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discussion bulletin

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NOTE: This document is being submitted to the present pre-convention discussion although it was originally submitted for the purpose of contributing to the New York Local discussion on tasks and perspectives at its City Conference in January 1958. The discussion in the party, over the past year, has proceeded to develop beyond the stage described in this document. The information contained, however, can serve to fill in the necessary background material to the present discussion and to show the actual evolution of the discussion around the orientation and perspective of the party in the coming period.

A REVIEW OF THE PAST YEAR'S WORK OF THE NEW YORK LOCAL

Note: This report is submitted by the minority of the Local Executive Committee in reply to the organizer's report given verbally to the LEC, on November 23, 1957.

We view the present discussion as fundamentally healthy and potentially fruitful. The strategic line set down by the last National Convention in the outline of the Political Report concluded with these words:

"Basically our political-organization objectives can be summarized as follows:

"Fuse all revolutionary socialist currents into a single Leninist-type party.

"Link the party to the mass movement through a class struggle left wing.

"Base the left wing on mass activity infused by the class struggle itself.

"Generate responsiveness toward socialist aims through a program of transitional demands.

"Split the labor movement from the Democratic party and create a labor party based on the unions in an alliance with the Negro people, working farmers and other potential labor allies.

"Establish a Workers and Farmers Government and move forward to the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist society."

The problem, and it is a particularly complex problem, is how to implement these objectives in New York.

"The Anti-Stalinist Offensive" and the December 1956 Conference

Within the framework of these general objectives, we correctly saw following the Twentieth Congress, the immediate need for all-out tactical intervention in the CP milieu. The New York Local made such a tactical effort and by the time of the conference we could draw certain conclusions on the basis of the considerable experience we had gone through in and around the Stalinist milieu.

Comrade Royce, who was director of our "Anti-Stalinist Offensive," submitted a written report to the conference. No substantial disagreement was voiced to this report either in the Executive Committee or at the conference itself. We feel that reiteration of some of the generalizations made in that report, based on the actual experiences of the local prior to the conference, would be helpful at this time.

"Analysis indicated the following factors that predominated in the first stage of our anti-Stalinist offensive:

"1. The general and profound pressure to the right in this country. With all their vitriolic shrieking at each other, the Foster and Gates factions will immediately join forces against any advocates of class-struggle policy.

"2. Petty-bourgeois chauvinism absolutely permeated the Stalinist world. Their acquaintance with Marxist ideology is on a fantastically primitive level.

"3. The inundation of New York with 'half-way houses.' There is no question that some of the amorphous, politically spineless socialist discussion clubs have scored a temporary tactical advantage. These groups demand no clarification of program -- no need to build a party of socialist revolution. The latest up-to-date road to socialism through side-line commentary is the spicy offering. But this advantage is fast waning and it is becoming increasingly obvious that serious revolutionaries will not be held for long by the prospect of discussing regroupment through the next epoch."

"Isolation of the Party Our Supreme Handicap"

"Our greatest handicap, by far, has been the isolation of our party. An empiric review of our anti-Stalinist offensive for the past year indicates quite clearly -- to the extent that we have broken through the isolation, to that extent and degree have we gathered momentum in the offensive against the Stalinists."

"Three decisive strides stand out in our offensive through this past year. The Brooklyn Compass Club Symposium, our intervention on Montgomery in the NAACP and our election campaign. What was the basic political thread that guaranteed us success in these ventures? It is simply this -- we are a party and not a propaganda group. . . "

The report listed the activities in which we were engaged at the time of the last conference. The nature of these activities led the reporter to note: "Practically all our activities have been in non-Stalinist sponsored groupings. In many of these activities the Stalinists are not even participants."

What Did the Conference Project?

The dominant theme of the conference was the desire to activate the branch and to attempt to move outward. The following examination of the decisions and recommendations of the conference quite clearly reveals the sentiments of the comrades:

1. Comrade Carolyn reported a highly successful election campaign in which we had won the ear of many "leftward-moving workers." There were over 300 letters sent in by radio and TV viewers. We obtained over 40 subs and Carolyn urged that the door-to-door work we had been doing continue after the campaign.

2. The conference passed a motion that: "An organized and persistent campaign of contacting and recruiting should have top priority in our next period of anti-Stalinist work. House parties and all forms of social fraternizing should be encouraged to the fullest degree."

3. We passed motions that "A city-wide NAACP fraction be set up," that "every comrade join the NAACP and apply himself to Negro work," "the incoming exec organize our intervention in the school desegregation struggle" and a recommendation was made that we intervene in organizations in the Puerto Rican community and seek out Stalinists there. We were also preparing around that time for widespread utilization of the Santana pamphlet in the Puerto Rican community.

4. We set up a multi-branch structure to organizationally implement these objectives. It was decided that the single branch structure was an obstacle to carrying out the work outlined by the decisions of the conference.

Comrade Kerry opened the conference with a general political analysis of the regroupment process, and if there was any feeling that the motions related above contradicted the regroupment line, it certainly was not expressed at the conference. Every one of the motions we have cited was passed by unanimous consent. These events are all recorded in the minutes of the conference. If comrades are taken aback and ask, "What happened to these motions?," we can only reply "there hangs a tale" that is deserving of our most serious thought and discussion.

Lack of Real Regroupment Perspectives and the Demise of the Multi-Branch Structure

The first apparent snag in implementing the decisions of the conference came with the difficulties encountered by the multi-branch structure. The conference, unfortunately, did not spell out the precise perspectives and activities of the two branches. When the Executive Committee of the "Wednesday Night Branch" brought forth specific recommendations for branch activities, which they assumed were merely implementing the decisions of the conference, Comrade Kerry, who was then Political Chairman of the Local, took rather firm exception.

The branch exec's proposals were essentially as follows:

1. The branch should take on immediate responsibility for activity at the Brighton Beach Center, which was the only consistent public Stalinist function.

2. The branch should follow up on the opportunities following the two symposiums at the Brooklyn Compass Club viewing the possi-

bility of setting up a socialist forum in cooperation with various politicals with whom we had made contact through these successful symposiums.

3. Look into the possibilities of work in a housing project where an ex-Stalinist worker offered to cooperate with us.

4. The branch should take the lead in seeing that we follow up on the opportunities open to us in the Brooklyn Branch of the NAACP.

5. All of these activities were, of course, to be under the political guidance of the City Executive Committee.

The purpose of the recommendations was, within the framework of the conference decisions, to provide practical and productive activity for the branch. The aim, further, was to provide the basis for a certain minimum of cohesiveness that any real branch must have if it is to thrive.

A number of comrades raised some practical disagreements with the recommendations of the branch executive. The most substantial objection was that too great a proportion of activity was to be carried on in Brooklyn. A few comrades pointed out, with considerable validity, the practical difficulty of getting people living in Manhattan to travel out to Brooklyn to carry out this work. These very real practical objections could have been organizationally resolved. However, Comrade Kerry offered criticisms of a qualitatively different nature and his objections can only be resolved by the forthcoming conference.

Does A Branch Need A Program of Activities?

Tom made no criticism of any of the specific proposals, nor did he offer any superior activities. Instead he criticized the Branch Executive Committee, very sharply, for introducing a discussion around a program of activities. It is out of order, he pointed out, for us to discuss branch perspectives -- we have our perspective, our regroupment activities, he insisted. But the Branch Executive Committee projected its proposals as the most effective practical measures they could think of in implementing the regroupment line projected by the conference. Perhaps they were faulty, but Tom has not indicated to this day how they contradicted our party's basic conception of how to intervene in the regroupment process!

We waited patiently for some clarification as to the political basis for the multi-branch set-up. The branch exec met without any idea as to what belonged on its agenda since there was no need to discuss administrative announcements and assignments that were passed down from the city. We were told in effect that one branch was politically responsible for Wednesday, in contradistinction to the other branch which was politically responsible for every Thursday that slipped on to the calendar. By the time of the election conference in May, a motion was passed that the branches be combined till after the election campaign.

The multi-branch structure met for the time being at least an unceremonious demise because it was stillborn. The branches had been

deprived, at birth, of any political basis for existence. However, whether we have one branch or ten branches is subordinate to the question of perspectives, which is primary. The counterposition by Tom of "regroupment" as against rounded branch activity, was a political phantom that still rides the night in the New York Local and should, at last, be put to rest.

Only the politically obstinate can fail to see the seething developments within the socialist movement since the Twentieth Congress. The question at issue, however, is not whether to intervene in the unfolding regroupment process, with all the force at our disposal -- but how! The conference indicated its attitudes on how to deepen our intervention in the regroupment process by its decisions. The validity of these decisions with which the minority basically still agrees are a matter of conjecture, for these decisions were not carried out and thus could not be tested. The proposals of the minority, described in this document, will have to prove their validity, if accepted by the conference. Let us see then how the alternative to these proposals actually unfolded in New York during the past year.

Where Is the Stalinist "Arena"?

The picture immediately after the conference was even more sharply focused. The Jefferson School, the West Side Club and the East Side Guardian Club were evaporating and attendance at the Bartell forum, at that time, was fast waning, CP-sponsored public meetings were becoming rarities. The only consistent public CP activity was at the Brighton Beach Center. Certain CP cultural classes were not even worth our attendance. Weeks would pass without a single Stalinist function meriting our participation.

Meanwhile, those few comrades doing mass work were meeting many Stalinists and other radical workers. Also it was clear, the character of these people was decidedly different than those we met heretofore. These Stalinists and ex-Stalinists, both Negro and white, were extremely friendly with us and enthusiastically welcomed the establishment of a working relationship with us. This working relationship has already proven to be the best bridge to frank and free general political discussion.

At the same time, the most publicized regroupment developments were taking place on a level that did not offer a very broad avenue for branch activity. The only activity, in over a year's existence of the American Forum that involved the participation of the entire branch, was a single rather disorganized symposium. By its very nature, at least until the time of the panels, the American Forum directly involved the participation of only a few leading comrades.

This situation may, of course, change. One of the propositions under discussion in the American Forum is the setting up of a local unit which might very well demand a good deal of the energy of the New York Local. However, up to now this has not been so. In fact, where we had an opportunity for setting up a forum in Brooklyn under favorable conditions, following the Dobbs-Gates symposium last May in Brighton, it was tabled pending further discussion in the NC of the American Forum.

However, what is most decisive to understand is that future successes within the American Forum can only reflect the relationship of forces in the outside world in general and the class arena in particular. For example, our recently completed election campaign has had a deeply significant effect on the role we are playing within the Forum which in turn affects the very nature of the American Forum as a totality.

This whole period, while we have been waiting for the American Forum to work out a practical program, should have been utilized to reach as many radical workers as possible, by implementing the decisions of our last conference and by seeking out radical workers active in the mass movement. But instead of moving outward into the mass movement where the best of the radical workers can be reached -- we have been involved in a fantastic discussion as to whether mass work contradicts our line on "regroupment."

At the time of the last conference, a year ago, the director of our "Anti-Stalinist Offensive" reached certain conclusions on the basis of our empiric experiences. He simply could not find an arena for fruitful activities, in organizations in the Stalinist milieu, that would involve the majority of the branch in consistent participation. This sphere had been reduced to the Sobell Committee, Brighton Beach and sporadic classes and forums. That is why with the unanimous consent of the Executive Committee the "Anti-Stalinist Offensive" committee and the post of director were dropped right after the conference. It was obvious that intervention in the regroupment arena had to take a new form than we originally envisaged.

If tomorrow, due to events abroad or a blossoming American Forum, a tactical arena appears demanding intervention and participation of the entire branch we must leap in without hesitation, as we did immediately after the Twentieth Congress. It must be understood, however, that the number of comrades doing opponents work in Stalinist organizations is a tactical question subject to the nature of the specific opportunity and the forces available. But our participation in the mass movement is motivated by our basic views on the general strategic role of the party -- which is to build an instrument to organize the working class for the achievement of socialism.

Today, objective conditions impose upon us, for the most part, propaganda tasks. However, this does not transform the character of our party to that of a propaganda group. Of course we do not today lead large masses of workers. But, what differentiates us from propaganda groups, such as the Shachtmanites, Cochranites, etc. is our program and our strategic objectives, not the size of our membership. Trade-union work, Negro work, as well as the general independent work of the party, are the day-to-day tasks that we must always carry on regardless of what tactical turn we may take at a given conjuncture.

Counterposing mass work to regroupment activities makes about as much sense as saying that the fund drive cuts across our regroupment activity. It is out of such a false counterposition, however, that a number of basic misconceptions have sneaked in through the "back door."

Building A "Left Wing" -- Our Fundamental "Regroupment" Task

The regroupment process will yield its real cadres to us only when we have demonstrated that we have the program and leadership to forge a genuine left wing in the unions and the NAACP as well as the general day-to-day struggles of the American working class. Comrades throughout the country are reporting that our activity in the mass movement has already led us to many of the most serious and high-spirited radical workers. In many cases this has led to a working relationship that has forced Stalinist workers to cooperate with us in carrying out policies that brought them in direct collision with the CP bureaucracy.

This is only natural because it is our attitude to participate in the labor movement, in general, and the struggle against the labor bureaucrats in particular that marks us off from every other radical tendency in this country.

It is from that vantage point that our recent National Convention opened the discussion on intervention in the mass movement with a "Program of Workers Democracy." We believe Comrade Dobbs' conclusion in a letter on that subject dated July 19, 1957, offers an excellent starting point for steering the New York Local back on the road towards steady, productive participation in the labor movement of New York City. He said:

"It is important to bear in mind that presentation of this program does not signify a basic shift in our present trade-union tactics. We are not yet in a position to summon the masses to action in defiance of the bureaucracy; nor can we challenge the bureaucratic machines for union posts. Under existing objective conditions the relationship of forces remains too overwhelmingly against us.

"What we have is a new opportunity to exert our propaganda toward the infusion of program into the spontaneous opposition movements now springing up within the unions. Through these efforts we can expect to reach worker elements awakening to fresh political thought. In this way we can lay new foundation stones toward the building of a class-struggle left wing in the unions."

Once More, Our View Towards Mass Work in a Period of Reaction

It is extremely unfortunate that a tactical discussion on regroupment work has been lumped together with much more profound differences on the basic proletarian nature of the party. We believe it is because of this confused nature of the discussion that many unfortunate formulae are finding fertile soil. "Sure we belong with our class, but our class is simply not moving anywhere today," "The movement of the workers is glacial while among the radicals the ice is breaking up," these typify many of the expressions heard recently. The logical conclusion of these remarks was demonstrated when a leading comrade warned the branch that "the quickest way to create apathy among the comrades is to send them into mass organizations."

Comrade Kerry very succinctly stated in a document written in 1953, which he reaffirmed in the trade-union discussion following

the convention, the basic party view on the question on hand. He wrote "The degree of reaction determines, not our basic orientation but the tactical application of our strategic line within the mass movement." Unfortunately there are some comrades who either are not familiar with this fundamental SWP attitude or simply do not agree with it.

To the extent that it is physically possible we maintain an organic bond with the working class. Within this framework we work out our tactics. Our point of departure is not whether to intervene but how and to what extent we can intervene in the activities of our class. Any discussion of branch perspectives that does not examine the state and progress of our union fractions and evaluate our participation in the activities of the working people of New York falls far short of its obligations.

And yet, when the City organizer was asked to put the trade-union question on the agenda of the last conference, we were told that there was nothing to discuss. The fact that we did not press the point only illustrates the extent, in our opinion, to which we are all subjected to the social pressures in the present "relative quiescence." The fact that there was "nothing" to discuss (if this were so) should have been the danger signal to us that discussion and resolution of this problem was imperative.

It is not very illuminating or helpful to cynically remind us that "proletarianization" is a battle-worn cliché in the New York Local. The immediate problem is not whether to turn New York into an industrial branch. We are faced with the hard fact that we are more isolated from the labor movement than we have ever been in New York. Of course, this is basically due to the social climate. But to dismiss it from the agenda, with a shrug of the shoulder, was an error that we all shared in to one degree or another.

A comrade correctly remarked, in a recent branch discussion, that this is a period for "probing." However, external probing only yields a very episodic picture and, far more important, would make our successful intervention in any "hot" situation that developed extremely unlikely. Successful intervention in a "hot" situation generally requires years of patient plodding in a "cold" situation. We should be utilizing this period to build a base, win the confidence of our shopmates and "learn the ropes."

We have just passed through a year when the working people of New York have seen mass layoffs in a number of defense plants dramatize the growing unemployment in the midst of an inflationary spiral. The McClellan Committee focused public attention on the potentially explosive struggle of the super-exploited of this city against the labor bureaucracy. We have seen the almost 2,000,000 Negro and Puerto Rican people of New York go through the experience of important struggles for integration in employment, housing and schools.

Limited by A Lack of Discussion and Participation

These problems have not been seriously discussed by the branch or exec. The organizer's report does not even refer to them. The comrades we do have participating in these struggles have not been

heard from except here or there, in passing.

The problem, at this point, is not to fix blame. Every member of the exec to one degree or another must share the responsibility for this very serious problem. There is no overnight solution. However, we must reach agreement on the nature of the problem and then attempt, within the limitations of our forces and our opportunities, to work out a practical yet flexible approach to the problem.

On the basis of the foregoing remarks we would like to make the following practical recommendations to the conference. They certainly won't solve the problem but we feel they are minimum steps in the right direction.

1. The incoming exec should select a trade-union director.
2. A thorough detailed report on the number of comrades who are members of unions, as well as the nature of their situations, should be prepared.
3. A careful survey should be made of shops in New York where comrades' employment is possible and/or desirable.
4. Where we have comrades in unions they should be given an opportunity to present reports to the branch as soon as it can be arranged and as often as it is necessary to keep the comrades informed of activities in their unions.
5. The incoming exec should carefully work out a program for intervention in the New York labor movement within the framework of our forces and opportunities.

The Specific Role of the Minority Peoples within the New York Working Class

No political evaluation of the role of the minority peoples in New York is possible without a reference to the dramatic population shifts that are taking place here. According to statistics released recently by SCAD, the increase among the Negro and Puerto Rican population has been about 600,000, while the number of whites has decreased by 416,707 since 1950! The total number of Puerto Ricans and Negroes in the metropolitan area is almost 2,000,000.

Since 1950 the director of SCAD points out "virtually no new construction in the state has been open to non-whites." During this period the city administration, despite pious words to the contrary, has consciously enforced the shamefully inadequate ghetto-like character of the educational system in the Negro and Puerto Rican communities.

During this same period the capitalist politicians, the employers and the labor fakers have joined hands in a cynical attempt to super-exploit the 600,000 Puerto Rican people of this city. Through the use of city police enforced "sweetheart" contracts they have tried to utilize exploitation of the Puerto Rican people as a battering ram against the wage standards of the entire New York working class. A shrewd plan has been unfolding in an attempt by the bosses

to turn the working people of New York in general, and the Negroes in particular, against the Puerto Rican workers.

It is in the context of these developments that the Communist Party made a turn in their National and State Convention towards stepped-up activity among the Negro and Puerto Rican people. The Daily Worker has fully covered these events with the greatest of care. Negro leaders within the CP have been pushed "forward" into more conspicuous positions. Comrades active in this sphere report that to the extent that the CP has forces at its disposal, they are deploying them heavily within this arena.

The Objectives of the December Conference and Their Outcome

Except for a passing reference to the example of the experience of the "Parents in Action" group and their unsuccessful attempt to organize a mass protest at City Hall, and the majority conclusion from this event that "Negro people have demonstrated that they could not at this time sustain any prolonged mass activity. . . ." there has been no majority report on our work among the minority peoples of this city.

This unusual approach is symptomatic of the attitude of some comrades in the executive committee majority toward work in the Negro mass movement. Moreover, it is an improper way to begin a discussion. The majority does not present an estimation of what went before nor a perspective for what is to come. Unless, and we hope this is not the case, that the passing reference mentioned above, is the majority's estimate and perspective. Consequently, it remains for the minority to review some of the events of the past year, beginning with the perspectives outlined by the last conference.

At that conference the branch voted to recommend to the incoming exec the following proposals as a guide to work among the minority peoples:

1. Every comrade join the NAACP and apply himself to Negro work.
2. Hold city-wide fraction meetings regularly under the direction of the executive committee.
3. The incoming exec organize our intervention in the school desegregation struggle.
4. A proposal was made from the floor that we consider "entry into Puerto Rican organizations and seek out Stalinists there."

The four preceding motions were carried unanimously. They were motivated in large part by a report by Nat on our work in the NAACP, prior to the conference. This report drew a realistic picture of the unspectacular groundwork that had been done and was necessary for the future. The report laid special stress on the inadequate effort in the past and the need for more extensive and intensive participation in this area of work.

It should be noted that not only were these motions passed unanimously but there was not even any attempt to contradict or

qualify the obvious practical meaning of these proposals. Plainly, the exec owes the branch an evaluation as to how these recommendations were implemented. Did they hinder or aid our work? If they did not prove feasible in life, why not?

Except for a few half-hearted steps, such as two announcements urging the comrades to join the NAACP and a total of one fraction meeting through the course of the year, these recommendations of the conference were ignored:

1. No one was urged to "apply himself" to Negro work.
2. No one was urged to enter Puerto Rican organizations and seek out Stalinists there.
3. There were no regular fraction meetings.
4. Outside of Comrade C., whose activity is involuntarily limited, not one comrade is consistently active in the local branch of the NAACP.
5. There was no real attempt made to organize our intervention in the school desegregation struggle. Those comrades participating in the PIA or Education Committee of the NAACP did so on their own initiative and without any guidance or political line from the center.

No Practical Conflict Between Negro Work and Regroupment

The argument that there was no practical possibility of doing these things due to the pressure of our Anti-Stalinist work just doesn't hold water. For if comrades claim that the past period witnessed a branch busily engaged in work in the Stalinist milieu, or around the "half-way houses," they should specify some of these activities, for we at least are not aware of the entire branch being engaged in such all-engulfing activity.

Of course, a considerable amount of activity took place in the Stalinist milieu, and it is unfortunate that there could not have been more. However, there was not nearly the kind of furious activity that would preclude the implementation of the four recommendations projected by the conference for work among the minority peoples.

There are comrades who perhaps felt that a follow-through in the direction of the minority organizations would tend to disorient the ranks, that it would lead them away from the necessary task of taking advantage of the ferment on the left. However, some sincere but confused charges hurled at the minority during the branch discussion on the election campaign reveal the emptiness of such concern.

Several times during the discussion comrades identifying themselves with the majority stated the following: "Some people just don't understand the regroupment orientation. To counterpose regroupment to work in the mass movement is wrong." Pointing to activities in other branches, they conclude, "the results there indicate that the best regroupment work is being carried on in the mass movement!!"

Can there really be any doubt about the position of the minority on this question? Let us then make very clear once again that our primary thesis in this discussion is this very point -- work in the mass movement is the best way of doing regroupment work. We are for intervention in the mass movement not only because it is the basic orientation of the party but because it is the most productive method for implementing the regroupment line of the party.

Regroupment and Our Experiences in the NAACP

Now, what are the facts regarding our experiences in the NAACP as they bear upon the present discussion. The most consistent work has revolved around our activities in the Education and Labor Committees. (A separate report on the Educational Committee will be submitted.)

In the Labor Committee a close personal and political relationship has been developed over the past two or three years with a relatively small number of Negroes who are to varying degrees conscious radicals. There is a larger circle with whom we have established to a lesser extent such a relationship. Finally, there is a still broader circle in the branch at large, among whom we have become accepted as active and consistent supporters of the Negro struggle.

With this first group we have established a working agreement to cooperate in a long-range attempt to transform this organization into one that expresses the needs, interests and methods of struggle of the working class. This agreement has been realized in life. To illustrate, let us refer again to the present discussion in the branch

Fred related to the branch a recent experience with a group of Negro and Puerto Rican workers. One of these workers had confronted him while he was gathering signatures with a put-up or shut-up proposition. She said, "If you're a socialist, you will help us fight against our sweat-shop conditions." Fred reported that we "probed" the situation, anxious for an opportunity to intervene in the mass movement. He concluded that although the "heat" was not there, it was correct to "probe" and continue "probing" until the objective situation ripens. While Fred's factual account is correct, it may inadvertently leave the impression that we can lead the workers from the outside.

Certainly it is not realistic to pressure comrades into seeking jobs in a laundry for 90¢ an hour. Nevertheless, there is an element in the picture that Fred did not have time to report. Although we did not have comrades working in the laundry, the party did have one important advantage. Two of our political contacts from the NAACP were actively cooperating with us in this action, providing a link to these laundry workers.

Incidentally, while the situation has not ripened sufficiently for these workers to be impelled on to the road of all-out struggle, they continue to maintain contact with us. They report new developments and discuss their problems with Fred and one of our friends from the NAACP.

But should nothing further come of this, we have already gained. As one of our political friends was quick to point out -- "The shop

situation had not materialized, but it had nevertheless given us an opportunity to work closely with members of the SWP and enabled us to discover first hand that you knew your way in a trade-union situation and were not abstract theoreticians, sectarians or disrupters. This," he summed up, "is real regroupment."

The extent of the relationship established with our friends is also on a level other than that described above. These are political people who are convinced that the different tendencies in the working class must confront each other, must discuss their differences, must begin, wherever possible, an active collaboration where practical agreement can be reached. To this end, these friends have taken the initiative to arrange meetings and socials where such confrontation has taken place.

It is significant to note that on the several occasions that our comrades have met these CP, ex-CP, and CP turned Cochranite individuals, we were by and large unable to reach them due to their cool and aloof attitude. However, the key to at least some of these people is through our conduct with our friends and our conduct in the mass movement.

To illustrate this point, one of these people said, "We can talk to you in a way we can't talk to the others (the CP milieu) because you have demonstrated by your activity in the NAACP that you are serious people who get off your backs and do work." In this connection our active participation in "March on Washington" served to distinguish us from all the other political tendencies. To put it in a nutshell, we behaved like a workers' party while the other tendencies did not.

A charge was made in the exec by Comrade Bert that the minority had displayed a "get rich quick" predisposition, which he feels motivates our approach to the mass movement. The evidence quite lucidly indicates the baselessness of this assertion. On the contrary, the predisposition of the minority, as examination of the facts will prove, is to proceed step by step, in line with the hard-won experience of the revolutionary socialist movement. We must build a firm foundation in the pores of our class, and in their organs for struggle.

Election Campaign

In our 1957 election campaign we scored an important political breakthrough. The support that we received from Hallinan, the endorsement of the National Guardian, the 14,000 votes, are all significant political achievements. As a result, we have unquestionably become -- in the eyes of both the workers that we reached and various left tendencies -- the socialist party in New York. We are recognized as the leading spokesman for independent political action by the workers and minority people. But the very success of our campaign poses problems. How can we go forward on the basis of the gains that we have made?

Organizational Weaknesses of Campaign

To answer this question, we must make an honest political and organizational evaluation of our campaign. The majority campaign

reports emphasized the successful aspects of the campaign but glossed over political contradictions and organizational weaknesses which became evident in the course of our work. This kind of report is a disservice to the local because it fails to educate the comrades and gives no guidance for future activity.

A review of some of the organizational difficulties we encountered will set the record straight and give a factual background for an analysis of the political problems from which these organizational questions flow.

In general, our greatest organizational difficulty in this campaign was to obtain the full participation of the branch. There was evidence of indifference and apathy to the work of the campaign. To be specific:

1. The petition campaign, usually completed before Labor Day even when we have up-state work, dragged on until the middle of September. On the final day before filing the petitions, we were working under pressure to complete them. This delay was caused not only by a late start, but by the fact that ten or eleven comrades obtained most of the signatures.

2. Because of the delay in completing our petitions, we did not set up a working campaign committee until mid-September. We then discovered that we did not have a Publicity Director. The comrade designated by the National Office to help the New York Local with this work was on a month's leave of absence and no one had been assigned to take his place. Our failure to prepare a printed platform was in turn due to the delay in setting up a committee and assigning someone to work on publicity. By the time we had discussed content and layout, our printshop was too busy to turn out the platforms in time for use in the campaign.

3. We only held one street meeting. (Rain interfered with another meeting that was planned. A third meeting had to be cancelled because we did not get a permit in time.) Although ten comrades volunteered for each of these meetings, five showed up and one comrade did most of the practical work involved.

4. Attendance of our comrades at the campaign rallies held at 116 was very poor. Many friends and sympathizers came to these rallies, and came on time, while the few members who attended frequently came very late. Fourteen comrades attended the final rally at which two of our candidates, Alvin and Murry, spoke.

5. We originally proposed integrating the 50¢ sub drive with the contact work carried on during the campaign. We actually did no contact work and no sub work either.

At our branch conference last December at which Joyce Cowley was nominated for mayor, we proposed an all-out campaign which would be a model for the rest of the country. The facts testify that it wound up as a token campaign, from the point of view of our participation as an organization and the activity of the comrades. No constructive purpose is served by ignoring these facts and pretending that it was actually an all-out campaign as originally proposed at the conference.

Political Objectives of the Campaign

Many of these organizational problems arose because of our political confusion regarding the campaign. What were our political objectives? Have these objectives been realized?

Two decisions reached by the executive committee and approved by the branch last May made it clear that we were planning to conduct a "regroupment campaign," i.e., a campaign primarily directed toward various tendencies on the left.

1. The committee proposed that the slogan for a referendum on H-bomb tests be the axis of the campaign. The Communist Party was stressing this issue and the referendum slogan was designed to differentiate our war position from theirs.

2. Comrade Dick withdrew as a candidate. The motivation given was that very little was happening in the Puerto Rican community (how did we reach this conclusion?) and that he could not be spared in the office.

The organizer's report states that our projected objectives were achieved. The minority of the executive committee disagreed with this evaluation and thought, on the contrary, that the type of campaign proposed and the H-bomb axis proved unrealistic. Our campaign did not center around the H-bomb but around issues agitating the working class of New York City: the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs bill to ban discrimination in housing, the school desegregation fight, low-cost public housing, labor racketeering, juvenile delinquency. These issues, which underlined the need for an independent labor party, became the main issues on which we campaigned. Our actual campaign was quite different from the one proposed in May and there was, consequently, a contradiction between the activity of the candidates and the type of activity to which the comrades were geared.

In his campaign report the organizer states that we participate in election campaigns because:

1. In order to win leadership of the American working class we put ourselves forward as a party, and American workers think of parties as organizations that run in elections, and

2. Election campaigns allow us to inject the issues that we consider important into a campaign.

Transitional Program Our Bridge to Socialist Program

On this point the minority of the executive committee sharply disagrees. We do not inject issues into the campaign -- that is what we tried unsuccessfully to do with the H-bomb slogan. We intervene on issues which the working class considers important. There is a significant difference between injecting issues and intervention into the working-class struggle.

To inject issues means to arbitrarily decide what we consider important and to disregard the level of consciousness of the working class. To intervene means to take the issues as we find them in the

working-class community and use them as a lever to raise the consciousness of the workers. We used these issues to prove the necessity for a labor party. They were a bridge to the presentation of our program for independent political action and for posing the socialist alternative to a capitalist society which is responsible for the evils of segregation, slum housing, sweatshop wages and delinquency.

In discussing the situation in New York at the time we entered the 1957 campaign, the organizer discussed at length all radical tendencies and their attitude toward the elections -- the Communist Party, Koppersmith, Greenberg, Zaslow, the Cochranites, the Shachtmanites, etc. But wasn't anything else happening in New York? There was nothing in the report about the problems affecting the New York working class -- housing, labor racketeering, segregation -- the issues on which we campaigned. The report states that our first aim was to reach the workers, but there was no indication of how we proposed to do this.

Contrast to 1956 Campaign

At our branch conference last year Comrade Carolyn, who gave the election campaign report, stated that our campaign was successful because we caught the ear of and got good response from leftward-moving workers. Her report did not indicate that we considered the support of McAvoy and Hallinan the most important factor in the 1956 campaign. In 1956 we consciously directed much of our campaign activity toward the working class, for example in door-to-door work in the projects, consistent work in Negro churches, etc. The fact that we also had a far greater participation by the branch in our campaign activity may be related to the kind of activity we engaged in. Last year our petition work, including upstate work, was completed before Labor Day and we conducted a more active campaign after we were knocked off the ballot than we did this year after we were certified for the ballot. The fact that our candidates were able to speak at fewer meetings this year is partly explained by the apathy in New York toward the contest between Christenberry and Wagner. But this does not explain the difference in the attitude of the comrades. Why, this year, a year in which we made a major political breakthrough in which we successfully attracted many non-members to our meetings, and received a very encouraging vote, did fewer comrades participate than in previous campaigns?

Some light would have been thrown on this problem if the campaign reports had included an analysis of our participation as an organization, a discussion of the contacts that we made, and if some perspective had been offered as to how we can best proceed on the basis of the gains that we have made.

The attitude of the comrades toward campaign work was a reflection of their isolation from mass organizations. The campaign did not flow organically from the work they had been doing through the past year. Isolation from mass organizations is not a new phenomenon in the New York Local but the situation is worse today than it was a year ago. The majority of the branch members have not been involved in regroupment work. Regroupment, particularly in New York, has meant a great deal of discussion at the top, and a small number of comrades

directly engaged in consistent work (at the Jefferson School, East Side Guardian Club, Sobell Committee, etc.). Most of the comrades did not see exactly where they fit into this nor were they directed to organizations such as the NAACP, PTA's or Parents in Action which offered an effective arena for regroupment and an opportunity to convince CPers (who do participate in such organizations) that we are not sectarian -- not by repeatedly saying we are not, but by our actions. No one, of course, was told he should not do this type of work, but there was a minimum of encouragement and guidance.

In past campaigns our candidates, in the main, have been able to speak before organizations where we had people working, and hence the campaign was directly related to their year-round work and follow-up contact work was also possible. (Swooping down on organizations once a year during elections doesn't make a very favorable impression. This applies, for example, to our work among the Negro people during the elections which was not related to consistent work in the Negro community. This makes us look, in this respect, like other parties who court the Negroes at election time and ignore them the rest of the year.) This year, again, it was the comrades still active in mass organizations who made the greatest contribution to our campaign. Campaign work is not, of course, the only reason for being in mass organizations. This is still the basic orientation of the party.

Hallinan

The majority campaign reports gave an unfortunate impression that Hallinan had saved the day. While the political significance of his support and the Guardian endorsement should not be minimized, some of the comrades had a rather subjective attitude toward Hallinan and were overly impressed by the favor he did us in supporting our candidates. It is more accurate, politically, to state the matter in opposite terms -- we did him a favor. By running candidates we provided a concrete example of the independent political action which he advocated, as well as a platform from which to present his ideas.

Before Hallinan endorsed our candidates, there was obvious discouragement about the campaign. Leading comrades questioned the value of participating in campaigns in the future. But his support, followed by that of the Guardian, gave these comrades a shot in the arm. This emphasis on Hallinan and the Guardian creates the feeling that our main work in the campaign was regroupment, but we overlook the fact that we did not win their support because of our original political object -- i.e., to conduct a campaign directed primarily toward left tendencies and the CP. We did not conduct this type of campaign, but a campaign aimed at the New York working class and the Negro and Puerto Rican communities. Our campaign intervened directly into the working class political arena. It was this intervention, the fact that we were functioning as a party and not a propaganda group, that we were not, in other words, conducting a "regroupment" campaign aimed at the radical milieu, that won the support of Hallinan and the National Guardian.

Consequently we did make a significant gain in regroupment, which demonstrates that direct mass intervention can be effective in

regroupment work. However, we achieved this in spite of the fact that organizationally we conducted only a token campaign. We achieved it because we actually changed the character of our campaign in midstream, although never formally agreeing to do so. (There is no reason why we should not make such a change in policy if we see that we are not correctly oriented. But it is important to admit that a change was made and analyze the reasons for it.) But due to lack of policy toward external party activity, we are not in a position to realize the potential for party growth offered by the campaign. We have no bridge from the campaign to the day-to-day work of the local.

Next Year's Campaign

It is essential that we make a correct analysis of this year's work in order to prepare for the gubernatorial campaign next year. We cannot base ourselves on endorsements from other organizations or prominent individuals. Suppose, this year, that Hallinan's support had not come through, suppose we did not get the endorsement of the Guardian, would we have had a successful campaign? Next year, can we take the organizational risk of a campaign based on the intensive activity of the candidates and about a dozen comrades, while most of the branch members do not participate? The party will experience real growth and our regroupment intervention will be really productive only through a campaign based on the year-round organizational activity of the comrades -- their activity in outside organizations and community work -- which will put us in a position at the conclusion of the campaign to build the party by a continuation of our regular branch work.

The New York Local and the "Scissors"

For the past year and a half, our branch has been experiencing a peculiar sort of scissors. On the one hand, our periphery has steadily, though not dramatically, broadened. More and more non-members have come to our public functions, up to and through the election campaign, while the participation of the comrades tended to decrease. A lack of enthusiasm is reported by many comrades to many of the party's activities. Dick states that he has great difficulty in getting comrades to carry out the most elementary, necessary tasks of the party. This problem of the "scissors" was most dramatically expressed by the results of the election campaign. We were given over 14,000 votes following an election campaign in which we had the narrowest participation of the comrades of any New York campaign of the SWP.

How can we explain the deepening apathy of the comrades at a time when there is a significantly improved response to the ideas and activities of the party? Pressures from the social climate, personal problems and a high proportion of comrades busy with National Office work are, of course, weighty factors. But these problems, to one degree or another, have always been present in New York. We have to weigh the extent and the causes for the intensification of this problem at the present time. It is true, as some comrades put it, that there is no "magic formula" for the solution of this problem but that does not mean that we should ignore its existence.

Isolation from the Mass Movement and the
Nature of our Regroupment Activity

We believe that two decisive general factors emerge in evaluating our local's activities in the recent year.

1. Our links with the mass movement have reached a critically low level. The number of comrades active in the mass movement as well as the political attention paid to their problems has come close to the vanishing point. Comrades doing mass work point out, with justification, that the party shows little interest in their problems and experiences.

2. The nature of our activities in the Stalinist milieu has not offered an arena for productive participation of the bulk of the branch on a sustained basis. Too often, the participation of most comrades was limited to waiting for leading comrades to give reports on the American Forum and other general developments.

The evaporation of the Jefferson School, West Side Club, the East Side Guardian Club and the general "freezing" of the situation within the Communist Party took place in the context of considerable expectations and effort on the part of the comrades. It would be surprising if comrades did not feel considerable disappointment over the lack of more dramatic concrete gains out of this work than we have achieved.

These two general factors caused a lop-sided situation in the life of the local which was further aggravated by large, unwieldy branch meetings. Discussion on our regroupment activities has too often been confined to leading comrades discussing developments in which most comrades did not and could not play a direct role. The size of the branch meetings has made it virtually impossible for the greater part of the branch to even engage in discussion of many of these developments in this sphere of work.

Those few comrades who were doing persistent work in unions, Negro, parent and other organizations could find no vehicle for expression. While these comrades justifiably felt neglected at times far more important, the branch as a whole was being deprived of a rich source of education and inspiration. However, it must be noted that the comrades engaged in mass work have displayed great enthusiasm and initiative in the general activities of the party.

But comrades who are handed their dues and pledge obligations as they walk in through the door at the branch meeting, and then sit and listen to a discussion which is not related to their activity, cannot be expected to show any great enthusiasm when they receive a phone call asking them to sell Militants, do petition work or do clerical work.

The leadership must provide every comrade with a productive avenue of self-expression, one that leads to activities outside the walls of 116 University Place. A healthy internal party life can only flow from a thriving external existence. We must develop a clear and precise approach towards participation in the unions,

minority, parent and other organizations. We should evaluate our present periphery with a view towards consolidating it and bringing recruits into the party.

Not only mass work, but work in the radical milieu, must be realistically appraised so that the comrades have a clear picture of the limits and difficulties, as well as the opportunities, presented by this work. We must be much more specific on what we mean by "regroupment" activity. Unless this sphere of activity is carefully outlined, confusion and disappointment will result that will seriously hinder the persistent and patient work that is vitally necessary among opponent organizations.

Regroupment in Its Proper Context

In reviewing this past year in New York, the developing regroupment process is the predominant factor. Out of this process we have taken a long step toward becoming the party of revolutionary socialism in New York. The crucial thing is to understand how we got there and what to do about it.

The general regroupment process is as old as the struggle for socialism. What is new is that this process has taken a qualitative leap forward since the Twentieth Congress. The National Guardian, Hallinan and many others have dramatically, at least insofar as independent working-class election campaigns are concerned, broken from Stalinism to extend support for our election campaign. Tens of thousands of workers, who scorned and slandered us yesterday, are today turning their ear to us in a friendly, fraternal spirit. The fact that the shrinking Stalinist milieu offers a limited arena for activity for branch work is certainly no reason for pessimism about our possibilities for intervention in the regroupment process.

The fact that public functions in and around the CP are so limited, merely means that the thousands of socialists with "open minds" are to be found elsewhere. We are convinced that the best of them are to be found in the unions, Negro organizations, parent and other organizations. Further, our experience has indicated to us that the best way to attract and hold them is by persistent independent political activities within the limits of our forces and opportunities.

The radical workers of New York who are turning to us do so not only because our theoretical ideas have been more persuasive than Cochran, Bartell or the Monthly Review, but primarily because these workers see in us a party and not a propaganda group, a party that advocates and leads the way to independent working-class action. The 14,000 votes that we received shed light on our path to the future.

We must show these 14,000 workers, and many other thousands that will observe us, that our program of independent working-class action is not limited to election campaigns. We must make our main effort, in the coming year, to reach these thousands. We must be in the organizations in which they are active, we must intervene in the day-to-day struggles that they are concerned with. This is our great

obligation and this will be the acid test of whether we are really prepared to intervene in the regroupment process.

Our great handicap, at present, in this inexorable historic process is not any weakness of our polemics or inadequate coverage of Stalinist meetings, but our isolation from the mass movement. We repeat, to the degree that we break out of this isolation, to that extent will we fulfill our historic role in the great regroupment of socialist forces that is now taking place.

December 15, 1957

Alvin Berman
Joyce Cowley
Nat Weinstein
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HUMANISM FOR US

By M. Bernz

The fall issue of the International Socialist Review presented a picture of humanism as Dr. Corliss Lamont, evidently, professes it. It is necessary, at times, to approach some item of bourgeois ideology in such a vein. But for ourselves, internally, a few additional observations have to be made.

"Mankind is mankind's primary preoccupation": this, it seems, is humanism's cardinal principle. Its attraction at a time when the H-bomb hangs over all mankind is not difficult to understand. But in what sense can a Marxist accept it?

Points of agreement between Marxists and humanists, we find, are neither absent nor few. They have to be; both live, after all, in the same universe. Moreover, these points of agreement can be counted on to stand stoutly in their places -- until one impolite interloper, the class struggle, makes his entry; and then, with no avoidable delay, they suddenly scatter to the four winds.

Professor Burnham, an old friend of ours, is probably still a materialist of sorts, a believer in naturalism as against supernaturalism, in evidence and logic as against revelation and faith -- at least for himself. But when World War II loomed, and with it, the need for maintaining a class line on the Soviet Union, all Burnham's humanistic points of agreement scattered to the four winds. He reverted to type; he became, again, the bourgeois professor. More, with a certain penance due the class he had philandered away from, he subsequently became -- in Joe Hansen's happy phrase, "Wall Street's drummer-boy." Nor was that penance enough: when last heard of, he was a McCarthyite.

Burnham did not accept certain tenets of Marxism when they served the working class, when he condescended to briefly vouchsafe it his intellect. But he swiftly applied them to serve the class beneath whom he cringed.

And here we can return to the cardinal tenet of humanism, and to an examination of its real meaning. For in philosophy, as in politics, as elsewhere, words do not mean what they say, nor do they often mean what they mean. Their meaning has to be rooted out of a succession of dictionaries which are themselves rooted neither in words, nor in illustrating pictures, but in the gross realities of class interest -- as the individual interest feels, becomes conscious, and gives expression to them.

Let us get a few points out of the way; let us see what humanism, presumably, does not mean.

It does not accept God and Heaven as any serious concern of mankind. Also, it believes that the working class, and hence the proletarian revolution, and hence socialism, are not mankind's primary concern, either.

Perhaps the humanist will demur at this point. Socialism, he might claim, is by no means precluded by humanism. In fact, some humanists are quite partial to it.

To this we can only answer: we have heard this before; this is utopian, pie-in-the-sky socialism; this road leads not to the barricade, but into the concentration camp; and beneath and beyond all that, lurks God and His Heaven again.

For ourselves: let us remember that every generation of Marxists, when it had grown old, or tired, or soft, has found itself toying with some such siren piece. Right now, here in these United States, where the working class is not on the march, the bourgeoisie is not in retreat, and where the social base for humanism takes its cue accordingly, humanism cannot point toward Marxism.

Feuerbach, as Engels and Plekhanov present him, was probably the last humanist who did point that way. And in this, he, historically, signified the same thing in philosophy as Ricardo did in economics. Post-Marxian humanism, like its counterpart in bourgeois political economy, had to turn vulgar; it had to designedly seek to undermine and displace Marxism.

We can conclude with a few observations on the epistemology of humanism.

Descartes, in his "cogito ergo sum," gave clear expression to an organic bourgeois tendency to base all knowledge upon the subject, and upon the subject alone. With this, it fell to idealism to elaborate the most imposing and comprehensive structures of bourgeois thought. Hobbes, it is true, was a kind of rough-and-ready materialist. But he, with Descartes, came when the historic bourgeois consciousness was as yet in its formative stage, still grappling with feudalism and with nature, and when the decisive turn toward idealism could not as yet be made. Afterward, however, along two major lines -- from Locke to Hume, from Kant to Hegel, this organic tendency did consummate itself.

Without belaboring this point, it is here necessary to repeat that the materialism of Hobbes, or the semi-materialism of Descartes, or later, of Locke and then Kant, arose out of the struggle with feudalism on one hand, the revolutionizing of the forces of production on the other; and this compelled a certain acceptance of the object subsequently suppressed in idealism because of the social relations which arose with the victory of capitalism. These relations, wherein men and classes confronted one another primarily as buyers-sellers, integrated and atomized human society in a manner hitherto unknown. With such a social framework pressing upon and isolating it from every side, the individual consciousness, with its consequent enforced preoccupation with its own sweet self, had to tend toward the idealist-monistic at best, or toward the solipsistic, and from there to such unhappy states as reside in mental institutions.

The humanist principle, that "mankind's primary preoccupation is mankind# means, consequently, that "a man's first preoccupation is himself," and -- the hell with everybody else. Thus couched, a little unmetaphysically, this first principle begins to ring a more plausible if less edifying bell. This kind of preoccupation with "mankind," as a mounting stockpile of H-bombs stimulates it, simply expresses a bourgeois outlook which, for the first time in its life,

finds itself staring up the wrong end of a bomb-sight. Since bourgeois salvation, no less than bourgeois extinction, dangles at the other end of that same bomb-sight, there is no reason why the proletariat should here squat alongside the bourgeoisie.

This capitalist contradiction, always latent, now fully matured, is perfectly expressed by the circularism of "mankind's primary preoccupation is mankind," by its tautological atomism. It is idealistic at its very roots; it suppresses the object. Translating its rarified thought into political action, it would begin by denying the class struggle, and end by suppressing the working class.

In connection with humanism's primary principle, taken either from its circular or its atomistic aspect, Marx effected its demolition long ago. In his Theses on Feuerbach, he made it clear that mankind could not change mankind, that -- with the dialectical-materialist re-relating of subject to object, mankind could not even contemplate mankind, or anything else -- and would consequently be wasting its time in self-preoccupation.

Historically, mankind has been able to affect itself only by re-shaping the material forces which affect mankind. This is not a circular process, but an uneven cyclical process, a dialectical process. It moves real iron with real flesh-and-bone hands, real hands with real iron; and hence it shares with the notion orbiting inside the humanist skull precisely that reality any solid object shares with a shadow. With this, of course, there has to be a certain agreement between humanism's and Marxism's views of man's relation to nature. But all this ends where the relations between men and men are concerned. And since men's views on everything, including nature, are determined by just these relations, the points of agreement between Marxism and humanism, however numerous, are inconsequential: the differences are all-important.

Finally: Marxism does not see the working class as an object of suppression, as bourgeois idealist thought and the bourgeois state, each in its own way, finds necessary. To Marxism, the historic working class stands as subject to humanism's "mankind" as object, and its Leninist vanguard stands as subject to the working class itself as object.

November 26, 1958.