

SWP

discussion bulletin

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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1. REGROUPMENT AND UNITED SOCIALIST POLITICAL ACTION (Majority Report to Plenum) -- Murry Weiss	1
2. RESOLUTION -- Joyce Cowley	22
3. REGROUPMENT POLICY (Minority Report to Plenum) -- Joyce Cowley	23

REGROUPMENT AND UNITED SOCIALIST POLITICAL ACTION

By Murry Weiss

Comrades, the report of the Political Committee on Regroupment and United Socialist Political Action deals with the main field of application and operation of the electoral policy adopted by the last plenum in January 1958. More specifically, my task is to report on how our electoral policy worked out in New York State, where we conducted an experimental pilot operation. Supplementary reports on our electoral work will be made by comrades around the country.

The Political Committee proposes that the plenum, in the light of the year's experience, reaffirm its policy on revolutionary socialist regroupment and approve the main line of our united socialist electoral policy. We do not propose, at this time, to motivate anew and in rounded form our line on regroupment but rather to concentrate our attention on our electoral policy which has been the main arena of the regroupment process during the last year.

I want to stress that we are asking for approval of the main line of our electoral policy as it was conducted: not every tactical step, not every nuance, not every maneuver -- but the main line. The tactic we followed in relation to the New York state United Independent-Socialist ticket was difficult and complex. In order to forge this election bloc we were compelled to make some very important organizational and political concessions. This is naturally subject to critical review. We don't come to the plenum for a vote of blanket approval. It would be entirely contrary to our tradition and to the nature of such an experimental action to make such an appeal to the plenum. We do ask, however, that the plenum approve the main line of the electoral tactic as an integral part of our regroupment policy and thereby provide guidance to the party for the period ahead.

As you know, the regroupment process opened as a result of the world crisis of Stalinism which in turn was impelled by the revolutionary action of the Soviet orbit working class beginning with the June 1953 East German uprising and culminating in the Hungarian revolution. The crisis of Stalinism destroyed the equilibrium of the Communist parties of the world and of the United States. And the inner crises of the Communist parties reverberated throughout the entire radical workers movement. The old frozen relationship of forces among the three main tendencies in the radical working class -- Stalinism, Social Democracy and revolutionary socialism -- was unlocked and opened to profound changes. That created a new situation for us, an opportunity for revolutionary socialism to break out of the enforced double isolation it has so long suffered -- isolation from the mass movement and isolation from the main body of radical workers in the United States.

At the same time we know that the regroupment process did not arise from, and wasn't accompanied by, a new forward thrust by the American workers. This fact has important bearing on the character and scope of the regroupment process and places certain limits on it. The process is taking place within the same basically unfavorable objective conditions which we have confronted for over a decade. Under the influence of these objective conditions the crisis of the

C.P. in the U.S. unloosed forces that moved in a rightward direction displaying tendencies to shift from subservience to the Kremlin to subservience to U.S. "democratic" imperialism. It also unloosed forces that are susceptible to our influence, provided we show the ability to intervene vigorously and skillfully. The two fundamentally contrary directions of these forces are not easily compartmentalized. In the same individuals and groupings there are inner crisscross currents which have to be assessed objectively on the basis of experience rather than on a priori conclusions.

One thing is sure, however, that the idea that everybody is moving to the right and that therefore there is no basis for a tactic of revolutionary regroupment was emphatically refuted by the experience of 1957 and 1958. On the other hand, the Marxist dialectic conception that in every situation, however unfavorable and difficult, we must seek ground for revolutionary action, has been amply confirmed in the course of our experience this year from January to November -- not to speak of what came before.

The new situation created by the prolonged and agonized crisis of the American Communist Party posed the following questions: how could discredited Stalinism be defeated in ideological and political struggle from the left? How could we help create a more favorable relation of forces for the revolutionary socialist wing of the radical movement in relation to social democracy and Stalinism?

These were the questions that animated our approach to tactics since the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.

In the Presidential campaign of 1956 we observed that the long record of the SWP in electoral activity had given us considerable authority among an important section of the former periphery of the Communist Party and even in the ranks of the CP itself. Our policy of socialist class struggle opposition to the capitalist system and its two parties had attractive power to those elements in the CP orbit who tended, however hesitantly and inconsistently, towards a revolutionary criticism of the CP and Stalinism. We were particularly heartened by the support our presidential ticket received from two of the most prominent political figures associated in the past with the Communist Party, Vincent Hallinan and Clifford McAvoy, who despite their stated differences with us called for a vote for Dobbs and Weiss as an elementary duty for all socialists. We felt this had profound symptomatic significance.

In the 1957 city elections we gained new valuable experience confirming our observation on the presidential election and laying the tactical groundwork for 1958. In Michigan, on the initiative, as I recall, of the Michigan comrades in consultation with the Secretariat and the Political Committee, we proposed essentially the same socialist coalition ticket policy for the Detroit city elections that we subsequently adopted as our 1958 electoral proposal. The Michigan comrades went through the entire process, calling on all socialist organizations to gather together and consider united socialist election possibilities. They followed up this proposal with a propaganda campaign. They tied up the proposal for united socialist electoral action with a proposal to the labor movement to enter the city elec-

tions with an independent ticket. Finally, when the Michigan SWP had fully explored the possibility of united socialist action and couldn't get any significant response, it entered its own ticket.

In the 1957 San Francisco Board of Supervisors election a similar process took place. While a coalition ticket did not shape up, the consistent campaign we conducted for such a ticket gained us wide support. When the SWP entered its own ticket it did so under conditions that were most favorable. All the important independents and a large number of people in the immediate CP orbit supported the Barbara-Jordan slate. And, as in Detroit, the policy proposed had national impact within the regroupment movement.

The most significant result of the 1957 city election campaigns was obtained in New York City. The SWP ticket, headed by Joyce Cowley, gained the support of a large section of the Communist Party ranks and of the former periphery of the CP. This was revealed by the vote itself and particularly by the almost identical vote Cowley and the CP candidate for Council, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, got on the lower Eastside. Moreover, the fact that a large section of the CP membership voted for the SWP ticket was common knowledge, widely discussed in all areas of the radical movement.

Later in 1957 we had a rich experience in the Seattle city elections which underscored all the features of earlier campaigns and again had national impact within the radical movement.

In 1956 McAvoy and Hallinan were practically alone in their support of the SWP candidates. In 1957 they were joined by numerous prominent local and national figures, all of them from the former periphery of the CP. And most significantly, the National Guardian editors who in 1955 had called for a conference to consider an independent policy for the 1956 elections but then dropped the proposal when the CP sharply rebuked them, and then had called for abstention in 1956 in order to avoid supporting the SWP ticket, came out in 1957 for all the SWP tickets in the city elections and took friendly note of our united socialist electoral proposals.

Against this background the last plenum formulated our electoral proposal for 1958. Our proposal was essentially very simple: socialists should get together to oppose the capitalist system and its two parties in the state elections. What socialists? Those socialists that took the name socialism seriously enough to oppose capitalist parties and politicians. On what program? On a program that could be agreed upon among those willing to join together as socialists against the capitalist parties. And we had a suggested outline of what such a minimum program should be. This approach left it to the struggle to decide what forces within the radical movement would be ready to move in this common direction of socialist class struggle politics.

What our proposal said in effect was, "Let us go a step further than discussion and support of the SWP tickets; let us try acting together as socialists on the central question concerning the American labor movement -- the question of independent class politics." It was simply an application of our regroupment policy which regarded discussion and common action as two inter-related processes aimed at

building a revolutionary socialist party in the United States on an expanded and stronger basis.

Just as the January 1958 plenum convened, we entered into negotiations with the Guardian editors and came to an agreement with them that our proposal, subject to the approval of the plenum, would be presented in the Guardian in the form of an ad.

On decision of the plenum, we published this ad in the Feb. 3 Guardian and you know the reaction it provoked. All the questions that were later debated on a wide scale, in the June conference and in the electoral struggle itself, were first debated in the form of a flood of letters to the Guardian. The entire radical movement began to discuss the proposal pro and con.

On January 17th, before our ad appeared, the former ALP leaders, Morris Goldin and Henry Abrams, took the initiative and called a meeting for January 31st to discuss the possibility of united socialist action in the New York State elections.

Leading representatives of all tendencies in the radical movement, with the exception of the SP-SDF and the Shachtmanites, were invited. The SLP of course declined to attend with the usual explanations and denunciations of "reformism." Cochran said he was too busy. Starobin thought that nothing could come of this kind of gathering of sects and sectarians. Muste wrote that he was preoccupied with educational work. Huberman sneered at the whole project.

Present at the January 31st meeting were Goldin and Abrams, John T. McManus of the Guardian, Simon W. Gerson of the CP, Babette Jones, at that time on the Bronx County Committee of the CP, Corliss Lamont, Michael Zaslow of the Socialist Unity Committee, Farrell and myself for the SWP. At later meetings the negotiations were joined by a number of other people who participated for varying periods. Annette Rubinstein, George Clarke, Russ Nixon, Richard De Haan, Otto Nathan, William Price, George Stryker, Otto Skottadal, Irving Beinen, Muriel McAvoy, Elinor Ferry, Steve Grattan, Benjamin Davis, Arnold Johnson, etc...

The two basic issues of controversy were immediately evident at the first meeting: a single candidacy versus a full ticket; and, an avowedly socialist campaign versus a so-called independent campaign.

In preliminary discussions, before the formal call for this meeting came out, Farrell had talked to Morris Goldin and at that time Goldin showed a distinct tendency to favor a single candidate for the office of U.S. Senator on a non-socialist basis. Abrams had the same view. But by the time the meeting was gathered, they had shifted their positions and favored an avowedly socialist campaign. They said they frankly recognized that all the forces available for independent action against the capitalist parties were socialist and they saw no point in concealing this fact.

But while they were ready to concede a socialist campaign, they were adamant and ultimatic on the question of a single candidacy. McManus, on the other hand, was wholeheartedly for a full ticket but had doubts on whether it should be socialist or independent campaign.

Obviously what was involved in the debate on a single candidacy versus a full ticket was the question: would this be a genuine anti-capitalist political campaign on the part of united socialists, or would this be another version of the Stalinist coalition policy with independent trimmings? We had just witnessed the latter kind of campaign in 1957 when the CP ran Elizabeth Gurley Flynn for Council on the lower Eastside of New York City. Flynn's campaign was really a stalking-horse maneuver for Wagner. At the same time it appeased some of the left sentiments of the CP ranks.

Here we must make an important distinction: While the proposal of the former ALP leaders for a single candidacy was on the surface identical with the Communist Party formula, there is an important difference: Goldin and Abrams wanted a bloc which would include the CP and the SWP. This was completely illusory and impossible, but they didn't know this at that time. The CP couldn't enter a bloc that would contradict its peoples' anti-monopoly coalition policy -- as a full ticket would; and the SWP couldn't enter a bloc which directly or indirectly served class collaboration in politics -- which a single candidacy for U.S. Senate would.

The former ALP leaders wanted to shake up the CP policy. They were bitterly dissatisfied -- some of them for a long time -- with the CP policy which had demoralized and scattered its cadres into the Democratic Party, scuttled the ALP, and so on. They wanted an independent form of political action for socialists. And they wanted to pull the CP onto a new course. Their political motivation was empirical; it didn't at that time and it doesn't now rise to the point of a principled generalization: for class struggle socialist politics against class collaboration. It is an empirical revolt against the policy of Stalinism in the political arena. From their angle of vision it would have signified a big left turn for the CP to support a candidate for U.S. Senate who ran against the Democrats.

The Guardian people, on the other hand, weren't ready to concede anything to the CP on the question of a single candidacy. They started out right from the beginning favoring a full ticket that would leave no loophole for supporting Harriman. They argued persuasively in the negotiations, although on a primarily "practical" basis: "Why do you want a single candidate when for the same petition effort you can get five candidates, with that much more radio and TV time, and with the possible dividend that with the gubernatorial candidate getting 50,000 votes a legal third party would be qualified in New York?" Zaslow, who from the beginning to the end of the negotiations worked in close collaboration with us, deepened the question: "Why do you insist on this single candidacy, when it appears that all considerations favor a full ticket?" he asked the former ALP leaders. Finally Goldin and Abrams explained: they insisted on a single candidacy because they were trying to get the CP into a united socialist ticket. They knew the CP wouldn't join if it meant direct opposition to Harriman. They hoped they could persuade the CP that a united socialist ticket didn't necessarily contradict its basic political policy; and they hoped they could persuade the SWP that a single candidate didn't necessarily mean support of Harriman.

It became clear very soon that the SWP would under no circumstance fail to oppose the capitalist parties on the gubernatorial level. However, this still left another variant for the seekers of a unity which would embrace both CP and SWP. If the SWP would support the candidate for U.S. Senate, while running its own candidates for the other state offices, and the CP would support the candidate for U.S. Senate, while pursuing its coalition policy on the gubernatorial contest, then they could still realize their objective. The SWP said to this: we would support the independent candidate for Senate only if this candidate were willing to bloc with our slate for the other offices on the simple proposition of mutual critical support against all the capitalist candidates. Otherwise, if it were a stalking-horse candidate for Harriman we would run our own candidate against him.

But what was the attitude of the CP? Goldin, and particularly Abrams, wanted the CP to participate in the negotiations and support their proposition of a single candidacy. Here, however, the acute internal crisis of the CP at that very time prevented it from making any kind of intervention in the situation.

Simon Gerson came to the first meeting, making it clear that he was representing no one, not even his family. He sided, of course, with the single candidacy and non-socialist platform but obviously couldn't speak officially for the CP. Benjamin Davis, who could speak for the ruling group of the CP, promised to come to meeting after meeting but at the last moment would beg off on some lame excuse or other. An official delegation of the committee was appointed to ascertain the policy of the CP and couldn't get any clear answer. Finally, it became clear that everyone would have to make up their own minds, without the CP.

Later when the bloc came to initial agreement and the conference was called, the CP frantically tried to turn back the clock and form a block with Goldin and Abrams on the single candidacy issue. But they were too late. The movement for a united socialist ticket was rolling towards the June Conference and it was painfully clear that the CP leaders were only concerned with breaking up the coalition. They never even succeeded in convincing anyone that they were really for a single candidacy except as a gimmick to smash the bloc. And moreover, it was clear that even if the CP leadership was for such a campaign it couldn't muster the party rank and file to go out and get such a candidate on the ballot -- certainly not while an SWP-independent coalition was organizing a united socialist ticket.

Thus the crisis of the CP prevented the Stalinists from effectively obstructing the formation of a coalition for the elections.

Now, what other factors enabled the bloc to overcome the original differences on policy and arrive at the position of favoring a full ticket against the capitalist parties on a program of socialism against capitalism? Contrary to the comrades of the minority, who seem to take this accomplishment for granted, we think it was the main issue and the main objective of the entire struggle. This becomes clear if we compare the New York campaign with the united socialist electoral effort in California last spring.

In cooperation with Hallinan and others we tried to launch a united socialist campaign around the candidacy of Holland Roberts for State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The CP in California threw all its power into the situation, exploited every advantage it had and prevented the Roberts' candidacy from expressing a genuine socialist opposition to capitalist parties. It exploited the fact that it was a "non-partisan" election and not a decisive political contest of the major parties where a lineup of socialist versus capitalist parties could be tested by the very election setup. Utilizing this and other fortuitous circumstances the CP prevented the campaign from becoming an identifiable socialist opposition to the capitalist parties. And above all they knifed in to cut down our participation. It was a very bitter struggle.

In New York we faced the same kind of opposition from the CP, although the internal crisis obviously caused a greater paralysis in the CP center and this gave us more time to shape up a powerful coalition. Also the technical format of the elections in New York favored a real showdown on basic electoral policy and tended to prevent any blurring of lines. Keeping these differences in mind we can still get a picture of what was achieved in New York when we bear the California experience in mind.

The greatest leverage we had in the negotiations was the fact, known to everyone, that the Socialist Workers Party was ready to go through with a ticket regardless of what anyone else did. We said, "There's going to be opposition to the Democrats and the Republicans on a socialist, anti-capitalist basis in this election. We would like to see a united socialist ticket, but in any case a socialist campaign will be waged." Everyone knew we meant business and weren't just bluffing.

Another important advantage, which was perhaps decisive, was the mood of the Communist Party membership and the broad rank and file of the periphery. Our 1957 election vote was interpreted by everyone as a kind of protest vote of the rank and file against the CP's election policy. The feeling the Communist Party membership and periphery in 1957 was vividly described by a worker from Brooklyn at the June conference: he had voted for Wagner in a previous election and then went home and tried to wash it off his hands. He was sick of that. The ranks of the CP made it plain that if there were socialists running against the Wagners and Harrimans, even if they were SWP Trotskyists, they would vote for them -- no matter what the party leadership said.

So we weren't just in a room with top people. Powerful pressures were operating from the ranks and periphery of the Communist Party. This resulted in the shaping of a bloc within the coalition that more consistently and consciously worked for a genuine socialist campaign. Within the Committee we worked closely with a whole number of elements, McManus, Annette Rubinstein, Muriel McAvoy, Elinor Ferry, William Price, George Stryker and Otto Skottadal.

We developed close cooperation with Mike Zaslow. One of the worst manifestations of sectarian smugness I have ever witnessed was to hear sneers and jibes from the minority comrades when this was reported. Just as if it were our task to prevent political enemies

from becoming allies, however limited; as if it were the art of politics to repel every possible alliance for your program and then adopt a superior, lofty attitude, making dire predictions on how everything will come to naught. Actually, Zaslow played an excellent role throughout the negotiations. At times he took the burden of the sharpest controversy on the question of Soviet democracy and the place of the SWP on the ticket. He openly fought anti-Trotskyist prejudice and incurred the hostility of elements in the bloc that were most subject to CP pressure.

We worked out a number of temporary and partial alliance within the bloc. For example, in the initial disagreement with McManus, on whether it should be a socialist campaign, we found ourselves in a closer relation with some of the former ALP leaders; and conversely, in the disagreement with the ALP leaders on a full ticket we were in close alliance with McManus. All these groupings and regroupings within the bloc served to pave the way for the common line brought to the June conference.

Now, as I have said, there was and remains serious limitations in the viewpoint of our allies in the bloc. Their break with Stalinist politics is empirical. It doesn't begin with principle as ours does. Actually, this is the characteristic way that all breaks with the false ideologies of the labor bureaucracy, the social democracy and Stalinism begins. And when you're dealing with leading strata, there's no guarantee whatever that it will be more than a beginning, that empiricism will give way to Marxist theoretical generalization. But deeper forces are involved than a few leaders and we seized on the empirical break with Stalinism on this key issue to propose a common action and propel the entire movement forward. I think this was correct.

Many of our allies in this bloc don't agree that it is an elementary principle of socialism never to make coalitions with capitalist parties. Our principled position on this question rests on the Marxist analysis of the class structure of capitalist society and on the whole generalized experience of the international working class, on the experience of the Russian Revolution, the negative experiences of France, Spain and Germany and on the entire experience of the American labor and socialist movement. They don't look at it that way. They would say, "Here in New York we saw the possibility of acting independently as socialists together with you. If we lived in Michigan, we would probably support Stellato and we wouldn't bloc with you. In California we would be for the defeat of Knowland. In 1960 we don't know what the situation will be."

Permit me an analogy to an experience we had in California in 1947. I vividly recalled this yesterday when I talked with Jean Simon. At that time AFL, CIO and independent trade unionists started a movement for independent political action in the industrial towns on the Southside of Los Angeles County. They were determined to run labor candidates for the elections in these towns on an independent basis. Our unionists and our party organization formed a bloc with them. These unionists did not question the basic class collaboration political policy of their unions. They continued by and large to support the policy of working within the framework of the Democratic Party as a matter of general policy. But in the case of the city

election where they could manifest the deepest urge of the militants for independence in the political arena, they wanted to break, empirically, with this policy. We worked in a bloc with them and the bloc encountered many principled dangers which I believe we met successfully. It was a worthwhile experience. Our contact with the militant unionists was deepened and we were able to win some of them to a more generalized, principled understanding of class politics. I know the difference between such an experience and the experience of a socialist election coalition. What I'm referring to, however, is the method of engaging in coalitions and blocs with people who do not start with principle, who have yet to learn principle and who represent forces in motion which if properly engaged can broaden the influence of the revolutionary socialist movement.

After the first period of the negotiations in New York there was, as I have already reported, a period of lull, during which we allowed the former ALP leaders to go through the experiment of trying to win the Communist Party to the bloc. They had a number of meetings with the Communist Party and the CP leaders would come up with some stop-gap proposal. One week it was the flash news that Ralph Bunche would run for U.S. Senate. "That's it! Let's all get behind Bunche." The next week it was Powell. "That's it! Let everybody go into Harlem and support Powell. Everything should be subordinated to that. What are we talking about sectarian off-beat things like a united Socialist ticket?"

Within the bloc the reaction to these reports was characteristic: McManus would say quite correctly, but empirically, that the Bunche candidacy was a Liberal Party pipedream that the CP was using as a dodge to keep from getting down to cases on our proposal. We would agree, but point out that even if Bunche would run we would oppose him or any other capitalist party candidate.

This went on until at one of the meetings Russ Nixon and some others rose up in arms and said, "We want an end of this business of giving the CP veto power over what we'll decide to do. They can come in or not but we will decide. That sentiment swept the meeting. It was unanimously decided to call a conference and propose a full ticket on a socialist basis. Abrams said, "I still believe that the single candidacy is best but I'll yield to all the others. This is the only practical possibility."

So we began to get out a conference call, which had only one significance for us -- the significance of taking an action. For us the main thing about the call was that it set a date and a place for the conference. The conference would decide questions of election policy, platform and candidates. We weren't interested in compressing a platform into a call for a conference. We knew that the struggle for an acceptable platform would come later. So we confined ourselves to pressing for the call to actually go out and to keep any objectionable formulations out of it. Of course, if you begin to discuss the call as though it were a theses on the road to workers' power, or as a programmatic basis for fusion into a new party, you can have a lot of pointless fun with it. But it's a meaningless exercise. We were fighting to overcome the pressure to procrastinate and stall. We were fighting to get that call out and force the movement into the open. Sure the call had serious defects. But it

had the essential virtue of openly proposing a full socialist ticket against the capitalist parties and it left to an open conference of the radical movement the making of a decision.

This was a historic move. The moment the call was issued a feverish atmosphere developed in the radical movement. The conference became the big thing, the major issue of debate in all radical circles.

The CP leaders now began to understand what a terrible thing had happened from their point of view. They began to race, always one station behind, to try to catch up with and board the train. From the moment the call was out the CP was continually off-balance, going from one desperate fumble to another, making one error after another. From their point of view the worst thing in the world had happened. Their whole former periphery was in a bloc to wage an election campaign on a policy opposed to theirs -- and the bloc included the Trotskyists! Common action with the Trotskyists! Legitimatizing Trotskyism! Giving the Trotskyists an arena, a platform from which to talk to all revolutionary and radical-minded workers. Could any conceivable catastrophe be worse? Their closed corporation had busted wide open. Here was the SWP, on the inside of the bloc and they, on the outside.

The Worker launched a vigorous attack, but the bloc held together and continued to head for the conference. The CP leaders, Davis and Johnson, suddenly turned up at the meetings of the bloc and tried to blow it up from within, but the bloc held together. Nevertheless, the pressure of the CP on the bloc was enormous. This was manifested mainly in the debates on the two basic issues of controversy: the issue of socialism and democracy and the issue of SWP representation on the slate.

In alliance with others in the bloc we insisted that it was necessary to have an unambiguous statement on socialism and democracy in the platform; a statement that would clearly oppose the bureaucratic dictatorship of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We argued that only by doing this could we go to the voters with a message of socialism that was not tainted with the crimes of Stalinism. We fought for this position pedagogically, but insistently.

However, in the course of many discussions we were unable to convince the representatives of the Guardian or the former ALP leaders on this point. While they would grant the correctness of a minimum stand for workers and socialist democracy everywhere, they argued that it had no place in a platform for an election in the U.S. They also contended that if we tried to get a minimum formulation on this question it would blow up the coalition, since there were many deep-going historical and theoretical differences that couldn't be reconciled in any minimum formulation. And they stubbornly persisted in refusing to agree to such a clause in the platform. We had to weigh the significance of this in determining our own course.

Was their refusal to agree to a simple statement opposing the bureaucratic practices of Stalinist regimes and championing the

cause of socialist democracy a sign that they were simply captives of the Kremlin, just like the CP leadership? If this were the case the possibility of a fruitful coalition with them in the elections would be extremely dubious. Or was it a sign of the continued pressure of Stalinism and that their break with the organized Stalinist movement was still incomplete. Our assessment was the latter. All the signs pointed to their eventual open break with Stalinism in which they would be compelled to denounce the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Whether this would lead them to agreement with our position or not was, of course, problematical. But we estimated that in the period of the election itself, they would be unable to hold on to a position of "dummying up" on socialism and democracy in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, etc.

In any case we had to decide how to handle this serious controversy at the June conference where the inner bloc differences would have to be considered in the context of the basic debate with the CP that was looming.

The same is true about the controversy in the bloc on the question of SWP representation on the slate. Originally, it was agreed that the SWP would have a representative on the ticket. But when the CP opened its offensive a chain reaction of pressure bore down on this point. The basic components of the bloc showed the capacity to resist the CP pressure as far as sticking to the agreement for a full ticket on a socialist basis. But they shifted ground on a representative ticket.

They argued that since the CP refused to participate, this meant that we couldn't have a representative ticket because only one of the two important organized groups -- the SWP -- was willing to go along. Therefore, they argued, to avoid the impression that the ticket was an SWP front, only independents, that is, unaffiliated socialists, should be among the candidates. Obviously, this was a lame argument and it was clear that their opposition to an SWP representative on the slate stemmed from their own anti-Trotskyist prejudice and suspicion. But we faced the choice: to go into the conference where the CP would be working to blow up the bloc and fight on all issues, the inner-bloc controversy as well as the main issue in controversy with the Stalinists, or to single out the basic issue, the full ticket on a socialist basis and subordinate the inner-bloc controversies to the big debate with the CP?

Our decision was to subordinate the controversies over socialism and democracy and our place on the ticket to the main questions: socialist opposition to the capitalist parties. That was our decision. We take full responsibility for it. We felt that it was our task, while not renouncing our positions on these points to seize this opportunity to deepen the cleavage between the CP and its former periphery and propel the movement forward. It was our task to prevent the CP from diverting the struggle from the main issue into the inner-bloc controversies and making those the main issues. Oh, how the CP leaders would have loved to do that. It would have rescued them. They certainly would have relished making the main point at the conference: should the SWP have a candidate or not or should there be a clause on socialism and democracy in the platform?

But we didn't intend to accommodate them. The main issue at the conference was class-struggle socialist politics versus Stalinist class collaboration.

We succeeded, as you know, in gaining a majority of the conference for a full socialist ticket. We isolated the CP leadership. The top CP leaders left the conference even before the main debate got underway, just after the walloping they got from Hallinan on the opening night. From that moment on the CP was whipped and incapable of gathering its forces for any serious struggle. And they never found an opening in the following two days; they never found a line of cleavage in the bloc because our policy was deliberately calculated to prevent this.

Even the split in the Presiding Committee, which took place under pressure of the CP, failed to provide them with an opening. That temporary split was quite instructive. After the first session of the conference on Saturday, Goldin and Abrams decided that the conference had polarized into SWP and CP camps -- without a significant independent group in evidence. Actually the SWP and the independents, who were present, had lined up for a full ticket on a socialist basis. But Goldin and Abrams couldn't see it. They had a spasm of fear. Goldin put it very interestingly at a meeting of the Presiding Committee. He said, "That's the situation out there. It's only CP and SWP. We have one choice; we have to go with the CP's proposal or be ruled out of the legitimate left."

How revealing of the terrible grip Stalinism has had all these years, not only on leaders and peripheral figures, but above all on rank and file Communist workers. This terrible fear of being "ruled out of the legitimate left." "Legitimate" was defined as anything the CP sponsored, or at least didn't oppose. Everything else, any movement which dared to oppose or criticize -- that was consigned to the realm of traitors, stoolpigeons and counter-revolutionaries. One of the great accomplishments of the June conference was that it helped liberate the radical movement from this monstrous tradition of Stalinism. It announced a new, wide-open situation where differences on policy and program could be discussed on their merits.

We healed the split in the Presiding Committee by Sunday morning. Goldin and his supporters, who were a minority on the Committee (Goldin, Abrams, Jones, Gluck) had offered an amendment to the Committee resolution for a full ticket on a socialist platform which would have prevented the conference from expressing a favorable position. Goldin frankly saw in his amendment a means for reconciliation with the CP in the name of a search for "broader unity." The majority (McManus, Rubinstein, McAvoy, Ferry, DeHaan, Stryker, Zaslow and Weiss) insisted on a vote from the conference on the basic issue of electoral policy.

It turned out that Goldin and Abrams were only wavering. We gave them lots of room in the debate on Saturday. In general our floor strategy was to encourage the independents to fight for our common position and by Sunday it became clear that the independents were a sizeable force in the conference. After the vote we turned to Goldin and said: "We're satisfied that the conference has overwhelmingly expressed an opinion. Now we're willing to formulate a

motion together with you that the committee continue to explore all possibilities of arriving at broader unity on the basis of the united socialist election campaign. This was agreed. And, as we anticipated, this common motion served to strengthen the cohesiveness of the bloc and isolate the CP in its continued effort to prevent the campaign.

Following the conference, our entire attention was focused on the problem of candidacies. The draft platform passed at the conference was satisfactory to us with the glaring exception of the omission of a section on socialist democracy in the Soviet orbit. But the movement was again in danger of dying, simply from inertia. I think this danger was reinforced by the dog days of the summer that came around this time. Weeks passed in which it was difficult to get a meeting together. At this point it would have been very simple to end the whole business, settle for the achievements of the conference, and go ahead with an SWP campaign. All we had to do was slow down, allow the decisive deadlines for action to come and go -- and the opportunity would have been lost. The struggle for the principle of independent socialist opposition to the capitalist parties could have died from neglect.

Lamont under the pressure of this whole controversy withdrew his name as a candidate. This in turn raised grave doubts among the Guardian people and the former ALPers as to whether any kind of ticket could be assembled. We exerted all our efforts to convince them that they had started something they had to finish. They had launched a movement together with us, gained support, and the logical and unavoidable next step was to produce the candidacies. We fought for a McManus-Rubinstein slate and continued to fight for our own representation. Again we faced a choice, this time of a somewhat different character than before the conference. We could have pursued the struggle for our position on platform and SWP representation on the slate and won. We could have won in a number of ways including gaining a "majority" for our position at many of the meetings of the committee. But we wouldn't have had a genuine united socialist ticket. That was what the politically immature ultra-lefts like Stryker and DeHaan could never understand. They said, "What do you need all these people for? You've got us, Have a united socialist ticket with Stryker and DeHaan. Let the majority rule. And the Stalinoids -- let's get away from them." Stryker and DeHaan were very radical. But we weren't interested in a masquerade, in a fake united socialist ticket. We were interested in effecting a genuine regroupment, in moving together with those who really represented a significant force among the radical workers and former CP sympathizers in the direction of revolutionary socialist politics.

The choice we faced was not would we get a candidate. The real choice we had was: would we have a full SWP ticket or a ticket of all independents. That was the way it worked out.

When we pursued the argument for SWP representation on the ticket it became clear that the necessary argument was whether they should participate in any ticket. If we pressed our cause on representation we would get the reaction: "There is no use arguing about representation. We aren't sure we can run at all. And without a candidate of Lamont's stature a ticket of McManus and Rubinstein

with an SWP representative would surely be regarded as an SWP front. So why don't you go ahead as you did in 1956 and 1957, run an SWP ticket, and we'll give you support as we did then."

Some comrades may think that would have been a wonderful bargain. We didn't. We thought it would be better to retreat and force them into taking the next step of consummating their split with the CP's political policy. We felt that such an action -- a McManus-Rubinstein ticket -- with our vigorous participation, would have a far more profound effect on the regroupment process than a full SWP ticket.

We didn't take this question of our candidacy lightly. It was a very serious matter. We were forced to choose between running our own campaign or participating in a ticket under disadvantageous and unfair conditions. We made our choice with eyes wide open. Considering the whole political situation and weighing the matter in the balance now, we think we made the correct decision.

Now, how did our decision work out in the course of the campaign? Did Trotskyism lose or gain in the process?

Comrade Gross of the minority said in a statement to the PC, May 13, 1958: "This Call [for the June conference] is quite acceptable to the Kremlin (while it is quite harmless to Wall St.). At the present moment, it is true, the Kremlin and the American CP regard the whole affair as 'sectarianism.' But they cannot be in the least disturbed by Trotskyist physical participation, when there is no Trotskyist political participation."

What a false appraisal this proved to be! We were assured by the minority that the CP and the bourgeoisie were undisturbed by the situation. But the CP and the Social Democrats, not to speak of the Tammany Hall machine -- the bourgeois party in administrative power in New York State -- took a different view.

The CP launched an old-fashioned anti-Trotskyist campaign in the Worker precisely on the theme that the I-SP was the expression of Trotskyist political participation. The CP leaders, who were in a position to know, screamed from the roof tops that it wasn't a matter of mere physical participation of the SWP. Their theme was that the SWP had worked its way into the "inner circle" of the committee and was politically influencing its course. And it must be admitted that they had considerable evidence to back up this claim, although our influence wasn't a matter of diabolic intrigue -- as the CP depicted it -- but political agreement within the bloc on class-struggle socialist politics in action.

Our allies in the bloc, however confused their concept of socialism may be, took a giant step together with us in socialist opposition to the capitalist parties. And this meant a break with Stalinist politics. They knew this and we knew it.

The SP-SDF wasn't undisturbed. Feeble as they are, they gave us some bad moments in this campaign. The SP-SDF made a big to become the instrument that would prevent us from getting on the ballot. They threatened court action to invalidate our petitions if

we used the name "United Socialist." Later they made other legal threats and played a treacherous, strike-breaking role against the ticket all the way through.

On the key question of independence from the Kremlin, and of taking as the very minimum a critical position towards Kremlin tyranny, the Guardian made its own break-through in the very period of the election campaign. It denounced the murder of Nagy and took the editorial stand that socialists had the right and the duty to criticize crimes against socialism in the Soviet Union, precisely in order to prevent the cold war advocates from utilizing these crimes for their own purposes.

And please, we don't need to be enlightened on the inadequacies of the Guardian's position and theories on the Russian and Hungarian questions. Such "enlightenment" is particularly odious from the Marcyites, who with all their "leftism" are the most right wing on the basic question of Hungary. For all its confusion and Stalinist hangovers, the Guardian chose to break with Stalinism and oppose its murderous course in Hungary. To my mind this is an infinitely superior position to that of providing "Marxist" rationalizations for the Kremlin murder of the workers in a general strike and revolutionary uprising in Hungary.

Don't give us any lectures, Comrade Marcyites, about the confusion of the Guardian position. They made a breakthrough to the left. In due course, we will continue and deepen our discussion with them on all the questions that arise from this breakthrough -- including the question of peaceful coexistence and political revolution. Meanwhile, I prefer their position on Hungary to the position of those who want to use the name of Trotskyism to support "objectively" the need for the shooting down of striking workers in Hungary and suppressing the revolution. It just gets to be too much to hear the sneering, supercilious attitude these comrades have toward people who, yes, are petty-bourgeois socialists as yet. Nobody's born a Trotskyist, not even Sam Marcy. The people in the Guardian orbit are in a process of evolution; they take a step away from Stalinism while maintaining an irreconcilable attitude towards the imperialists, the witch hunt and the labor bureaucracy. They strike out against murderous Stalinism. We welcome that step without any hesitation.

What was the CP reaction to the Guardian's stand on the Nagy execution? Were they "undisturbed by the physical presence, but not the political presence of Trotskyism"? Again the CP reacted as those who feel the blow most keenly. The CP leaders stepped up their slander attack: Look! they cried, here's the proof! If you associate with anti-Soviet Trotskyists you become one of them. The Trotskyists have foisted their anti-Soviet line on the entire coalition. We warned you that if you associated with them you would become anti-Soviet yourself and now it has come to pass.

There was some validity to the Stalinist fears. The Guardian made its own break with Stalinism and embraced the minimum formula we had fought for; namely, socialists have the right and the duty to oppose Stalinist crimes in the Soviet orbit. And then, under the CP smear attack, all participants in the bloc were faced with an ines-

capable question: either the CP is right about the SWP, and, in that case, what are they doing in a bloc with us? Or the CP is engaged in a colossal frameup. It is a very thought-provoking question and it finally forced McManus to publicly declare that the charge of anti-Sovietism against the SWP was false.

Lamont took a stand on Soviet democracy from the moment of his first public statement in the campaign. At a news conference early in the campaign, Lamont said he thought the Soviet Union had made "mistakes in regard to Hungary and Yugoslavia." He said, "I have been critical of civil liberties in the Soviet Union and I have criticized the execution of Nagy." Of course, Lamont made these statements within the context of his own false position on peaceful coexistence and his humanist philosophy. But the point is that the participants in the coalition did not follow a Stalinist policy in the campaign on the critical question of Soviet democracy. And when the Guardian took its position on Nagy, or Lamont on Soviet democracy, those elements in the bloc who were most susceptible to CP pressures didn't dare echo the CP attacks. This, we believe, is a significant sign of the direction of the bloc as a whole with regard to Stalinism.

Moreover, the SWP maintained full freedom of expression throughout the campaign. Our candidates in Michigan, New Jersey, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin expressed our position on all questions. So did our paper. We exercised full freedom of action within the bloc. There were no restrictions whatever on us; we wouldn't dream of permitting any. The minority misreads the whole situation on this point. We said what we pleased in the Militant. It is, of course, entirely natural that disagreements among the majority occurred, or may develop in retrospect, on what we could or should have said at this point or that. But the idea that we wrote the Militant to please political opponents is utterly false. How easy it would have been, if we were engaged in the politics of pleasing, to please the Marcyites with articles that simply denounced our allies for every false viewpoint they held. But we weren't concerned with cover ups and pleasing.

We developed our line in the Militant according to our understanding of how to, pedagogically, over a period of time, unfold a campaign for Marxist principles; to utilize the election campaign to deepen the discussion in pace with the experience, to let actions underscore our words and to encourage our allies to conduct their own struggle for ideological independence from the CP.

Take the episode of Lamont's 10-point program. We disagreed with Lamont on many of these points. There was disagreement on peaceful coexistence, reliance on summit conferences, the United Nations, etc. According to the agreement in the bloc, Lamont had the right to express his personal views in the course of the campaign, while making clear what the common platform was. Lamont made a serious error, as we quickly pointed out, when he spoke in the name of the I-SP for his 10-point program. We took this up immediately in the Committee, attacking Lamont's conduct: "The SWP never agreed to such a program and it was never even presented for approval." The committee unanimously agreed that we were correct. Immediately thereafter we had a meeting of the active workers which Lamont

attended. Lamont outlined his views on foreign policy and said that he came to hear the opinions of the active workers on program and presentation of program. The SWP membership was predominant at the meeting and in the course of the discussion, our position on the question of Lamont's procedure as well as his gimmick about Stassen was made amply clear.

We followed this up in the Militant with an elaborated and precise article criticizing all points in Lamont's program that we disagreed with. What happened? The Worker launched the most savage attack of the entire campaign against the Militant and the Trotskyists on this very point of our controversy with Lamont. Here was their grand opening, they thought. They charged the Trotskyists had knifed the peace campaign in the back, right in the middle of the campaign.

The CP didn't miss our open disagreement with Lamont. The comrades of the minority, however, conveniently forget this basic engagement and charge that we wrote the Militant to please Lamont. The CP knew better.

And what happened? Lamont dropped the Stassen proposal and the 10-point program. That's a fact. It was a victory for us. The Stalinists wanted to exploit our public differences with Lamont, but they didn't succeed because Lamont didn't take the bait.

I cannot, within the framework of this report, comrades, give a detailed account of the petition campaign. That's a vast subject. It should be written up and recorded for the benefit of the whole party and all subsequent efforts. There's one point I should make about the petition campaign, however. It was an open test of the capacities of all tendencies within the radical movement.

The CP made an all-out effort to qualify a candidate in a state-senatorial district, which is nothing compared to the vast effort required to put a state ticket on the ballot. It failed and failed rather badly. It couldn't muster the forces, the enthusiasm and the grit to go out and do even that job.

The SP-SDF entered the lists in an attempt to qualify a state-senatorial candidate and it failed even more miserably. It didn't even get the minimum number of signatures.

Even the SLP showed a steep decline in its capacity to wage a petition campaign, coming up with 16,000 signatures, and then, at the critical moment of the legal struggle ducking out of the court fight.

And the success of the I-SP petition campaign is accounted for, as everyone knows, primarily by the capacities displayed by the SWP.

That is not to say that the SWP was alone. This wasn't the case. There was a wide participation from independents on various levels of activity. There was an important group that worked as hard as anyone in the SWP cadre. Some displayed the finest qualities of revolutionary militants. How many people? In that category about 20.

I've heard say that's very little. That depends. To me, twenty people of the revolutionary cadre type, that's a new lease on life for the New York SWP. There were, according to carefully assembled figures, over 150 participating in the New York City petition drive, in the upstate work about 75. From all over the state some 500 people sent in petitions by mail.

Upstate, as in New York City, we made invaluable contacts with our kind of people, people who will undoubtedly be in the same party with us in the future.

There were 919 people who together contributed \$15,000 to the campaign. Considering Corliss Lamont's contributions, which totaled \$6,500, that leaves 918 contributing the remainder of \$8,500.

It's true that the social composition of these I-SP supporters is heavily weighted towards the middle class, with relatively few industrial workers. This reflects both the peripheral character of the group and the unfavorable social composition in the entire radical movement in the U.S., including the SWP. But to neglect to do everything possible to win such peripheral forces to the revolutionary socialist movement is nothing short of criminal, particularly when these forces include many of the present rank and file members and sympathizers of the Communist Party.

The campaign accomplished what we set out to accomplish. It took a census of the socialist vote in New York State. I believe that on objective consideration the vote we got will be reckoned by the movement nationally as an impressive achievement. The upstate vote showed an interesting result. In a large number of counties the I-SP vote showed a plus over the combined ALP-SWP vote of 1954, despite the steep decline in New York City.

We have yet to make a careful analysis of the vote. But the important conclusions were indicated by McManus at the last meeting of the I-SP committee: "Considering what we were up against in the petition campaign and the legal fight," he said, "and particularly considering the vigorous opposition of the Communist Party and the SP-SDF, the vote is quite significant. The decline of the vote in comparison with the ALP's vote of 1954 must be considered in the light of four years of dissolution of the ALP, four years of entry into the Democratic Party by many thousands of radicals under the influence of CP policy. Despite this we have demonstrated what we set out to demonstrate: that there is a sizeable group of voters who despite all pressure from the CP and all Democratic Party illusions, stand firm for socialism and vote a socialist ticket when it is present on the ballot."

At the last meeting of the I-SP committee we saw a foreshadowing of the differences and debates to come within the broad coalition. Some of those who went along with the venture, now want to pull back. They are afraid of getting drawn into the SWP orbit. Another section of the bloc is coming closer to us on some issues. Among the rank and file supporters of the I-SP we have gained since the election a number of new recruits and are in contact with people who are reading our literature, who see eye to eye with us on a positive estimation of the campaign and want to go forward to further close cooperation with us in other fields.

What next, comrades? We are in the middle of a process. We can't blueprint the course ahead. Moreover, in order to formulate the perspectives before the party in any precise way it will be necessary to synthesize our analysis of the results and prospects of the regroupment process with an analysis of the objective situation internationally and here in the United States. This will be done in preparation for the convention.

We are now in a new situation in my opinion. A new and more favorable relation of forces exists within the radical movement. I don't know how long it will last, that will be decided by the struggle, but at the present moment and for the foreseeable future, this new relation of forces must be our point of departure. The new situation is characterized by the fact that within the radical movement we have taken the initiative. That's an unfamiliar position for our movement to be in over the recent years. And certainly it's a new position for us in the radical movement in the country as a whole. It places a different kind of political and even psychological demand upon the leadership and ranks of the party. For a long time we have been forced to orient almost exclusively upon what other forces could and would do: what the labor bureaucracy, the capitalist class, the Social Democracy and what the Stalinists would do. We were in the position of critics of those powerful forces with relatively little opportunity to intervene in action. We were the forerunners of the revolutionary action of tomorrow. We stuck to that position and carried it through. But when opportunity provides the possibility of doing more than that, of taking the initiative and changing the reality in however limited a way, and such opportunities are not seized upon -- that opens the way to sectarian ossification.

The outward symptoms of the new relationship of forces can be very quickly cited: at the June conference for the first time in many years we were the decisive, initiating force in an action of the radical movement and the CP had to orient itself on the basis of what we would say and do. Considering the history of Stalinists excluding and hounding us out of all radical activities and all sections of the labor movement where they had control, it is ironic that the CP had to ask for the right to speak at the conference. We were asked to concede Ben Davis a place on the platform at the opening session -- which we did, of course.

The same picture emerges in the preparations for the forthcoming Cleveland conference. Here is an important national gathering of the radical movement scheduled for this weekend. The whole thing developed completely apart from the CP. Then the conference secretary received a wire from Eugene Dennis: "Arnold Johnson is arriving in Cleveland to see you." The secretary wondered what the CP may be up to. Johnson arrived in Cleveland, presented his credentials and asked if the CP will be permitted to participate, or "have the Trotskyists stacked everything against us?"

Take a simple matter like the Davies tour, an elementary forum activity. Socialists from other countries, of whatever persuasion, are brought over to break ground here, create discussion, stimulate thinking and help open up doors to more intensive socialist propaganda. We played a prominent role in the venture and the CP was on the outside, protesting and grumbling about it.

Together with many people formerly in the CP periphery we play an active role in the Sobell case and other civil liberties cases, while the CP's participation dwindles in most areas.

And notably in the youth movement we have taken and held the initiative over the past two years. We are the main contenders with the social democracy for influence over the radical youth. The Stalinists are still only talking about remobilizing some of their youth and trying to carve out a place for themselves in the budding youth movement.

Thus in many fields, aside from socialist electoral activity, we show a stepped-up influence and activity and the CP has been unable to regain its equilibrium sufficiently to even attempt to re-establish the old practice of exclusion and black-listing of Trotskyists.

Two important features of the new situation should be noted: (1) The more favorable relation of forces within the radical movement shows signs of opening new avenues of initiative and influence within the mass movement, particularly in the civil rights field. This is as yet limited in scope and we haven't enough experience to go on. We should certainly avoid any hasty or exaggerated conclusions. But the signs are there and all new opportunities in this field are being explored intensively. (2) The internal crisis within the Communist Party, has found its focus around the issues which we have posed and around the question of the inroads of the SWP. This is true nationally. The general crisis of the CP has become a crisis of what to do about the actions of the SWP.

This new, advantageous situation has come about, according to the comrades of the Marcy group, as a result of the "liquidation of Trotskyism." I hope that in the discussion comrades will take this charge up with all the seriousness it deserves. I confess that I find it very difficult to view it as anything more than a grotesque slander, particularly when it is accompanied by accusations that what motivates the majority of the party leadership is fear of the witch hunt. The New York comrades report that new and young comrades and recruits are submitted to systematic, round-the-clock agitation by the Marcyites on this theme. The Marcyites don't give these new, young recruits a chance to examine the different views within the party in an atmosphere of calm, objective discussion. They hammer away at the thesis: "You're entering a party in which the leadership has liquidated and betrayed Trotskyism for a period of ten years as a result of its fear of the witch hunt."

I make a big distinction between the position of Comrade Joyce Cowley and that of the Marcyites. A big distinction. We're not asking, as I said, for unquestioning approval of everything we have done. Undoubtedly, we have made mistakes. Many, no doubt. Very well. Let's go over the mistakes, see what they are, discuss and assess them. I think Comrade Cowley goes way, way overboard in what she regards as mistakes. And I think she makes a bad mistake when she grants Marcy even a finger on this charge of liquidationism. But I hope that with Comrade Cowley our discussion can take place within the framework of basic agreement on regroupment policy and thereby will enable us to review more effectively and critically the actual

application of this policy. With Comrade Marcy, it's an entirely different discussion.

I think that the party accomplished a lot in this eventful year. It not only had to carry out a complex and difficult tactic, it also had to overcome all the inner sectarian resistance all of us have to moving quickly in a changing situation with the necessary flexibility. And the party had to do this while it was continuously being harassed by the Marcyite charge that "Trotskyism was being liquidated." Despite this the party leadership and ranks showed the capacity to take advantage of a big opportunity and displayed a firmness and absence of jittery nervousness that was in some respects remarkable.

Now, in its discussion of the year's experience and in preparation for the convention, the party can mature and consolidate its accomplishments and move on to new tasks. We can move with greater energy and decisiveness towards the goal of the regroupment process -- the building of and expanded revolutionary socialist party in the U.S. That means, above all, building the SWP, its press and all its institutions, since the SWP is the most consistent and devoted fighter for this goal.

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RESOLUTION

By Joyce Cowley

1. This Plenum reaffirms our basic strategic proletarian orientation. Our primary party task continues to be propaganda activity within the working class, with particular attention to the growing receptivity of the Negro people and the working and student youth, as well as party intervention on issues facing broad sections of the masses wherever practical opportunities exist. While as yet there has been no qualitative change in the objective situation, we should constantly be alert to any realistic opportunities to further our objective of building a left-wing within the labor movement.

2. Within the framework of this basic orientation and perspective, the Plenum recognizes the continuing necessity of a special tactical approach flowing from the qualitative shake-up in the radical movement following the Twentieth Congress. Electoral blocs, united fronts, or any other tactic consistent with Leninist class struggle politics that shows promise of furthering the process of regroupment of revolutionary socialists in a Leninist party, should be aggressively pursued.

November 25, 1958

REGROUPMENT POLICY

by Joyce Cowley

(Submitted to N. C. Plenum, November 1958)

Last December I was one of four comrades, the minority of the New York executive committee, who brought out a document criticizing the implementation of the regroupment policy in New York. We thought the most effective way to achieve regroupment was to work where we would find the best elements in the radical movement, especially the C.P. -- in the unions, the NAACP and parents organizations. We believed we could reach them politically through joint participation in this kind of day-to-day work. Last December, leading majority comrades said they saw no conflict between our proposals and the general regroupment perspective.

I still think that the tactic proposed last December, confrontation of other radical tendencies through work in the mass movement, is valid, but it is no longer the fundamental issue. A year ago I did not see clearly the direction in which the majority was moving and considered the differences merely tactical. Now the evolution of the majority line has not only resulted in even greater isolation from the mass movement, but the perspective of revolutionary regroupment has been abandoned and instead we have turned toward reformist elements, and made serious political concessions to them. The "regroupment" line has become one of adaptation to petty bourgeois politics, moving toward liquidation of the SWP.

ISP Campaign

The errors of petty-bourgeois regroupment are clearly revealed in the recent election campaign in New York.

The SWP entered this campaign with illusions, substituting wishful thinking for analysis with regard to the size and character of the Guardian group. Extravagant predictions were made, not only by rank and file members but by comrades in the Political Committee.

While no one said that the Guardianites, our hottest candidates for "revolutionary" regroupment, were revolutionists, they were not correctly characterized as a petty-bourgeois, reformist, quasi-Stalinist tendency. The shortcomings of the Guardian group were overlooked because they were "moving to the left." But McManus and the former ALP-ers who participated in this campaign have had a position favoring independent political action, and opposing the C.P. policy of all-out support to the Democrats, for a number of years. Their 1955 call for independent political action was somewhat to the left of the Call issued this year in collaboration with the SWP. In 1955 the SWP ignored the Call while this year we helped to initiate it. The change is in the SWP.

Last January when we received the invitation to negotiations for united electoral action, there was certainly no reason to reject it, as long as we entered these negotiations fighting for a class struggle program and as long as we insisted on our right to adequate representation on the ticket. But in the course of the negotiation we made political concessions on fundamental issues, particularly the "peace" issue and revolutionary socialist opposition to the Soviet bureaucracy. Lamont and McManus got on the ballot thanks to the hard work of SWP comrades. We made it possible for them to conduct a reformist "peace" campaign -- it was certainly not a socialist campaign in spite of an uneasy acceptance of the label. Lamont said afterwards that the socialist label was a disadvantage, the ISP lost votes because of it and the candidates didn't talk much about socialism anyway. Lamont's "socialist" peace program included a boost for Stassen and a proposal to reduce the military budget from 48 billion to 24 billion. The radio-TV speeches of the candidates and their public appearances were more likely to antagonize than to attract anyone seriously interested in socialism. If, in these negotiations, the SWP had fought for a class struggle program, a clear statement in opposition to the Soviet bureaucracy, and insisted on an SWP candidate for one of the two major offices, we would either have run our own ticket (probably with critical support from the Guardian as in 1957), or we would have had a united ticket in which the voice of revolutionary socialism could be heard. (The importance of having one of the two major candidates is the amount of radio and TV time, most of which goes to the candidates for governor and senator.)

In view of the stage that negotiations had reached last June, I voted for a policy of critical support to ISP ticket. With this policy we could still participate in the campaign and be in contact with any new people who were attracted to the ISP, but at the same time we could sharply differentiate our political position and put forward the SWP program. As it was, we gave non-critical support and campaign articles in the Militant were a sad echo of Lamont's pacifist speeches.

Curiously enough, even the point which is underlined as the main achievement of ISP election policy, the break of the Guardian group with class collaborationist politics and the C.P. policy of support to the Democrats, seems questionable at best. In the final election issue of the Guardian it advised its readers that there were "thousands of good Democrats" for whom they could cast their votes and three days after the election, at Adelphi Hall, McManus stated that he was not in principle opposed to supporting Democratic candidates.

What's Wrong with Regroupment?

The mistakes made in the election campaign flow logically from the present regroupment strategy of the majority.

The regroupment perspective is based on an erroneous appraisal of the objective situation following the 20th Congress. In 1956 the radical movement in this country had gone through ten years of witch-hunting and isolation, which resulted in demoralization, internal conflicts and shrinking membership. The SWP was not exempt from

these difficulties, as the Cochran-Bartell split testifies. Over a period of years, this situation led to pessimism regarding perspectives in the working class movement and a tendency toward a lopsided concentration on the internal organizational work of the party. Comrades left jobs in industry to cook at camp or work in the 116 office. Consequently, at the time of the 20th Congress, the party had reached a low ebb in the sense of having few ties with the working class, and recruitment was almost at a standstill.

Suddenly, after many lean years, the Khrushchev revelations were a vindication of Trotskyism, and if ideas are vindicated it logically follows that the organization fighting for these ideas should experience rapid growth. This is the basis for the original miscalculation regarding regroupment. Regroupment would have been a valid tactic in this new situation, but instead of a tactic it became the main strategic line of the party, in spite of continued lip service to the proletarian orientation. The opportunities that existed have been greatly exaggerated and unrealistic perspectives adopted, on the following incorrect supposition: That regroupment today is comparable to the regroupment of radical forces in the 1930's.

The main difference in the objective situation today is that there are no revolutionary forces in any way equivalent to those of the thirties. In the thirties there was a leftward movement of the entire working class due to the depression. There was also a turn to the left within the socialist movement after the social democratic defeats in Germany, Austria and France. Today there is no decisive leftward movement in the working class, except the struggle of the Negro people for full equality. The 20th Congress was not a defeat for Stalinism in the same sense that events in the thirties were a defeat for social democracy -- the Congress struck an ideological blow at the Stalinist movement, but in Germany and Austria the entire left movement was physically destroyed.

In the absence of a broad leftward movement today, the tendency of groups and individuals breaking with Stalinism, and of the radical movement generally, is to the right. However, small leftward moving groups, contradicting this general tendency, are possible. One example is the YSL left-wing which opposed the liquidation of the Shachtman group into the SP-SDF. Another more recent example is the Marxist-Leninist Caucus.

This situation calls for a special tactic in relation to small numbers of radicals who might be attracted to a program of revolutionary socialism, but it does not require a major regroupment strategy to which all other work of the party is subordinated.

Seeking forces with which to regroup, the SWP leadership first anticipated the formation of a left-wing in the C.P. When this did not materialize, they turned their attention to various individuals breaking from the C.P. -- Gates, Clark, Fast, etc. It seemed unlikely either on the basis of the past record of such individuals, or policies adopted and statements made by them subsequent to the 20th Congress, that they were moving to the left. But they were misrepresented to the SWP membership as prospects for revolutionary

regroupment -- here too wishful thinking took the place of analysis. I don't think we should have ruled out the possibility that one or several of these individuals breaking from the C.P. might be attracted to a revolutionary program. But we should have correctly characterized their general tendency, which was to the right.

The next regroupment adventure was the American Forum. Once again, it was unrealistic. Glowing reports were made to the membership of the great possibilities opened up by the Forum. It was possible, of course, that we could find some new avenues of work and contact some new people, so we certainly should have participated in the Forum. But again these possibilities were greatly overestimated and nothing was said by the leadership about the obvious weaknesses of this discussion-club set up, nor that the divergent political types constituting the Forum were not likely to stick together very long.

Finally, with the C.P. consolidated, with Gates, Clark and others back in the bourgeois camp, and the American Forum practically non-existent, the only regroupment prospects left were the people grouped around the Guardian including many former leaders of the ALP who opposed its liquidation. Instead of revolutionary regroupment, we now pursued a policy of regroupment with a reformist, petty bourgeois tendency. In order to collaborate with them in the New York election campaign, we made organizational and political concessions which resulted in the SWP doing the legwork that enabled McManus and Lamont to conduct the kind of campaign they wanted.

So, step by step we have followed a line of political adaptation which, if not checked, confronts us with the danger of liquidation.

There are numerous concrete examples of this adaptation in the party press, beginning with articles in the ISR on Fast and Clark, on peace, and on political revolution in the USSR. When Hansen wrote that political revolution in the Soviet Union might look like a series of reforms, I felt that he was not only mutilating the meaning of the word "revolution" but also attempting to propitiate a group whose most serious objection to the SWP was our position on political revolution.

The demand for a summit conference, a popular slogan with our new allies, suddenly received sympathetic treatment in our paper. No one could have deduced from articles in the Militant, the Trotskyist position on the proposed summit conference as well as all similar big power meetings -- that they can only result in a deal at the expense of the world working class and the revolution. The concrete issue of the Arab revolution became a "peace issue" in the columns of our paper.

When we collaborate with another tendency in an action like the ISP campaign, it is particularly important to sharply differentiate our political line. But as the campaign progressed, it became an "anti-war ticket" in the Militant headlines, and articles on Lamont carried no explanation of our differences with him, no criticism of his pacifist line. This culminated in absurd

articles on the Quemoy crisis which accused the puppet Chiang of dragging U.S. imperialism toward war. (Another popular liberal idea -- similar articles appeared in the New York Post).

The reformist character of the New York election campaign testifies more clearly than anything else to the rightward-moving liquidationist policy of the SWP leadership.

This brings up the question of "fusion." About a year ago when it was first raised on the branch floor in New York, by comrades Weiss, Ring, and others, it was not clear with whom they wished to fuse, since no organized leftward moving tendency existed. It is obvious now that an attempt has been made to create a centrist organization -- the ISP -- which would make fusion possible. At first this appeared to be an aberration on the part of a few individuals in New York until the authoritative voice of James P. Cannon, speaking in Los Angeles on the same platform with Hallinan, said that we are seeking a party of "all honest socialists" -- a return to the idea of the Debs all-inclusive party. In the past Cannon has effectively analyzed the weaknesses of this type of organization.

Similarly in youth work, we have attempted to create a milieu in which to work. A youth leader described this as "an entry tactic in reverse" and Morris Stein said it was something new. It certainly would be new if it were possible, but a milieu cannot be artificially created. However, there is an important difference between the question of our regroupment strategy and our perspective on youth work. There is an objective basis for the formation of a youth movement. But the youth movement we attempted to build in the last two years has been weakened and demoralized because it was used as a tail to the regroupment kite. First there was a search for non-existent "leftward moving forces" among youth in the radical milieu, ex LYL -ers etc. and more recently the youth group has been oriented toward the ISP. Both policies have damaged our youth work but I believe a youth movement can be successfully organized if it is not quite so broad and independent, but more militant, and if it bases its work on participation in actions related to the day-to-day problems of youth, particularly in working class and minority neighborhoods.

Regroupment Gains

One of the problems the majority has faced, and one of the reasons for the sudden changes in the direction of our work (from the C.P. left-wing, to Gates-Clark, to the American Forum, etc.) is the unimpressive results achieved in two and a half years of regroupment. Some majority leaders declared that the main purpose of this policy was "to put flesh on our bones," others insisted it was the right policy even if we did not get a single recruit out of it. While we have had some modest recruitment, it has been offset to a considerable extent by an unusually large number of comrades who have dropped out of the party altogether or become inactive. But recruitment is not considered the vital test of our gains. It's the vast new milieu for work, the new people we have contacted. Generally when we contact new people, there is a rise in party activity, we get new

subs, etc. This year the sub campaign in New York has dragged and the explanation given is that for the first few weeks, we were too busy with the election campaign. In the past, our campaigns have aided our sub work. As to the vast milieu, most of the area committees set up during the ISP campaign engaged in very little campaign activity, except for Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn which held street meetings and rallies. The others met once, at most twice, and raised some money. Again, we are told that because of the ballot fight there was only a ten day period in which to campaign. But in 1956, when the SWP did not even succeed in getting on the ballot, we conducted a very effective campaign.

The majority has dressed up and distorted reports to make it appear that impressive gains have been made. I first commented on this tendency to "glamorize" reports in connection with the 1957 election campaign. For example, while the initial successes of the youth group were widely publicized, the recurrent crises in this work (inevitable because of the false organizational set up and perspective) have been minimized. We heard about the forums attended by sixty or seventy youth, but not that they dwindled to ten or twelve. We heard little about the shrinking membership, fights and resignations. A few weeks ago the crisis was so acute that youth comrades discussed the possibility of discontinuing publication of Young Socialist and even giving up the youth group itself. Tim Wohlforth's tour has apparently given the group a new lease of life and a new orientation, toward the college campuses.

The Marcy Tendency And Regroupment

On regroupment policy, I think the Marcy tendency has failed to do what the four New York comrades attempted in their December document -- to present a positive tactic toward work in the radical milieu in view of the new situation following the 20th Congress. I'm not even sure that Comrade Marcy considers it a qualitatively new situation. Just what is the Marcy line on "regroupment?" He has no over-all written analysis of regroupment policy which explains why such an orientation was adopted by the party at this time, what changes in the objective political situation and our perspectives resulted from the 20th Congress (if any) and what new organizational tasks were posed.

He has written short articles on specific aspects of regroupment work (for instance, Gates, Clark) and has made negative criticisms of the regroupment line with which I am in general agreement. But many questions remain unanswered. Did the 20th Congress make a qualitative change in the situation in the radical movement in this country? If so, what should our tactic be in relation to this changed situation? For example, when we received the invitation to participate in discussion on the United ticket, should we accept or reject it? If we accept, exactly what policy should we follow in the negotiations. Specifically, as regards program and candidates, in what kind of ticket does Marcy think it would be politically advantageous for the SWP to participate?

Finally, the most important question -- what relationship does Marcy see between the errors of the regroupment line and his general international analysis?

I have arrived at my criticism of the regroupment line on the basis of an entirely different analysis from that of Marcy, and this results in differences on organizational perspectives and tasks. I see the regroupment line as a result of the isolation of the radical movement in the United States, a politics of desperation reflecting lack of confidence in the working class movement in this country and therefore substituting the regroupment work for our fundamental task of building a left wing in the unions, in the hope that when there is a leftward development in the working class we will be a larger organization and therefore in a better position to lead it. Even granting that we may gain membership through such a policy, if we do it by sacrificing program, there will be no reason for a resurgent working class to turn to us.

Marcy apparently sees the regroupment line as a further development of what he considers the party's adaptation to U.S. imperialism which began during the cold war and the Korean war. He also sees no leftward movement in the U.S. working class unless there are "new catastrophes."

Marcy wrote in his letter about the Weiss article on Clark that because "all the other tendencies in the labor movement were moving to the right" that "the net effect of the Khrushchev revelations was, under the existing circumstances, to plunge the Stalinist movement further along the path of bourgeois reformism, rather than a break in the direction of revolutionary Marxism." Consistent with this position, he has seen every break from Stalinism - even Hungary - as a break to the right. In the absence of a leftward movement either among the radicals or in the U.S. working class, his organizational policy is one of "digging in" in the shops and of individual recruitment. But he tends to take an absentionist position toward special tactics directed toward the radical milieu and particularly to joint activities with other tendencies.

To clarify this, here are some specific organizational points:

1. I am not sure what the Marcy position is on the general question of electoral blocs and whether or not they offer political opportunities. Marcy voted against a united campaign at the last Plenum. I voted for it. I still do not oppose entering such negotiations or participating in a united ticket. My objections are to an unrealistic appraisal of the gains to be made which, when they are not realized, will result in demoralization of the SWP membership, and to political concessions which constitute an abandonment of the Trotskyist program. I do not agree with Marcy that the kind of ISP campaign we had in New York was the inevitable result of these negotiations. I think we could have had a better ticket, program and campaign if we had adopted a different policy in the negotiations. Even if the final result was an SWP campaign instead of a united ticket, I believe we would have gained support for our campaign through a correct policy in negotiations. I do not oppose united electoral action. Judging by the speech the Rev. King made at camp and what I know of his campaign in Chicago, I would support it. My information about the Seattle campaign is necessarily limited. But while it used a "liberal" label, the program was to the left of the New York "socialist" program, and contained an

unambiguous criticism of the Soviet bureaucracy. Also, we had two SWP candidates on that ticket. I would probably support the Seattle campaign, too.

2. On the Gates-Clark question, I agree in general with the Marcy analysis and do not agree with the line taken in our press. But, since I did not rule out the possibility of attracting some of these individuals, I did not favor initially approaching them with a sharp attack. The Militant and ISR should have carried an honest analysis of their rightward tendency, tempered by a hope that in some cases the tendency could be changed. I think Marcy's motivation in calling for merciless criticism was his preference for an approach to the Fosterites, while the majority thought the Gates group offered better prospects. Since, as outlined in the December document, I proposed a confrontation of both tendencies in the mass movement, I had no preference for a tactic directed toward one section of the C.P. rather than the other.

3. On youth perspectives, one of the disagreements I had with Comrade Gross when he was New York organizer was on the formation of an independent youth movement and work with the YSL left-wing, which he opposed. Marcy is critical of the present youth set-up but I still don't know exactly what his proposals for youth work are.

Our Perspective

The resolution passed by the 1957 convention stated that we must "link the party to the mass movement through a class struggle left wing." But at that convention, the Plenum last January and the present Plenum, the American labor movement has not been on the agenda. We have had neither a broad analysis of what's going on in the labor movement nor a discussion of our participation in the struggles in which the workers are engaged. Our discussion of the Negro movement, too, has been limited to theoretical issues raised at the convention. Why have we failed to become a part of the one force in the American working class which has moved rapidly to the left in the last few years? These are the questions, the labor movement and the Negro struggle, which should be before this Plenum, instead of devoting so much time to past, present and future election campaigns, which have never before been the main arena of activity for a revolutionary party.

The 1958 elections, especially the labor campaign against the right-to-work bills, are an indication of a leftward movement in the working class as a whole. But I do not agree with the analysis in the Militant that this is due mainly to the recession. It is a tendency which has been developing for several years. The analysis of the labor movement made in the resolution passed at our 1957 convention was pessimistic, overestimated the strength of the anti-labor offensive, McClellan, etc., underestimated labor's capacity to fight back. Labor's struggles may still be characterized as "defensive," but I don't think the working class has to take the offensive before we redirect the work of our party to the main task --- building a left-wing in the unions and the Negro organizations. Our approach to the radical movement should be a supplementary tactic.

But first, in order to have a revolutionary vanguard party which can undertake these tasks, we must reverse the present tendency toward liquidation.

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