. They then act on the basis of their own opinion about what "must be true," and consistently reject without consideration possible alternative interpretations of events. They reject facts that don't fit in and refuse to discover or acknowledge anything that might contradict their particular interpretation. (For example, when the NC was suspending the four opposition members, a motion was made by the four to establish a commission to investigate the actual facts before action was taken. This was voted down, and the NC acted solely on the basis of the false assertions made by the Barnes leadership. In California, the State Committee held its trials in secret session and refused to hear statements by the accused.)

Any questions that may be asked by the leadership in its "investigation" under such circumstances only make sense, and can only be answered if the particular conclusions and interpretations of the leadership are accepted as valid: "What were the programmatic differences that caused you to dissolve?" Or "will you repudiate the disloyal split actions?" When these questions cannot be accepted by members who do not share the leadership's assumptions, or who know for a fact that they are false (that there were no "programmatic differences" or "disloyal split actions") then the failure to respond as required is cited as proof that these comrades are part of a disloyal secret faction, "refusing to cooperate with elected party bodies" and "hiding their views from the party."

And of course only the leadership's version of events and the leadership's conclusions are presented to the party ranks--since those who could present a different interpretation are now expelled. Even if party members may have questions about the official version, they have no access to the information necessary to determine the real truth for themselves.



The timing of this purge, coming just a few months before the scheduled opening of our twice-postponed pre-convention discussion, underlines the obvious fact that the current party leadership fears most of all a full and democratic discussion of the big theoretical and programmatic questions they have put on the agenda. The PB declares that the split in the party has been consummated, but this is a bad case of self-deception. Any Leninist will understand that no split can be really consummated without the essential precondition of a full political discussion and clarification. Attempts such as those being made by the Barnes leadership to substitute organizational measures for the requisite political debate can only lead to the most destructive consequences.

In the long run, the present SWP leadership will not be able to avoid that debate, no matter how many expulsions they carry out. It will be imposed on them by life--by the reality of the class struggle itself. And even if they pretend to ignore those of us who have been expelled--who will not go away, and will continue to remind the party of its true heritage--they will find that new opposition, questions and discussion will inevitably arise from those who remain inside the party as the membership confronts the contradiction between the new line of the leadership and the political realities they see and experience in the world.

The SWP leadership may even find that the very action they are counting on to end their problems and finish the "split"--the latest purge--will itself serve as a stimulus for other members to begin to wonder about what is happening in the SWP today. Some of these will take up a serious investigation of the vital programmatic and theoretical questions, and find for themselves what is being done to our heritage. They, too, will take action to oppose the leadership's present course.

This purge is, of course, an attack on the democratic rights of the oppositionists who were expelled. But even more than that it is an attack on and partial foreclosure of the democratic rights of all party members. As such it is a threat to the life-blood of the party. The continuation of this attack will mean the death of the SWP as a revolutionary organization. We urge all comrades to act to reverse this process before it is too late. Rescind the expulsions! Open the discussion! Solve these problems in a Leninist, and not in a bureaucratic fashion!



21 supported the minority resolution for the Dec. 3-4 California Socialist Workers Party state convention.

16 were expelled on December 10.

3 were forced to resign on December 11.

2 were expelled on December 17.

Final score: 21 out of 21 within two weeks of the convention.

#### WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CALIFORNIA SWP STATE CONVENTION? ? ?

By Evelyn Sell, a convention delegate from Los Angeles

It is now clear what really happened before and during the 1983 California state convention. The call for the convention issued by the State Political Bureau became a deadly trap for those who voiced political criticisms or alternative proposals to those of the leadership.

The surface appearance before and even during most of the convention itself was of relatively democratic procedures. The minority counter-resolution, "Deeds Not Words," was published in the second discussion bulletin. One of the three signers, Michael Schreiber, was given time to present a minority report at the convention. Out of the nine articles published in discussion bulletins, five were by minority supporters. Minority counter-reports were allowed in some branches.

The state leadership responded to the effective criticisms and positive party-building proposals in the minority's counter-resolution by issuing a six-page "amendment" which significantly changed the original draft resolution and provided the basis for attacks against minority supporters during branch discussions. Majority leaders and supporters avoided discussion on the political and strategical differences by falsely accusing minority supporters of being against the party's turn to industry, of being "economists" who only wanted to talk about shop floor issues, with being cowardly about "talking socialism" on the job and afraid to discuss the U.S. invasion of Grenada with fellow workers.

The atmosphere during the discussion was affected by the party leadership's reaction to the emergence of Socialist Action, a new national organization formed by members expelled from the SWP over the previous 2-3 years. The November 19-20 SWP National Committee plenum passed motions characterizing this group as an opponent organization hostile to the party and prohibiting any support to or collaboration with it. Plenum reports to the six California branches stressed these motions and repeated the false charges about "split actions" by party members who had expressed political differences over the last several years. The formation of Socialist Action was viewed in the context of such charges.

At the same time, plenum reporters repeatedly assured the branches that no witchhunt would take place in the party and that members could express political differences. These assurances appeared to be valid since pre-convention discussion was proceeding and differences were expressed on all areas of party work and internal party matters. A little over 10% of the members voted for the minority resolution at the conclusion of the discussion.



The majority reports on the first day of the state convention gave no hint that a purge would soon be underway. The first report, "Defending the Party in California," reviewed successful defense cases for SWP and YSA members and projected further campaigns to fight government and employer attacks against socialists. The report was discussed and unanimously approved by the delegates. The next three reports were given one after the other followed by discussion on all of them. The majority Political Report covered major areas of party work, defended the record of party activities over the past year and rejected all minority proposals. The majority report "The Fight Against Imperialist War in Central America and the Caribbean" covered current events and reviewed the party's strategy and accomplishments in carrying out anti-intervention and solidarity work. After 85 minutes of majority reports, the minority reporter, Michael Schreiber was allowed 30 minutes to speak.

He stressed the key themes of the strategy presented in the minority resolution, refuted the charge that the minority was against the turn to industry, outlined a general approach within the trade unions, criticized the weaknesses and inconsistencies in party anti-war work and presented an alternative approach, described his own support activities to the Greyhound strike as an example of what party members could do in such situations, and ended with comments about the need for democracy within the party. Within the context of pointing out problems in functioning democratically, the reporter made the following remarks about Socialist Action:

"Is it any wonder that many of the people recently expelled from the party (and other people who were disillusioned with the abstentionist policies of our party and had dropped out) came together to form a new organization?"

"These people are activists and Trotskyists, trained in the SWP. And yet in reports given to our branches from the national plenum, they have been slandered as 'enemies' of the party. Never before have I heard this term, 'enemies' used by anyone but Stalinists, except when referring to members and agents of the ruling class.

"In order to back up this characterization, it was alleged that these Trotskyists in Socialist Action distributed a leaflet which 'attacked the revolutionary government of Maurice Bishop.'

"Now I will read to you the sentence from the Socialist Action leaflet in question which deals with Maurice Bishop.

"'The coup d'etat that overthrew the government of Maurice Bishop in Grenada sharply underscores the need for institutions of workers democracy at all levels in the struggle for liberation.'

"That's all! Comrades, that statement is true! A faction within the New Jewel Movement which had a majority of the central committee took over, threw the head of state into prison, demobilized the militia, murdered Maurice Bishop, murdered several cabinet members, murdered scores of supporters--can anyone in this room say that such actions represent workers democracy?"

"This statement offers criticism along the same lines as Fidel Castro, who criticises the Coard grouping among the Grenadian revolutionaries. In no way is that statement an attack on the policies of Maurice Bishop or the Grenadian revolution. In fact, the whole purpose of the leaflet was to express the solidarity of the Socialist Action group with Grenada, and their determination to help build a movement against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean" (taken from a text of the report circulated by Socialist Action).



In the discussion that followed all three reports, most of the majority delegates spoke about very positive experiences and achievements in carrying out party campaigns and activities. Several majority delegates sharply criticized the minority reporter's remarks about Socialist Action.

One minority delegate, Marc Rich, commenting on serious problems regarding party democracy, used the example that the Los Angeles branch was told not to talk to members of Socialist Action--a prohibition he felt was not appropriate.

The second day of the convention began with the summary by Michael Schreiber. He answered majority delegates' remarks about NBIPP, party election campaigns, anti-war work, union activity, Greyhound strike support, and the way the Lenin study classes were carried out in the SWP. He also defended his own views about Socialist Action:

"In San Francisco and Oakland the party has expelled virtually its whole cadre of trade unionists who to any degree were leaders in the trade union movement.

"That's one reason why the Socialist Action grouping was able to move so rapidly into the top leadership of the Greyhound strike support here in Northern California. The other reason is their fighting program, which is also the program of the SWP.

"Jan G. once again laments that Comrade Jeff Mackler, 'one week after leaving the party helps draft a leaflet which puts the blame on the revolutionary leadership of Grenada.' I don't know how Jan knows it was Jeff Mackler that may have drafted the leaflet, but in any case I thought I had put this slander to rest. It seems clear that the New Jewel Movement party was able to take on, for most purposes, governmental power in Grenada. The mass organizations had little real power. But Maurice Bishop was not 'to blame' for this situation. (Besides, he and his supporters were a minority in the New Jewel Movement.) Blame is a strong word, and the Socialist Action leaflet doesn't place blame. It only affirms the need for socialist democracy. That's all it says.

"As for Jeff Mackler, if you turned on the radio in the week after the invasion, you probably would have heard his voice on one of a number of stations defending Grenada. Yesterday, he was one of the speakers at the labor support rally for the Greyhound strikers, along with Sylvia Weinstein, who gave the fund pitch, and Don Harmon, who gave the main organizational speech from the support committee. I think we should stop defaming these people in Socialist Action and find ways to work with them."

In his summary for the majority political report, Sam Manuel opened the attack against the minority which would culminate in the mass expulsion in California and around the country. He claimed that Schreiber had "solidarized with Socialist Action by calling them "Trotskyists" and "activists." Manuel hammered away at the position taken on Socialist Action by the N.C.--that it is an opponent organization which only seeks the destruction of the party and YSA.

Under the "State Organization Report," further groundwork was laid for the witchhunt about to take place. The reporter spoke briefly about the organization and functioning of the State Committee and state finances, but most of the report was devoted to a lengthy attack against Socialist Action, and to political differences in the party nationally going back to 1979.



Immediately after this report and before any discussion, the presiding committee presented motions to refer to the incoming State Committee the remarks made about S.A. by Michael Schreiber and Marc Rich. The presiding committee spokesman said this "raises questions on their willingness to abide by decisions of the National Committee" and "challenged the party's right to regulate relations" with other organizations. The minority reporter was accused of "a conscious attempt to reopen discussion on decisions of the National Committee" and Marc Rich was accused of asserting that only he, and not the party, determines his relations with other political groups and with opponents of the SWP.

At this point the focus of the convention shifted to the accusations against the two minority delegates. Marc Rich clearly stated he had always abided by party discipline and would continue to do so. He pointed out that it was no breach of discipline or loyalty to get up in front of a convention and state an opinion although, as he explained, he had phrased his feelings in a heated and exaggerated manner. Michael Schreiber defended his right to state his personal opinions in front of the delegates in accord with norms long practiced in the SWP.

The other three seated minority delegates attempted to take the floor but the chair recognized only one from San Francisco who had not previously spoken under any agenda point. The minority delegate from Oakland had been called on the first day of the convention. I had been called on during the discussion on the plenum report on Grenada--when the convention was officially adjourned and discussion was opened for all SWP members. The significance of this pattern of allowing a minority delegate to take the floor only once became clear after the convention when we were charged with "failing to take the floor. . . ." This was a true Catch-22 since we had to be called on by the chair in order to take the floor and were deliberately not recognized.

The newly elected State Committee quickly acted on the motions to refer. First, it instructed branch leaderships to meet with each member who voted for the minority resolution and ask them to immediately agree to the following statement:

"The minority resolution 'Deeds not Words: Draft Counter-Resolution' contained no position on, or declaration of support for the sect Socialist Action. As a supporter of that resolution, I repudiate the disloyal actions of the entire seated minority delegation, Marc Rich, Hayden Perry, Evelyn Sell, Paul Colvin, Michael Schreiber and Ralph Forsyth in failing to take the floor before the SWP California state convention and disassociating themselves from the split statements made by minority delegate Marc Rich and the minority reporter Michael Schreiber."

When comrades asked questions or expressed the desire to see a written report or hear a tape recording of what was said at the convention, they were told to accept the leadership's report as the only true and correct one. Under these conditions, agreement with the repudiation statement involved a breach of SWP organizational principles. Without any documentation or discussion or opportunity to hear other points of view, members were required to state political agreement with the leadership's characterizations of S.A., the behavior of the minority delegates and the remarks by Schreiber and Rich. Any hesita-



tion in fully agreeing with the leadership's version resulted in charges of disloyalty to the party. Up to now, loyalty to the party has always been defined in terms of actions, that is, members were required to carry out majority decisions--members were never required to agree with decisions or positions taken by the majority or leadership bodies. It is unprecedented in the SWP to equate blind acceptance of the leadership's judgment with loyalty to the party.

The minority delegates were not called into any meeting but received charges of "disloyal actions in failing to take the floor at the SWP California state convention to disassociate (herself/himself) from the split statements made by minority delegate Marc Rich and the minority reporter Michael Schreiber."

Six days after the convention, the State Committee heard the charges and, acting on the basis of its own unilateral interpretation of events, expelled every minority delegate who had been seated at any time during the convention (six in all) and expelled ten minority supporters who had not agreed to repudiate the six delegates. None of the charged members were present at the December 10 trial; most didn't even know it was taking place. Statements from the accused members were not solicited or, in some cases, members were told statements were not allowed. (When I protested this procedure, a State Committee member told me members had trial rights only at the branch level; members charged by higher bodies had no rights.)

When the report on this mass expulsion was given at the Los Angeles branch meeting the following night, three minority supporters protested the actions of the State Committee and said they could not, in principle, agree to such a repudiation statement. On the spot they were told that everyone who refused to agree with the statement would be charged and expelled along with the others. Under these circumstances they were forced to resign.

The State Committee then checked more carefully and "discovered" two more minority supporters who had not agreed to the repudiation. These two were expelled by the State Political Bureau on December 17.

The branch members who voted for the minority resolution and for delegates had no control over what those delegates said or did at the convention. Delegates to SWP conventions are not "instructed," that is, delegates are elected on the basis of agreement with the general line of a resolution but each delegate is free to speak and vote at the convention as they consider appropriate. Serious consideration of convention discussion can, at times, result in delegates being convinced of another position and changing their votes. Otherwise, there would be no point in people spending their time and money to travel to conventions; political positions could be determined simply by polling the branches.

An SWP convention is--or should be--a true collective discussion and decision-making body. It is a violation of this basic aspect of party norms to make branch members responsible for remarks made by delegates they elected. It is a violation of SWP organizational principles to demand that members repudiate opinions stated by other members in the course of an internal party meeting where democratic discussion is supposed to prevail.

It is also a violation of SWP convention proceedings and organizational principles to demand that delegates take the floor to repudiate each other. It is completely contrary to SWP norms to hold



delegates who vote for the general line of a report or resolution responsible for every specific formulation used by the reporter. The vote is taken on "general line" exactly because this allows members to register major agreement and, at the same time, permits particular differences or reservations over phrases, specific points and even whole sections of a resolution or oral report. If members had to agree with every word and sentence before they could vote for a position SWP conventions would be endless bickering sessions.

In branch discussions for the 1981 SWP national convention, I expressed differences, doubts, and questions about a section of the majority's draft political resolution but I voted for the general line of that document. The majority accepted this as perfectly appropriate and nobody criticized or challenged my voting for general line while holding certain differences. Two years later, however, this norm was suddenly replaced with a new one: voting for a general line automatically assumed agreement with every single word spoken by the reporter and all other supporters of that line. I voted for a general line in 1983 the same way I voted for the general line of the majority in 1981--with some differences on particular points and statements.

I and three other minority delegates were not accused of any disloyal actions during the convention itself where we could have answered such accusations in front of the membership. We were not allowed to clarify anything after the convention was over. We were not called in for special meetings with branch leaderships nor permitted to be at the trial where we were found guilty.

In order to create an atmosphere of hysteria within the party to justify the sweeping purge of oppositionists across the country, the California State Political Committee and the SWP Political Bureau made false assertions about "disloyal actions" and "a split perspective of political support for and intent to collaborate with Socialist Action. . . ." The real facts are: there was nothing in the remarks by Schreiber about S.A. which changed the general political line of the counterresolution. Even the state Political Committee admits that the minority resolution contained no "disloyal" or "split" statements. In addition, the minority delegation did not function as a caucus either before or during the convention. There was no caucus meeting to elect a reporter, no caucus discipline, no caucus collaboration on the summary, no caucus consultation on remarks made by delegates during the convention. The minority delegates heard Schreiber's report at the exact same time as the majority delegates: at the state convention on December 3. The minority delegation did not discuss, approve, or support any kind of split perspective in regard to Socialist Action or any other organization.

All SWP members will need to think through the character and purpose of party conventions in light of what happened in California. A national convention was announced for the summer of 1984. A huge question mark hangs over pre-convention and convention discussion and voting. Will comrades be free to express views honestly and openly or will they be victimized for any deviation from the official line of the leadership?



## REPORT ON THE EXPULSION OF GERARDO NEBBIA

(Note--the following report was prepared by the three comrades in New York who signed it. Its general line was approved by the National Organizing Committee of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency on March 2, 1984.)

On Sunday afternoon, February 12, the New York-New Jersey district of the SWP was scheduled to have a membership meeting to hear a report on "Reorganizing the Party." That morning Gerardo Nebbia, an active member of the Brooklyn branch for the last four years, and a former member of the Healyite Workers League in the 1970s, was visited by his branch organizer and handed a letter from the Political Bureau. The letter said: "The Political Bureau, acting under Article VI, Section 2, of the SWP Constitution, has concurred with the recommendation of the Control Commission to expel you from membership in the Socialist Workers Party for being an agent of the Workers League/Workers Revolutionary Party disruption operation and for being a member of Socialist Action."

Up to this moment, Comrade Nebbia did not have the slightest idea that he was being investigated by the Control Commission. In one blow he was denied the right to hear evidence against him, if any; to confront his accusers and respond to their charges; to attend his trial, if that is what it was; to defend himself in person or in writing before his branch or the district meeting where his comrades were presented with only the Political Bureau's version of his case.

Our report is not concerned with the charge that Comrade Nebbia is a member of Socialist Action, since we know with absolute certainty that he is not. It is concerned only with the charge that he is an agent of the Healyite disruption operation against the SWP. It is based on our discussions with Comrade Nebbia, who answered all our questions and cooperated in every way possible; discussions with other comrades who have known him throughout his membership in the SWP; and on the position our movement has always taken toward charges that individual members are agents. We did not learn anything directly from the Control Commission or Political Bureau, although we learned some more things about their anti-Leninist methods.

On the night of February 12, Comrade Nebbia got a phone call from a member who told him about the meeting. We have no way of verifying all the details of this account, but on the whole it rings true to us. If any part of it is inaccurate, the SWP Political Bureau can correct us.

The report on the Nebbia case was given to the meeting by Barry Sheppard, who spearheaded the purge of oppositionists in California and was transferred to New York to speed up the purge of oppositionists here. Sheppard said that the Control Commission had direct and conclusive evidence that Nebbia is a member of Socialist Action and, even worse, that he is an agent of the Healyites and had pushed the Healyite line in Socialist Action. But the evidence could not be disclosed for security reasons, since to do so would be to compromise and expose the source of the evidence. Therefore, all he was able to cite, he said, were examples and signs of Nebbia's "Healyism." First, Nebbia was alleged to have said that Jack Barnes has gone over to the class enemy, which is an echo of what the Healyites claim. Second, Nebbia expresses



himself in the same gobbledygook that the Healyites employ in their press. Third, Nebbia frequently refers to the dialectic, as the Healyites do.

Discussion from the floor of Sheppard's report came exclusively from supporters of the Barnes leadership, most of them apparently well primed before the meeting. The first was Nebbia's sister, who said she was not surprised because of his suspicious actions--to wit, he had a subscription to the Healyite newspaper; she had heard him speak favorably of some articles it had printed about strikes; she had never heard him criticize the Healyites or their policies.

Another speaker recalled that two other members, David and Jeanie Weissman, had left the party three or four years ago under mysterious circumstances, after which letters had been sent by D. Weissman to SWP members pushing the Healyite line. Nebbia was not mentioned but the implication was that he was connected with the Weissmans somehow or could be expected to follow their example.

A third speaker from the floor recalled that when our transit fraction was started some years ago, the Healyites had obtained a list of its members and had informed the union leadership who they were in an effort to get them ousted. Since Nebbia is in the transit fraction, the implication was that he had supplied the Healyites with the names.

A fourth speaker, a member of the Control Commission, did not discuss Nebbia, but confined himself to general points about various Healyite attacks and slanders against the SWP.

Someone asked Sheppard if the party plans to inform Socialist Action that it has a Healyite agent in its ranks. Sheppard replied in his summary that the Political Bureau had discussed and considered doing this, but finally decided that it couldn't because Socialist Action would ask for proof, and we can't give them proof without exposing or endangering the source.

That is the entire case against Comrade Nebbia, as presented to the New York-New Jersey district of the party.

To begin our inquiry we investigated Nebbia's political background. When he was an 18-year-old student in Oregon, he belonged to the White Panther Party for a few months. That was in 1969. He joined the Healyite Workers League in 1972 in Portland and resigned in 1976, "demoralized" by his experience with them, he says. He came around the SWP in New York in 1979, and was accepted into full membership early in 1980. He was a part of our Brooklyn Navy Yard fraction for two years, and then a member of our transit fraction. In the Autumn of 1980 he was summoned by the Control Commission and asked to explain (1) what he knew about D. and J. Weissman and (2) why he had been translating into Spanish an article from the Healyite press. The Control Commission reported to his branch that it had no reason to doubt his explanations about these matters, and did not carry its investigations of Nebbia's possible Healyism any further--at that time.

Meanwhile, a serious dispute over perspectives began in the party prior to the 1981 national convention, and Comrade Nebbia voted for one of the minority documents and for minority delegates



to the convention. Subsequently, as the dispute deepened, he expressed differences with the Barnes leadership, supported some of the positions of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus in the NC, voted against expulsions that he considered unjustified, and spoke vehemently against the leadership's moves to cancel the 1983 national convention. This earned him a place on the National Office's list of suspicious or dangerous characters. But that didn't make him a Healyite or a Healyite agent.

In our interview, Nebbia made the following points: It is true that he had a subscription to the Healyite paper--but so do others who are non-Healyites and anti-Healyites. It is true that he spoke favorably on a few occasions about individual articles in the Healyite paper--but that is not what a Healyite agent would do. It is untrue that he never criticized Healyite policies and practices--but he did not feel required to keep doing so every time he saw his sister in order to demonstrate his anti-Healyism to her. It is untrue that he ever said, to oppositionists in the SWP or anyone else, that Jack Barnes had gone over to the class enemy. It is true that he first came into contact with Marxism while he was in the Workers League and may retain some of their terminology, but that doesn't make him a Healyite. It is true that he is interested in theory and aspires to think dialectically, but these are positive features shared by many thousands of others throughout the world who have never even heard of Healyism.

Nebbia was not a member of our transit fraction at the time the Healyites fingered our members to union officials. (We also established that the membership of the fraction at that time was widely known in the party and could have been revealed by virtually any party member.) The last time he saw D. or J. Weissman was the day after J. Weissman had resigned from the SWP, when Comrade Nebbia saw her in the subway, as he reported at the time to his branch organizer. He occasionally sees a Healyite at his work place but has never had a political discussion with him.

In short, everything said against him at the district meeting from which he was barred, is irrelevant, immaterial, or untrue.

Why did the Political Bureau bring the charge of Healyite agent against Comrade Nebbia? Because during the recent Christmas-New Year's purge, when scores of party members on the National Office's "subversive list" were asked to repudiate actions or inactions of minority delegates at a California state convention, and were expelled if they refused, Comrade Nebbia was one of the few oppositionists who did repudiate the California delegates and therefore was not expelled at that time. But he spoke vehemently against the purge at a district membership meeting on January 8 and made a motion to reinstate those who had been expelled. His was the strongest oppositional voice at the meeting. That made him a target. In fact, the spokesperson for the Political Committee on January 8 promised to get rid of any oppositionists overlooked in that particular round of expulsions.

For more than a year and a half the party leadership had been dropping hints that oppositionists in the SWP might be supporters, objectively if not subjectively, of the Healyite attack on the party in the form of the Gelfand suit; at the very least, it was implied, the oppositionists' criticisms of the leadership "paralleled" those of Gelfand and the Healyites. If the SWP membership had accepted



such an amalgam, the dissidents would have been completely discredited and isolated. Fortunately they did not. But after the Christmas-New Year's purge had silenced most of the opposition voices in the party, the leadership seized on Comrade Nebbia's previous membership in the Workers League to concoct a frame-up that would at once justify eliminating him from the party ranks and smear oppositionists with the taint of Healyism.

Finally, we must question the credibility of this charge against Comrade Nebbia, and the way in which it has been presented by the SWP leadership. This is not the first time that charges of being an agent have been leveled in, or against members of the SWP. Our tradition has always been to demand rigorous and convincing proof before expelling members as agents. Any such charges made on the basis of mere suspicion or circumstantial evidence have been dismissed as irresponsible--giving them any credibility could open the party up to serious disruption by provocateurs.

This idea has correctly been given great emphasis in the SWP recently exactly because of the Healyite slander campaign against the party leadership. The danger of agent-baiting was also a major topic of discussion a few years ago at the time that former National Committee member Ed Heisler was exposed as a government fink.

Comrade Sheppard's report to the New York-New Jersey district membership claimed that the Control Commission and the Political Bureau had proof of the charges against Comrade Nebbia but could not reveal it because to do so would expose its source. The only kind of evidence for which this might be true is purely verbal testimony, where the identity of the individual providing it would have to be revealed. But for the Control Commission and the Political Bureau to convict Comrade Nebbia of being a Healyite agent solely on the basis of such testimony--and without allowing the accused comrade a chance to refute the charges--would be the height of irresponsibility. Comrades can imagine what sort of victimization that could expose the party to.

It would be legitimate for the Political Bureau to have taken the action it did in the way that it did only if it also had some sort of irrefutable documentary proof, corroborating the verbal testimony. But if that is the case, then this documentation should be presented to the membership. Revealing such material evidence would not endanger its source, which could still remain confidential.

We challenge the SWP leadership to prove its charges against Comrade Nebbia, or to withdraw them. It is impossible to prove the negative in such a case: that Comrade Nebbia is not an agent of the Healyites. But this is not necessary. No self-respecting revolutionary can accept an action as serious as expelling a comrade on the basis of someone else's word. Until we have been presented with real and substantial evidence, the only responsible course is to reject the charges and consider Comrade Nebbia not guilty.

\* \* \* \* \*



Recommendations:

1. The Fourth Internationalist Tendency should do everything it can to expose and discredit the expulsion of Comrade Nebbia and to help clear his name of the false charges used to smear him and other oppositionists inside and outside the SWP.

2. The F.I.T. should support Nebbia's appeal for reinstatement in the SWP and urge the United Secretariat to include him among the unjustly expelled SWP members whom it recognizes as part of the Fourth International.

3. The F.I.T. should support Nebbia's efforts to bring into existence an impartial commission of inquiry which would invite the SWP leadership to submit its alleged proof that he is an agent of the Healyites.

signed/  
Naomi Allen  
Steve Bloom  
George Breitman

Feb. 23, 1984



Introduction

In the Orwellian world inhabited by the SWP majority faction, oppositionists who ask for an open party discussion of political differences are condemned as a "secret faction," and the purge of the oppositionists initiated by the leadership is labeled a "split operation" by the victims of the purge. Such abominations are possible only if the membership is denied the right to know the facts and read the documents about the party struggle. The SWP leadership has done everything it could to suppress oppositional statements and documents (and to distort the context and meaning of those it cannot suppress). We here print four such documents that throw additional light on the Political Bureau's January 21, 1984, statement and Steve Bloom's answer to it in this issue.

The purges of all SWP oppositionists formally began at the February-March 1982 plenum of the NC. There a series of accusations and charges against oppositionists in the NC and other party members was referred to the Control Commission in the midst of the plenum. The Control Commission dutifully discovered (among the many crimes allegedly committed) that the four NC oppositionists were guilty of circulating "unauthorized documents"; that they had formed a "secret faction"; and that they had "forfeited their right to membership" in the SWP. The majority faction then enacted 27 motions on proper conduct of party members, stipulating that any infraction of these new "norms" would bring expulsion from the party. Frank Lovell's "Remarks under Party Norms and Appeals" were directed against this witch-hunt atmosphere and those responsible for it. In September 1982 the National Office transcribed these remarks and distributed them in their present unedited form to NC members only. They were never made available to SWP members.

In the course of his remarks Lovell referred to an unpublished 1966 letter by James P. Cannon as an example of how a self-confident leadership encourages discussion whenever serious questions of party program are raised, the purpose being to educate the ranks and arm the party with a better understanding of Marxism. Cannon wrote this letter after the 1965 national convention had adopted the resolution on "the organizational character" of the party, which the majority faction in 1982 was citing as the basis for its rigid restrictions on political discussion within the party. Cannon had been a member of the subcommittee that prepared the 1965 resolution and obviously he had a different interpretation of it than the 1982 majority faction. Lovell's request that the Cannon letter be appended to the plenum minutes was ignored. We are pleased to reprint it now for its educational value and as evidence of how the present leadership has changed the party's organizational character.

Our third and fourth documents relate to the claim in the Political Bureau's latest statement that at the August 1983 plenum the four NC minority members refused to explain why they had dissolved the Opposition Bloc of two tendencies they had formed in May. These documents are self-explanatory and refute beyond doubt all charges that the Fourth Internationalist Caucus had withheld information about the termination of the Opposition Bloc, or was reticent in any respect about stating unambiguously its position on the danger of a split in the party, which it did everything possible to prevent. The August 8 statement by Bloom and Lovell was delivered to the presiding committee of the NC plenum.

The Bloom-Lovell "Response to the Charges Against Us" was made on August 10 after the majority faction, ignoring the previous refutation of false charges, made additional accusations of the same stripe. It was submitted to the NC after the four NC oppositionists had been suspended from the NC, as an answer to the second set of contrived charges which were the purported grounds for their suspension from the party. Neither document has been published before this.



Lovell (first round)

Comrades, in anticipation of this discussion we, the minority, submitted a resolution on democratic centralism and the building of the revolutionary combat party in the United States. That's in your kits and I hope you've had an opportunity to read it. I don't intend to refer to it here or try to explain the details of it.

I'm here now as an advocate of proletarian democracy. I strongly believe that what the radical movement in this country needs is a broad and open discussion of all the problems facing the American working class and I am convinced that that discussion must begin right here in our own party. This is not just to get the record straight at the moment. I've been convinced of this for a long time. But I want to tell you now exactly where I'm coming from. I am a socialist to the marrow of my bones, and on that account I am an uncompromising democrat. For that reason I have been proud for the last forty-seven years to belong to this party through which I learned to hate and despise any and all manifestations of bureaucratic controls, and especially thought controls.

In our resolution that I referred to, "Democratic Centralism and the Building of a Revolutionary Combat Party in the United States," we tried to describe as succinctly as we could, the relation between the democratic and the centralist aspects of Lenin's democratic centralist concept of party organization. This relationship is not constant. It's variable and you can't make it constant simply by proclaiming it as such from this podium or anywhere else. It varies depending upon the stage and intensity of the class struggle, the degree of legality, the level of political consciousness of the working class, the size and class composition of the party, the experience of the cadre, the weight and class character of social pressures bearing down on the party and influencing its development, the various political currents that find expression inside the party, the general level of Marxist education of the party membership, and the major tasks of the party as dictated by the objective social and political conditions at any given juncture. Social and political conditions of this kind have to be understood and measured, they can't be telescoped in the form of a formula such as "This is a transition epoch", which was presented here. That doesn't mean anything without a description and analysis and a careful study of what this transitional epoch consists of.

Needless to say, in times of civil war or under conditions of illegality, we must have a highly centralized structure in order to survive. But these are not the conditions now in the United States in 1982. We're going to avoid schematic and purely administrative approaches, if possible, to a solution of our current

problems. And if we're going to avoid that, then we have to handle them in a healthy and productive way. The starting point must be the real needs of the party today. The present period is one of profound and rapid change, profound change in economics, in politics, in consciousness, national and international relations, profound changes in everything. In such circumstances the party's compelling need is to understand the changes taking place and about to take place. Otherwise we cannot influence the outcome of these changes or take advantage of them. And the only way to acquire the necessary understanding is through collective effort, a crucial part of which is discussion.

This means that the democratic side of democratic centralism is needed more than in any ordinary period when change is slower and more gradual. The supreme example of this is the period of revolution, when change is most rapid, and old habits are reversed, and when all previous concepts of how the change will occur are tested. We saw this in 1917 in the Bolshevik revolution and in all others. The Bolshevik revolution remains the best example because it is the best documented. In 1917 in Petrograd there was no lack of debate. Questions of all kinds about the revolution were discussed throughout the party, in the leadership and by the membership. This accounts for the variety and richness of the debate and this contributed to the programmatic understanding and tactical versatility of Lenin and Trotsky from the time of their return to Russia until the victory of the revolution in October.

If that was possible and beneficial in the crucial period between the [February and October] revolutions, it ought to be useful in our party today. This is the question Steve Bloom spoke about yesterday, the need to open the debate on one of the most crucial questions confronting our party, the Leninist theory of the state, his conception of the Russian revolution. We believe this begins with the discussion on Leninism which was opened in our public press, not simply to members of the party but to the public, in the ISR last November with the article on how Lenin saw the revolution, the article by Doug Jenness. I submitted a proposal for a well-regulated literary discussion at our last plenum. Les Evans, who was present at the plenum, subsequently wrote a carefully researched answer to the Jenness article, and submitted it for publication to the ISR. If this created confusion and has a negative effect on the kind of political discussion the party needs to build a self-reliant membership, if it creates consternation, restiveness or cynicism in the party, then the blame belongs to the majority tendency, not to us. It's the majority tendency that restricts discussion, will not publish answers to the article that was published in the ISR in which the whole public read a basic change in our programmatic position. The real interests and needs of the party



dictate that you should recognize the error that was made at the last plenum and correct it now, which you have reserved the opportunity to do by an early decision of the Political Committee. If you fail to do this, you will do grave damage to the Leninist character of the party and to its ability to fulfill the great mission that it was organized for.

We don't need debates now about norms. What we need is a political discussion about the basic programmatic positions of the party that you have changed without a discussion. We have been asked and undoubtedly will be asked again if the Fourth Internationalist Caucus on the National Committee accepts or recognizes the organizational principles adopted by the 1965 convention. The answer to this is yes, of course we do. I voted for those principles in 1965. And I could vote for them again today. But I don't interpret them, I didn't then and I don't now interpret them in the way that you do, that you have been doing, and that you're extending here at this plenum. The 1965 principles do not at all support interpretations that would hobble the right of the members to engage freely in political discussion, a right that has meaning only if the members can communicate their ideas to each other both orally and in written form. I've been doing that for forty-seven years in this party and I don't take kindly to interpretations that would strip me of my right to express my opinion to my comrades.

There is nothing in the 1965 principles abrogating the right of members to consult in the preparation of documents to be submitted to the party. There is nothing in the 1965 principles giving the leadership the right to tell the members of any tendency or any other tendency who it is or what it is or what they want to belong to or what ideas they want to subscribe to within the basic tenets of this party. There is nothing in the 1965 principles that authorizes the leadership to take the restrictions we have developed against so-called disloyal factions and apply them to loyal comrades who belong to an organized tendency or who may not belong to any organized tendency and may be part of only an unstructured, undisciplined ideological current on one or another issue. There is nothing in the 1965 principles to prevent tendencies from existing in non-preconvention discussion periods. It is customary and therefore normal for tendencies to dissolve after conventions. But that is not obligatory, and there is nothing in the principles to prevent comrades from forming tendencies, either purely ideological tendencies or organized and disciplined tendencies in non-discussion periods. Nothing in the principles supports the statement of Jack Barnes at the last convention that there is no activity -- nothing whatsoever -- that an organized ideological tendency can engage in during a period when the party has not opened discussion. I

don't believe that. A tendency can be active in nondiscussion periods in a number of ways, just as long as it doesn't disrupt the work of the party.

Some comrades read the 1965 principles wrongly. In part, this document outlines the norms of party functioning and tendency functioning. And, in part it engages in education against wrong or questionable conduct. These two parts and functions of the document should not be mixed up. It denounces and explains the dangers of a particular kind of tendency, cliques and cliquism. But no one has even been expelled from our party for cliquism, although there is evidence of it on several levels in this party today. That's because cliquism is fought by political and educational methods rather than by administrative or disciplinary measures. This confusion over what the document actually does is responsible for some of the weird, weird interpretations recently. Such as prohibitions against comrades consulting about documents to be submitted to the party bulletin. And as Comrade LeBlanc said in one of the letters that's in your kits, "There are norms and there are norms." It is a norm for members to pay dues, and they can be expelled if they do not pay dues. It is also a norm for members to pay suitable sustainer for pledge, but members don't get expelled if they don't pay what you or I might regard as suitable. So norms are not all of a similar weight or gravity.

In the face of the facts, the majority tendency has the vote to declare that two distinct tendencies are a single tendency. They did that. Just as the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Galileo's time had the votes in the council of cardinals to declare that the earth does not move around the sun. But it still moves, despite the votes. During this plenum, there is evidence that you have begun to see the light. I'm not talking about most of the delegates here. There is evidence of that in a different respect. But there is evidence that the majority, the leaders of the majority tendency, have begun to see some light, at least partially, if dimly. They have stopped talking about the minority and they now recognize that there are two distinct and separate minority tendencies. And that's progress on your part. The majority tendency has the votes to declare that there is an undeclared international faction. And that we are part of it. This is an abomination against the truth, but the truth will prevail in the end and this will be seen as an effort to poison the international political discussion through organizational accusations ...[tape change]...Workers Party of in the International, especially since we do it openly in front of both and not behind their backs.

Comrade Farrell Dobbs' 1970 talks about our organizational principles singles out for praise an ideological tendency in the party after World War II. Included in



that tendency was Joe Hansen, Tom Kerry and Bert Cochran among others. Because, as Comrade Dobbs says, "...what the comrades did was to collaborate in discussing their views among themselves. Through a process of collective thinking they arrived at a generally accepted concept among themselves, as to what the party line should be...." That's what they did. That was their great crime, according to present day norms. They were discussing the problem facing the party at that time on Eastern Europe, before raising their views orally and in writing. In other words, they consulted with each other and even agreed on a course of action, secretly, behind the back of the party, according to these norms that you're trying to apply here today and I presume you will vote for them. No one at that time even thought there was anything wrong in such consultation, or that they had to get permission to do it. And five years after the adoption of the 1965 principles, Comrade Dobbs, one of the authors of that document, likewise saw nothing wrong in such consultation. In fact, he said it was a model way of conducting and preparing, conducting a discussion and preparing for that discussion. But what would happen today, if such a situation under these new norms that are being introduced now? Would it involve in such circumstances, consultation of comrades; would they be accused at least of undeclared factionalism?

Another member of the committee that introduced the 1965 organizational document was Comrade Cannon. I want to cite here a few sentences from a letter or a document well its now a document, it was a letter that he wrote in 1966, one year after the 1965 organizational principles was adopted. I'll submit the entire Cannon letter if Matthew [Herreshoff] doesn't have it already in his collection, he can get it here and I'd like it to be made part of the record. At that time, 1966, Comrade Arnie Swabeck, one of the founders of our movement was under the sway of Maoism, and he was agitating for all of us to become Maoists. He and some of his co-thinkers circulated documents containing their views throughout the party. Larry Trainor, who was then organizer up in Boston, complained to the national office that this was a violation of National Committee membership discipline and the PC put the question of discipline on the agenda of that plenum. That's the circumstances in which Cannon was writing then. His letter was a letter addressed to the majority caucus. Here's some of what he said, "In light of our tradition and experience over a long period of more than 37 years since the left opposition in this country began its work, under the guidance of Trotsky, one might well include the first ten years of American communism before that, from which I, at least, learned and remember a lot from doing things the wrong way" (which he thought the letter that had been sent out by the national office was approaching). He says, "Probably the hardest lesson

I had to learn from Trotsky after ten years of bad schooling through the communist party faction fights was to let organizational questions wait until the political questions at issue were fully clarified. Not only in the National Committee but also in the ranks of the party. It is no exaggeration but the full and final truth that our party owes its very existence to the fact that some of us learned this hard lesson and learned also how to apply it in practice."

The reason I read this here aloud not only for the benefit of all the delegates but especially for the benefit of the central leadership of the party. I know you're not unfamiliar with this document because I gave it to -- put it on the desk of -- the comrade who was on the desk at the time that we were having some trials two or three years ago, some of which seemed to me to have aspects of a frame-up about them. I thought this would be a good guide. I protested at the time about the way these trials were being conducted. Cannon continues, "As for disciplinary action (which they were contemplating) suggested in Larry's letter, or at least intimated in the action of the Political Committee in putting this matter on the agenda of the plenum, I don't even think we have much of a case in the present instance. Are we going to discipline two members of the National Committee for circulating their criticisms outside the committee itself? There is absolutely no party law or precedent for such action." This was after this [1965] document on principles was written and adopted. "And we will run into all kinds of trouble in the party ranks," Cannon said, "and in the International, if we try this kind of experiment for the first time." And at the end of his letter, Cannon wrote, "It would be too bad if the Socialist Workers Party suddenly decided to get tougher than the communist party (of the 1920's he's talking about, not the Stalinist Communist Party) and tried to enforce a nonexistent law which can't be enforced without creating all kinds of discontent and disruption, to say nothing of blurring the serious political disputes which have to be discussed and clarified for the education of the party ranks." The National Committee of 1966 evidently agreed with Cannon and with his line of thinking, since the next plenum did not take any disciplinary action against Swabeck and Frasier for having circulated their documents outside the National Committee. The whole matter was dropped.

What will this plenum do? What this plenum will do depends upon the recommendations of the central leadership of this party. What will we do, on our part? I'll tell you now, right now. We will abide by the new norms in every detail, including those that we consider to be in conflict with the historic traditions and practices of the Socialist Workers Party and of Leninism. After expressing our opinions about them, we have no



alternative but to abide by them until we are able to persuade a later plenum or a convention to rescind them. I have been in the party for a long time and I intend to remain in it until the end. I urge all other members opposed to the new interpretation not to become discouraged and drop out. These perversions, perversions of our principles, will surely be corrected by the revolutionary party sooner or later and it is our obligation to help achieve such correction. Before that happens, we appeal once again to reason, to the reason of the majority tendency, and to the leadership of the majority tendency to reconsider before taking steps that will weaken the capacity of the members to learn and develop as worker Bolsheviks and make it harder to achieve our goal of becoming a full-fledged Leninist party.

We're not discussing the right, we're not discussing here at all the right of the majority to govern and lead the party, only the wisdom of these changes that you are about to take. Your self-interest coincides with the interest of the party as a whole, and both can be served by considering and deferring the imposition of these proposed norms. For my part, as an individual member of the National Committee, and of the Political Committee, if I'm elected here as was proposed yesterday, I will abide by the discipline in every detail. And I will serve loyally as I always have in every capacity to which I'm assigned. I'm sure that we'll have an opportunity at a later date to discuss the substantive political differences that are involved.

Now, in concluding, I not only want to introduce the motion that I suggested at the outset, to support the resolution on democratic centralism that's in your kits, but I'm also introducing the following three motions: One, to append to the minutes of this February-March plenum of the Socialist Workers Party the platform of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus, a political tendency in the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party, as submitted on December 24, 1981. Two, to send copies to the branches of the Socialist Workers Party the platform of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus, a political tendency in the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party, as submitted to the National Committee on December 24, 1981. Three, to send copies to all SWP branches of the resolutions and edited reports presented to this February-March 1982 plenum of the Socialist Workers Party on the following debated subjects: Iran, Party Tactics in the Trade Unions and U.S. Politics, The Socialist Workers Party and the Coming American Revolution, Democratic Centralism.

One final word, now about the voting. I do not agree with the motion that we should have a convention this year. If you decide to have a convention this year, it might work out all right, but I think it will work out better if we don't. I think having made the decisions that

will be made here, it's better to allow some time, more than the few months intervening between now and August, allow some time for the events to take their course. There's going to be some very great changes in the coming year. So that if we come to a convention in 1983 we'll all see these questions in a very much different light than if we try to hold a convention this year.

Lovell (second round)

Let me tell you, comrades, what our purpose was. You know Steve [Bloom] and I formed this tendency, the Fourth Internationalist tendency, last December, and that's not very long ago. The reason we formed it was because of the action of the previous plenum, which rejected a proposal which I had made to begin a serious discussion about one of our basic tenets, permanent revolution. That has very far-ranging ramifications, if you want to revise that. It appeared in the article written by Doug [Jenness] that that was the purpose, so we wanted to find out. That's certainly a legitimate quest.

Our purpose then in forming an organized tendency in the National Committee, was to pursue that quest and others, because there are a number of disputed political questions about which there is no specific position written down in document form, in resolution form. So when we approached this plenum, we said, well, we ought to undertake that task. It really is the responsibility of the majority tendency. The leadership should do this. We will undertake it. We'll do the best we can. And we drafted a serious of resolutions, one on Poland, one on Iran, one on the American political scene, and one on the organization question because we were quite sure that one of the consequences of our quest for a clear political discussion on these fundamental questions would be a broad discussion on the organization question. So we wrote a resolution on that question, too. Steve told me as we approached this plenum, it just looks to me as if everything is going to have to be on the organization question. He says, look at this, and he took the documents that we had written, our resolutions, in one hand, and balanced them against what we had written about the organization question. What we were writing about the political questions far outweighed the other matter, but with the majority tendency, if you weighed their documents, they don't have very much on the political side, but the organization side is very heavy, very heavy indeed.

For the brief period of time we've been in existence, I don't know to what extent we've accomplished political clarity. But we must have been doing something. We were charged with all kinds of high crimes and misdemeanors here, that you have to be rather talented, I think, to accomplish



all of this in such a brief period of time. Now we haven't done such bad things as we're charged with. It's true, we pushed the norms. We did that deliberately. But we stayed within the norms, that was our purpose. We did not want to violate any of the basic tenets of the party. But we knew we would be charged with that. I'm thankful that we haven't been charged with disloyalty, because we're not disloyal. We want to function within this party.

We're not impatient, either, as has been charged here. We are very patient. If you compare what we did, preparing for this plenum, and the approaches we've made to the PC, it showed a very great degree of patience. The first thing we did was submit to the PC our statement, tendency statement, with the issues listed, in brief positions stated on them, what we thought. Then we followed up with resolutions, on each of these fundamental questions the party is facing. All we asked-- first of all, we said, here, you send this out in the minutes. But it took about three or four weeks to get that in the minutes. Then we wrote a letter that said, you've been kind of slow in doing this, it seems. I don't know why the PC would try to hold up this statement from members of the National Committee. Two members of the NC write a political statement. Now the PC is a subordinate body to the National Committee. So you would think, I think, I know there's a difference of opinion about this, but I believe it is, it should be, automatic for the PC to send out a document of this kind. A very responsible document. If somebody suddenly went out of his or her mind, and put in something irrelevant, the Committee could say, well, we don't think this is really relevant to our needs at the present time. We won't send it out, we'll wait, and we'll have further discussions about it. There was no dispute along these lines, and they did, eventually, send it out.

Then we said, well, it's good that you sent it out. We propose now that you publish it for everybody in the party to read, in a party education bulletin, or something. We didn't propose to open a discussion in the party. And it does not mean, as interpreted by the PC, that simply because you publish a document of this kind, that you thereby begin a big discussion in the party. Unless you want to organize such a discussion. If you do not want to organize such a discussion, on all the issues, then on some of the issues. That can be done. That's the responsibility of the PC to do that. We think you shunned your responsibility in this respect. Also, you have a responsibility for preparing this plenum, which you have done, not in the way that we would have done, or in the way that we believe it ought to have been done. We think you would have acted more responsibly if you had come to this plenum with your positions, written out, in resolution form, on all the basic questions that face the party. Not rely on some

oral reports, later to be edited. That's an innovation. We never did that before. Always, the central leadership of the party brought resolutions to the plenums, and then to the membership.

Well, we didn't accomplish that either. I could go on for quite a while, but I won't take more than a few minutes, if you'll give me that time. There are some specific questions that were raised.

I think probably I should go to some of those specific questions that have been raised now in this particular organization discussion. I thought in some respects this organization discussion was pretty good. Better than many that I have heard. One of the questions that was raised was, if you don't favor a convention, then you apparently intend to continue your anarchistic or subversive or underhanded activity. We don't intend anything of the sort.

We don't think that a convention this year would be useful because we don't think there is time to test the ideas that have been raised here. We don't think that if a convention or a plenum adopts a position then that remains the position until there's another gathering. On the contrary, you elect a PC here, and every member who's sitting here now goes back to the branches and the thought process continues. Life goes on. We are all thinking people, and we are, our thoughts are determined in part not simply by resolutions that we make here, or motions that we pass, or speeches we've heard. Our thought processes are determined by the weight of events upon us. Things are happening fast here. So that what is happening everywhere in the world is going to have something to do with what we think and do in this interim period between now and the next plenum, between now and the next convention, between now and the education conference. That is, this body is a thinking body, so it makes changes. Over time. Sometimes in a very brief period of time. There's nothing wrong with that. It has to be. That's the living reality of the party, that's the life in the party.

We are pretty sure that what we have written down leading up to this plenum will be vindicated. We are quite sure. By events. Not by any arguments we give you here. And what we've written down will not be overthrown by any arguments you hear from the other side, either. We will see during the course of the next year. And during that period of time, we in the party, we the minority in the party, will carry out the decisions of the majority. The majority has every right to make decisions. We don't question that for one moment here. Did not, do not, will not. What we do question is the wisdom of this majority. We don't think they do things very well, and we don't think the party is going to prosper if it pursues the line that was advanced here by the central leadership of the party.



February 8, 1966

TO THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Comrades:

I feel rather uneasy about the circular letter from Tom dated Jan. 28th, enclosing a copy of Larry T.'s letter of Jan. 15th, and Arne's letter of January 7th addressed to Larry and his letter of Dec. 14th addressed to Rosemary and Doug, and also the circular of Al A. announcing his decision to join the PLP (which I had already seen locally).

The Swabeck letter and the Kaye document, which I had previously received, make serious criticisms of the Party and Youth actions at the Washington Thanksgiving Conference, and make a number of other serious, and even fundamental, criticisms of party policy and action in general.

The problem, as I see it, is how to deal effectively with these challenges and how to aid the education of the party and the Youth in the process -- in the light of our tradition and experience over a period of more than thirty-seven years since the Left Opposition in this country began its work under the guidance of Trotsky. One might well include the first ten years of American communism before that, from which I, at least, learned and remember a lot from doing things the wrong way.

Larry's letter of Jan. 15th suggesting disciplinary action, and Tom's letter of Jan. 28th informing us that the Political Committee has put the question of discipline on the Plenum agenda, are, in my opinion, the wrong way.

Probably the hardest lesson I had to learn from Trotsky, after ten years of bad schooling through the Communist Party faction fights, was to let organizational questions wait until the political questions at issue were fully clarified, not only in the National Committee but also in the ranks of the Party. It is no exaggeration, but the full and final truth, that our party owes its very existence today to the fact that some of us learned this hard lesson and learned also how to apply it in practice.

From that point of view, in my opinion, the impending Plenum should be conceived of as a school for the education and clarification of the party on the political issues involved in the new disputes, most of which grew out of earlier disputes with some new trimmings and absurdities.



This aim will be best served if the attacks and criticisms are answered point by point in an atmosphere free from poisonous personal recriminations and venomous threats of organization discipline. Our young comrades need above all to learn; and this is the best, in fact the only way, for them to learn what they need to know about the new disputes. They don't know it all yet. The fact that some of them probably think they already know everything, only makes it more advisable to turn the Plenum sessions into a school with questions and answers freely and patiently passed back and forth.

The classic example for all time, in this matter of conducting political disputes for the education of the cadres, is set forth in the two books which grew out of the fundamental conflict with the petty bourgeois opposition in 1939-40. I think these books, twenty-six years after, are still fresh and alive because they attempt to answer and clarify all important questions involved in the dispute, and leave discipline and organizational measures aside for later consideration.

Compared to the systematic, organized violation of normal disciplinary regulations and procedures committed by the petty bourgeois opposition in that fight, the irregularities of Kirk and Swabek resemble juvenile pranks. Nevertheless, Trotsky insisted from the beginning that all proposals, or even talk or threats of disciplinary action be left aside until the political disputes were clarified and settled. The Party was reborn and reeducated in that historic struggle, and equipped to stand up in the hard days that were to follow, precisely because that policy was followed.

\* \* \*

As for disciplinary action suggested in Larry's letter, and at least intimated in the action of the Political Committee in putting this matter on the agenda of the Plenum -- I don't even think we have much of a case in the present instance. Are we going to discipline two members of the National Committee for circulating their criticisms outside the Committee itself? There is absolutely no party law or precedent for such action, and we will run into all kinds of trouble in the party ranks, and the International, if we try this kind of experiment for the first time.

We have always thought proper and responsible procedure required that Party leaders confine their differences and criticisms within the National Committee until a full discussion could be had at a Plenum, and a discussion in the Party formally



authorized. But it never worked with irresponsible people and it never will; and this kind of trouble can't be cured by discipline.

In the first five years of the Left Opposition, Shachtman and Abern took every dispute in the committee, large or small, into the New York Branch -- with unlimited discussion and denunciation of the committee majority by an assorted collection of articulate screwballs who would make the present critics of the Party policy from one end of the country to the other, appear in comparison as well mannered pupils in a Sunday School. There was nothing to do about it but fight it out. Any kind of disciplinary action would have provoked a split which couldn't be explained and justified before the radical public.

To my recollection there has never been a time in our thirty-seven-year history when a critical opposition waited very long to circulate their ideas outside the Committee ranks, despite our explanation that such conduct was improper and irresponsible. We educated and hardened our cadre over the years and decades by meeting all critics and opponents politically and educating those who were educable.

I will add to the previously cited examples of the fight with the petty bourgeois opposition two minor examples.

1. Right after our trial in Minneapolis in 1941 the well-known Munis blasted our conduct at the trial as lacking in "proud valor", capitulating to legalism, and all other crimes and dirty tricks. I answered Munis by taking up his criticisms point by point and answering them without equivocation or evasion. Munis' letter and my answer, some of you will remember, was published in a pamphlet on "Defense Policy In The Minneapolis Trial", so that all party members and others who might be interested could hear both sides and judge for themselves.

That pamphlet was published twenty-four years ago, and I personally have never since heard a peep out of anybody in criticism of our conduct at the trial. On the contrary, my testimony "Socialism On Trial" has been printed and reprinted a number of times in a number of editions and, as I understand it, has always been the most popular pamphlet of the Party.

2. I notice that the YSA has just recently published, in an internal discussion bulletin, my two speeches at the 1948 Plenum on the Wallace Progressive Party and our 1948 Election Campaign. The circumstances surrounding these speeches has pertinence to the impending Plerum.



No sooner had the Wallace candidacy been announced on a Progressive Party ticket than Swabeck in Chicago, consulting with himself, decided that this was the long-awaited Labor Party and that we had to jump into it with both feet. Without waiting for the Plenum, or even for the Political Committee, to discuss the question and formulate a position, he hastily lined up Bartell and Manny Turbovitch and the local executive committee and from that, quick as a wink, the entire Chicago Branch to support the candidacy of Wallace and get into the Progressive Party on the ground floor. There was also strong sympathy for this policy in Los Angeles, Buffalo, Youngstown, and other branches of the Party. The discussion at the Plenum should be studied in light of these circumstances.

My two speeches were devoted, from beginning to end, to a political analysis of the problem and a point by point answer to every objection raised by Swabeck and other critics. It is worth noting, by those who are willing to learn from past experiences, that Swabeck's irresponsible action and violation of what Larry refers to as "committee discipline" were not mentioned once.

There was a reason for the omission, although such conduct was just as much an irritation then as now. The reason for the omission was that we wanted to devote all attention at the Plenum to the fundamental political problems involved and the political lessons to be learned from the dispute. My speeches, as well as remarks of other comrades at the Plenum, had the result of convincing the great majority present and even shaking the confidence of the opponents in their own position. By the time we got to the National Convention a few months later, the Party was solidly united and convinced that the nomination of our own ticket in 1948 was the correct thing to do.

Committee "discipline" follows from conviction and a sense of responsibility; it cannot be imposed by Party law or threats. I have said before that in more than thirty-seven years of our independent history we have never tried to enforce such discipline. There was such a law, however, or at least a mutual understanding to this effect, in the Communist Party during the period of my incubation there. But what was the result in practice?

Formally, all discussion and happenings in the Political Committee and in the Plenum were secrets sealed with seven seals. In practice before any meeting was twenty-four hours old the partisans of the different factions had full reports on secret "onion skin" paper circulated throughout the Party. Even the ultra-discipline of the Communist Party never disciplined anybody for these surreptitious operations.



It would be too bad if the SWP suddenly decided to get tougher than the Communist Party and try to enforce a nonexistent law -- which can't be enforced without creating all kinds of discontent and disruption, to say nothing of blurring the serious political disputes which have to be discussed and clarified for the education of the Party ranks.

I would like copies of this letter to be made available to National Committee members who received Tom's letter of Jan. 23th.

Fraternally,

S/ James P. Cannon



Oberlin, Ohio  
August 8, 1983

SWP National Committee and Presiding Committee

Dear Comrades,

The minutes of Presiding Committee meeting #1, August 6, 1983 contain a number of speculations by Comrade Barnes on the possible meaning of the letter which we addressed to the PC on August 6 announcing that the Opposition Bloc was no longer operational. Comrade Barnes is correct in his assumption that it was tactical disagreements on how to proceed in pursuing the goals of the Bloc which caused it to be terminated. However he is incorrect in every other assumption.

We are opposed to a split in the SWP, as was stated in the Bloc platform. We do not maintain relations or engage in discussions on "perspectives and modes of functioning" with any comrades who are not on the National Committee since we have been prohibited from doing so by specific vote of the NC. And we do not maintain political relations with any comrades who are outside the party. We have pledged ourselves, and have carried out our pledge to abide by the norms which have been established by the leading party committees, despite our strong political objections to them.

Since we have already responded to the letter referred to in Presiding Committee minutes #1, it may seem redundant for us to further elaborate in writing on your motivation for sending it. However, we must inform you that any assertion that we are in some way trying to maneuver a split in the SWP is groundless.

We have consistently tried, during the past several months, to establish a working arrangement among the minority tendencies and the majority that will allow for an orderly discussion of the profound ideological issues in dispute. On March 9 of this year, in a letter to the PC, we proposed a joint commission to preserve party unity and quash anti-party rumors. This proposal was rejected at our NC meeting last May.

We now believe that this proposal is again in order, and urge the NC to give it careful consideration when our meeting convenes later today or tomorrow. Had this sort of commission been operational under the present circumstances we could have easily avoided the wasted time and effort, as well as the groundless charges, involved in the pursuit of Comrade Barnes's speculations.

The Opposition Bloc in the National Committee was never intended as a long-term coalition. It was created last Spring in anticipation of a pre-convention discussion period which would be open to the entire membership. That is the reason for the statement in the platform which explained: ". . . We are announcing the formation of the Opposition Bloc--a coalition of the Fourth Internationalist Caucus, the Trotskyist Tendency, and other currents and individuals in agreement with the general line of this platform." When the platform was introduced, the meaning of this portion was questioned by the presiding committee for the May NC meeting. We explained that it did not refer to



any immediate reality, but to the potential future reality that would be realized when a discussion was opened for the party membership (see letter of May 7, 1983, copy attached).

With the continued delay in the opening of a discussion in the party, the primary purpose for the formation of the Bloc has failed to materialize. Given this fact, the differences which divided the two tendencies in the National Committee before the formation of the Bloc--and which were never overcome through the formation of the Bloc, but only temporarily put aside in order to pursue a common struggle (which is what made it a Bloc and not a faction)--have re-emerged as important factors in our functioning with regard to the discussions in the NC. This has made the continuation of a Bloc in the National Committee impossible. These differences did not then, and do not now relate to the possibility of a split in our party.

Comradely,



Frank Lovell



Steve Bloom



Response to the Charges against us

by Frank Lovell and Steve Bloom

The charge that we have acted as <sup>(part of)</sup> a secret faction is false and without foundation. It is based on a completely illogical string of assertions, which has as its premise the statement that the Opposition Bloc in the National Committee, formed prior to the May 1983 NC meeting, was a faction. We have been asked to present an explanation for the dissolution of that Bloc which could justify the dissolution of a faction. We are completely unable to do this, since we never were a faction, and never functioned on the basis that we were a faction, but simply a bloc of two tendencies. The explanations we can give are good and sufficient for the dissolution of such a bloc.

The differences which necessitated the break-up of the bloc were partially the result of some of the political disagreements which we had previous to the formation of the Bloc. These still remained after we formed the Bloc. And partially the differences were over tactics--of tone and approach to the discussion in the National Committee. Were such reasons sufficient for the dissolution of a faction? Probably not; but we didn't feel that we needed reasons of such import to end the formal relationship of the Opposition Bloc. Comrades can raise questions, if they like, about our political judgement on this, but it can hardly be asserted that this is proof of "secret factional activity."

Much has been made about the response we sent to the August 6 letter of Larry Seigle for the Political Committee. We are asked why we did not respond to that letter by explaining the reasons for the break-up of the Bloc. The answer is, of course, quite simple--the letter did not ask for any such explanation. The first time we knew the real reason this letter was written was only a few hours before the Monday N.C. meeting, when Presiding Committee minutes #1, with Comrade Barnes's charges against us



were made available.

All four NC members who had been members of the Opposition Bloc have stated our continued commitment to the political perspectives outlined in the documents of the Bloc. This has been presented as proof of the charge that there must be some secret political line which is not being expressed; but there is no substance to this accusation either.

Neither of the two tendencies which came together to form the Opposition Bloc gave up, by that act, any of the political positions which they had stood on up to that time. We simply came to the conclusion that the struggle for the defense of the historic program of Trotskyism could best be defended, given the attack on it by the central party leadership, by leaving aside the points that divided us and concentrating on the main political questions. This we particularly believed to be possible given the pending pre-convention discussion which would be open to the entire membership. There was no break in continuity for either of the tendencies in the act of forming the Bloc, and no fundamental change in our political positions. It should be easy for comrades to understand, then, how the Bloc could be ended, and the old organizational relationship of two separate tendencies re-established, with both tendencies explaining that they maintain their continuity with the positions taken by the Bloc.

Comrade Sheppard in his report Monday night motivating our suspension from the National Committee stated that the "only possible conclusion" which could be drawn from the events which had taken place is that there were political differences within the "faction" that had not been stated; that were secret, and hidden from the party. But far from being the "only possible conclusion," this charge is unproven speculation. The actual sequence of events demonstrates something quite different. At least it must be acknowledged that other explanations of the events which led up to these charges are "possible."



It is a most damning fact that no attempt whatsoever was made to ascertain the truth or falsity of these charges before moving for disciplinary action against us. Comrades insisted on the necessity of rushing to judgement, and even rejected the modest proposal for a fact-finding commission to look into the charges before taking action. This demonstrates that the real reason these charges were brought against us has nothing whatsoever to do with any supposed violations of "organizational norms." It demonstrates that these charges were merely a pretext for carrying out a political expulsion. Our continued membership in the Socialist Workers Party is incompatible with the political project of the current central leadership-- to transform the revolutionary Marxist program and practices upon which our party was founded and built.

In the past, some comrades have characterized the charge that the current majority leadership is changing the SWP's program as a slander. But any pretense along these lines is no longer possible. With the publication of Comrade Barnes's Chicago speech, the new political line is explicitly stated for the first time for all to see. It would seem to be no coincidence that the frame-up and removal from the party of the National Committee members who oppose these views is scheduled to follow so closely the publication of this article.

"There is a third content which our movement has given to permanent revolution," Comrade Barnes explains. "Between 1928 and 1940, while Trotsky was still alive, and since then, we have used the term permanent revolution to describe the positions of our movement, especially in relation to the class struggle in the oppressed nations, that are uniquely based on and incorporate the strategic positions of Trotsky in the pre-1917 period, as opposed to those of the Bolsheviks.

"This usage of the term poses the biggest political problem for us, because it has brought weaknesses into our movement associated with Trotsky's



wrong pre-1917 theory" (New International, Vol 1 #1, pp 12-13).

Certainly, if the political content which Trotsky and the Fourth International have given permanent revolution "poses the biggest political problem for us" then what must be proposed is a complete rejection, a change, of that political content--which has been the cornerstone of our program for 55 years--and its replacement with something new. Comrades who wish to deny this will hardly be taken seriously by anyone who has the slightest familiarity with our history.

There is no crime in the central party leadership considering the possibility that Trotsky was wrong about permanent revolution. But what is impermissible is for a leadership to draw these conclusions, and unilaterally overturn the entire history of our movement, imposing their line on the party without allowing the ranks to hear and participate in a full discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the new line.

We reject the propositions put forward by Comrade Barnes. They are based on a complete misrepresentation of what "the political content" of permanent revolution has always meant to Trotsky and to us, as well as a false conception of the class dynamics at work today in the colonial revolution and particularly in the Central American revolution.

It is because we have rejected the new theories of Comrade Barnes (actually a rehash of old theories, developed by others, and long ago discredited in the revolutionary Marxist movement) that we have had charges brought against us by this leadership.

We have been consistently confident that in a democratic, balanced, and all-sided discussion we will be able to convince comrades of our views. The current central leadership of the Socialist Workers Party has not been so confident--and that is why they have opposed and blocked a discussion of their new perspectives (even going so far as to deny that they had any



new perspectives) for the last two years. And this lack of confidence in their position is the reason they have brought charges against us, slandered us, and are threatening to separate us from the revolutionary party.

If this National Committee again upholds these charges you will be doing a grave disservice--not primarily to us, but to the party which you are responsible for leading. The precedent set by sustaining charges based only on speculation and vague <sup>n</sup>inuendo, without any substantiation by factual evidence, will severely threaten any possibility of a democratic internal life in the future. It can only deepen the already dangerous atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion, of charges and countercharges, of frame-ups and slanders of opposition comrades on flimsy organizational grounds. A proletarian party, striving to reach out to and recruit the most militant, most conscious, most dedicated, and most independent layers of the working class, cannot be built on that basis.

The current crisis in the party can only be worsened by your action. It is a pure fantasy that the problems which have arisen in the party are a result of a disloyal minority, and that it can be solved by the removal of the opposition in the leadership. That crisis is a result of the incorrect policies followed by the central party leadership, which has violated the most fundamental proletarian norm of all--that the program belongs to the party, and that any fundamental change in the programmatic perspectives of the party (and the challenge to our program by the current leadership is by no means limited to the ~~question~~ question of permanent revolution) can only be decided on by the party membership after a full and democratic discussion.

This is such an elementary political conclusion that it should not be surprising that many party members, on their own, and without the need for consultations with others, have discovered that something is seriously wrong with the Socialist Workers Party, and have striven (sometimes



correctly and sometimes incorrectly) to do something about it. No conspiracy theories are necessary to explain what has been going on in our party.

Perhaps the biggest tragedy in all of this is that while stepped-up attacks are being launched by Washington against the Central American revolution--attacks we should have spent our time mobilizing our party to combat by building the August 27 and November 12 demonstrations--we have instead wasted our time at the Oberlin conference and at the NC meeting with frenzied and unfounded attacks on the minority in the SWP and on our international co-thinkers. This clearly illustrates the real priorities, the real political orientation, of the current majority leadership. If you continue down that road you can perhaps eliminate every comrade who presently holds oppositional views in the party. But that won't solve your problem. It will simply lay the basis for new oppositions and new purges in the period ahead.

We have often in the past pledged to abide by the norms of the SWP. We are not now being threatened with disciplinary action for any actual violation of any such norm. Our removal from membership in the party is being proposed because of the political positions we have defended in this National Committee, and when permitted to do so in the party as a whole and in the Fourth International. This will be clearly understood by every conscious member of our party and of our world movement; and we will appeal any adverse decision made by this NC to the Fourth International. We will fight for our right to re-integration into the SWP and <sup>to fight</sup> to preserve our right to participate in the democratic decision-making process of our world party.

Aug 10, 1983



## A Valuable Book on Nicaragua

PERMANENT REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA, by Paul Le Blanc. 1983.  
130 pages (double-spaced typing). \$6.90 plus \$1.15 postage.  
Order from Paul Le Blanc, P.O. Box 10769, Pittsburgh, PA 15203.

Here is a first-rate study of the Nicaraguan revolution. It satisfies the need to know the essential facts about the revolutionary movement that succeeded in overthrowing the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship in 1979. At the same time it analyzes the dynamics of the revolutionary process that made that victory possible. And on top of all that it examines Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in the light of the Nicaraguan experience up to September 1983.

That would be a big bite for even a much larger book than this one. But Paul Le Blanc carries it off without difficulty or awkwardness. Along the way he compares Russia in 1917 with Nicaragua in the 1970s with a method that really illuminates the similarities and differences, and gives a summary of permanent revolution that clarifies its content for anybody who wants to understand it.

For readers of the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, Le Blanc's study will have many areas of special interest, such as his treatment of the problems the Sandinist workers and farmers government has had to cope with since 1979. But perhaps its major attraction for them will be the fact that it effectively refutes the positions of two antagonistic (but complementary) tendencies in or around the Fourth International:

(1) Those who claim that the Nicaraguan revolution disproves the theory of permanent revolution, and therefore have discarded the theory. (2) Those who claim that the Nicaraguan revolution lacks the proletarian character advocated in Trotsky's theory, and therefore withhold the full political support that the workers and farmers government of Nicaragua has earned.

Le Blanc is a leading activist in the Central America Mobilization Coalition in Pittsburgh and was a member of the Socialist Workers Party until a few weeks before he finished writing this book. He was expelled for various alleged violations of discipline, but the real reason was his opposition to the SWP leadership's abandonment of the theory of permanent revolution and other hard-won acquisitions of the Marxist movement.

It's a shame that the only way you can get to read this book is by ordering a photocopy of the typed manuscript from the author (at the cost of copying and postage). The failure to get it printed in conventional format is a sign of the backwardness of the publishing industry and of the weakness of the revolutionary movement in this country. But we should be grateful to the author for sharing his work and performing non-authorial tasks to make it available in any form.

Reviewed by George Breitman







