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from the desk of
FRANK G. MANNING

June 19, 1973

Dear Comrade Barnes:

Enclosed is a letter sent to Doug Jenness in regard to an incident that took place in Brooklyn within the context of pre-convention discussion.

Comradely,
s/Frank Manning

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June 19, 1970

Doug Jenness
S.W.P. City Office
706 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10003

Dear Comrade Jenness:

I tried reaching you on the telephone earlier today, but you were in a meeting. Therefore, I am writing this letter to call your attention to an incident that occurred in the Brooklyn branch last evening that was a culmination of the incredible factional situation being shipped up in that branch.

Due to the death of my grandmother late last week, I was in Brooklyn all weekend and planned to return to Freeport Monday night, after the funeral services. Since Hedda Garza was also going to be in Brooklyn Monday night to present her summary on the Latin American discussion there, she offered to give me a ride home. Therefore, I went over to the Brooklyn hall both to get my ride and also to listen to and evaluate the summaries (I had given my summary Sunday night in the Upper West Side).

When I arrived at the hall, Joe Henry, the branch organizer, confronted me immediately, demanding to know why I had come there. I explained my presence as per the previous paragraph and he then told me that comrades from other branches just could not "float around" and listen to discussions in other branches and that I had to leave. Since I had never heard of such a thing before, I challenged him on it and offered to call up the National Office for clarification. I also suggested that the branch vote on whether or not I could stay, but he brusquely dismissed this by saying that that's not how he did things. At this point, Hedda, Mike Fishman (who had driven the car) and Peter Gellert (on leave from Houston) came in. After Hedda threatened to call you up about Henry's insistence that I leave, he backed off and said that we could stay this time.

First of all, neither I nor Hedda nor anyone else I raised the question with has ever heard of a policy of prohibiting comrades from observing pre-convention discussion in other branches. In fact, people outside the party, i.e., YSAers and members of other sections, have been allowed to attend discussions. In this very same Brooklyn branch, in fact, a comrade from Argentina, who happens to support the Leninist-Trotskyist tendency, was even given speaking rights. Suffice it to say that Comrade Bret Smiley from the League for Socialist Action, who happens to support the International Majority tendency, attended a session in Brooklyn the night before and was not even told that he could take the floor if he wished, thus being deprived of the same right that was afforded the Argentine comrade. He had already been told in the Lower Mann. and Uptown branches that comrades from other sections could not take the floor.

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Secondly, it was reported to me that at the Brooklyn business meeting held immediately after last evening's discussion, comrades raised the charge that certain comrades were "floating around" to provide "cheering sections" for reporters from the Internationalist Tendency. This charge is patently absurd. I was in Brooklyn for the reasons described above; Mike Fishman drove Hedda in; and Peter Gellert was a visitor from another branch out of town. None of these reasons are irregular or factional and I can only assume that this whole incident was created for factional gain on the part of the Brooklyn supporters of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency. This incident occurred within the context of the unbelievably factional discussion that took place in Brooklyn last Tuesday and last night. I even commented in my summary in the Upper West Side that the discussion uptown was exemplary and completely devoid of the vituperative personal attacks on "Germain and Hedda," and the distortions of Hedda's initial presentation in Brooklyn. Henry's remarks to Hedda on the upcoming European discussion (which she has already told you about) are yet another indication of the atmosphere being created in Brooklyn. In fact, the atmosphere was so bad that an I/T supporter found it necessary to apologize in private to us for the "bad behavior of his branch."

I hope that by bringing these facts to your attention, we can change the dangerously irrational and factional tone set thus far in Brooklyn and proceed in the future with a clear political discussion of the issues being raised in the current debate.

Comradely,
s/Frank Manning

Copies to:

Jack Barnes, National Secretary
Joe Henry, Brooklyn Organizer
Bill Massey, IT National Coordinator
Ernest Mandel, for the United Secretariat

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New York City
Socialist Workers Party
706 Broadway
N.Y., N.Y. 10003
June 23, 1973

Frank Manning

Dear Comrade Manning:

In your letter of June 19 you charge comrades in the Brooklyn branch with whipping up a factional atmosphere. To back up this charge you cite several incidents involving visitors attending SWP branch meetings.

I would first like to review the party's policy in respect to visitors attending branch meetings.

The only persons who have a right to attend SWP branch meetings are members of the branch. All others, including SWP members from other branches, non-party YSA members, Trotskyists from other countries, etc., are visitors whose attendance at branch meetings is a decision that must be approved by the branch membership. Whether or not visitors are allowed to speak is also up to the branch. This includes members of tendencies or factions from another branch who are invited to present reports on their positions during the preconvention discussion period. In other words, attendance at branch meetings by any non-branch member is a courtesy and not a right.

The two New York branches where there are no declared members of the Internationalist Tendency -- Brooklyn and Upper West Side -- have invited the Internationalist Tendency to send a reporter to their branches to present the Tendency's views on the disputed questions. They have extended the courtesy of offering these reporters equal time with the reporters who support the line of the Political Committee. This has been done to help clarify the political differences and provide for the richest possible discussion.

It has often been the practice of party branches to invite, as a courtesy, non-party YSAers to attend branch educationals and sessions of the verbal preconvention discussion. It has also been true that branches often invite visiting cothinkers to sit in on branch meetings. Party members visiting a city where there is a branch often ask if they can observe a meeting. They are usually extended this courtesy.

In New York City, however, the Local and branches have strongly discouraged members of one New York branch from attending meetings of another branch in the city. Part of the responsibility of branch members is to attend their own branch meetings and participate in the life of their own branch.

Furthermore, in New York this is important in order to help regularize the functioning of the branches and the Local. This is not a new policy. To the contrary it has been the general approach since the New York branch was divided about two years ago. This policy applies to all members in both the preconvention discussion periods and non-preconvention discussion periods.

Both you and Mike Fishman are members of the Lower Manhattan branch which was meeting on the night that you showed up at the

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Brooklyn branch meeting. Neither of you had excused absences from the Lower Manhattan meeting. Therefore you have no grounds to charge the Brooklyn branch with factionalism because the Brooklyn organizer questioned why you were at the Brooklyn meeting. In fact both you and Comrade Fishman were out of order.

Concerning the two foreign visitors that were in New York City when the New York branches were discussing Latin America. One was an individual member of the Canadian party who supports the Maitan-Mandel-Frank tendency. By his own admission he could not speak for that tendency and was in the country as an individual. As is our custom with individual visitors from other countries, the three New York branches granted him the courtesy of sitting in at meetings. He did not ask any of the branch organizers if he could speak during the discussion. Since the question never came up he was never told that he could not speak during the discussion.

The other visitor had a different status. She is a leader of the Argentine JSA and PST, one of the largest parties in the world movement adhering to the Fourth International. It is our practice to treat representatives of other parties in the world movement with the comradely respect they deserve. That she was granted to give brief greetings and a short report from Argentina to the Brooklyn branch is entirely in keeping with our internationalist traditions. It is unfortunate that each branch in New York was unable to make time available during her brief stay for a much more complete report from this comrade. Other branches in the SWP have invited her to visit and have scheduled special meetings for a report on Argentina with time for questions and discussion included. Leading SWP comrades who have visited Argentina have received the same sort of comradely and hospitable treatment from the PST. This is a practice we intend to maintain and one we hope to be able to observe whenever a leading member of another party of the world Trotskyist movement is visiting this country.

The incidents you cite and the facts about them that I have outlined seem to me to be less than an adequate foundation for your charge that they constitute "a culmination of the incredible factional situation being whipped up in the Brooklyn branch."

I can speak for both the Local and branch leaderships in assuring you that we want to have a thorough and democratic discussion.

Comradely,
s/Doug Jenness

cc: Ken Shilman
Joe Henry
Debbie Notkin
SWP national office