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14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014

July 30, 1971

OAKLAND-BERKELEY

Bill Massey

Dear Comrade Massey,

The Political Committee at its meeting today, considered your letter of July 25 on behalf of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency and the July 26 document "A Serious Tendency Which Has Acted Seriously Deserves to be Treated in a Serious Manner and Receive Adequate Time to Present Its Views to the Highest Body of the Party." This letter is in reply to several of the points raised in those two documents.

You ask the Political Committee to guarantee that the reporter for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency under the point on the Political Resolution at the convention receive at least one hour for the presentation of your position. The Political Committee can not make such a guarantee.

The Political Committee only makes a recommendation to the pre-convention plenum of the National Committee, which meets shortly before the convention, concerning the time to be allotted to various reporters under the different points on the agenda. The National Committee then considers this recommendation, making any modifications it desires, and submits its own recommendation to the convention. The delegates to the convention make the final decision on the question of the apportionment of time to different reporters, as they do on all questions before the convention.

Thus, the Political Committee cannot guarantee what you ask of it. Consequently, according to your instructions, your letter and document are being placed in the Discussion Bulletin, together with this reply. In your letter, speaking for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, you refer to the correspondence between the leaders of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency and the national office prior to the convention. We are printing, in an appendix, that correspondence for the information of the party.

The tradition of our party is that when there is a political division, the amount of time allotted for the reporter of a minority position compared to the time allotted to the majority reporter is not strictly proportional to the strength of the minorities as opposed to the majority. In order to provide an opportunity for minorities to present their views, more time is generally given minority reporters than would be the case on a strictly proportional basis. When the convention delegates have deemed it appropriate, equal time has been granted to minority reporters. In some instances, such reporters have been given less than equal time by the convention delegates, when this was in their opinion warranted by the concrete circumstances.

Until a few weeks ago, it appeared there would be only one minority report. However, at that time the supporters of For A Proletarian Orientation split into two groups, the Proletarian Orientation Tendency and the Communist Tendency. The convention may thus be confronted with three counterposed positions: a political resolution backed by a large percentage of delegates and two counter-resolutions each backed by a separate minority grouping of elected delegates.

In the case of more than one minority on a given point, it has been party practice to divide among the reporters for the minorities no more time than that of the majority reporter.

This procedure is indicated for two reasons: 1) If each minority were to receive time equal to the majority reporter, then the majority would receive a minority of the time. When there is a clear majority this would mean that the democratic rights of the majority were being violated.

2) If each minority were to receive time equal to the majority reporter, this would make the ratio of time allotted to reporters compared to that allotted to the elected delegates out of balance. It must not be forgotten that the convention is above all a meeting of the elected delegates, who must have the opportunity to present their positions and fully participate in the discussion before deciding upon all the issues facing the party. There is much more before the party convention than the debate with either the Proletarian Orientation Tendency or the Communist Tendency. The delegates must make decisions under eleven major agenda points.

In your letter and document you allude to the problem which the split in your grouping has placed before the convention, but do not directly name or discuss the Communist Tendency. However when you state that "with the possible exception of seven comrades (in Boston) and one (in Oakland-Berkeley) the votes of the rest of the party membership will be divided between the NC Draft Political Resolution and the counter-resolution put forward by the Proletarian Orientation Tendency," we assume that these eight comrades (by your estimation) you are referring to are in fact the Communist Tendency.

If we understand you correctly, you imply that the Communist Tendency is not serious, and that its reporters should receive no time or perhaps little time, on this basis. You claim that you are serious, in contrast to them. Should the majority of delegates determine how much time should be allotted to your Tendency on the sole basis of how "serious" they think you are? Your notion of "seriousness" cannot be the basis for the division of time among reporters for the two minorities.

One of the arguments you advance for the "seriousness" of your tendency is that it has the support of members of the National Committee and of branch executives, and that it will receive (you predict) the support of a minimum of 90 members. Would you consider a tendency of 40 comrades composed of rank and file members only "not serious" and restrict its time accordingly?

You talk about democracy and the rights of minority views to be heard. You say that if the convention delegates should give your reporter less than an hour this would mean making a "mockery" of party democracy and would constitute a "scandal." This would not give the convention "the chance to hear adequately and fairly all viewpoints" and would prevent the convention from taking "a fair vote," you charge. It would "instill the attitude that allowing a minority (the Proletarian Orientation Tendency) to speak is a mere formality instead of a vital part of party democracy."

But what about time for the reporter for the Communist Tendency? Would you make your decision on the basis of how "serious" the Communist Tendency considered its "real life in the party...as well as its ideas"? What about the democratic rights of another minority than your own?

Perhaps we have misunderstood your argument. Perhaps you are requesting equal time for your reporter and equal time for the Communist Tendency reporter giving the combined minority reporters double the time of the majority reporter. We have already explained that this would be a violation of the democratic rights of the majority and of the delegates as a whole.

You assert that the democracy of the convention hinges upon the single question of how much time your reporter receives. This is absurd. There has been a record number of Discussion Bulletin articles printed for this convention. The Discussion Bulletin was open to every contribution your supporters cared to make. There was full discussion in all the branches, including presentations by reporters for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, wherever you chose to send one. We are sure the convention will grant your reporter appropriate time to present the views of your tendency before the convention, relative to the reporter for the majority and for the Communist Tendency, if it should be represented by delegates to the convention.

It is the responsibility of the delegates to insure that democratic procedures are followed throughout the convention. This includes, but is not limited to, guarding the democratic rights of the Communist Tendency, the democratic rights of the majority, and the democratic rights of the convention delegates as a whole.

Your entire letter reveals a conception of party organization alien to the party's principles of democratic centralism. For example, you say that the concept that "minority views are not as important as what the NC says" is a "prejudice." That is not a "prejudice," it is a fact. The positions of the National Committee, the democratically elected leadership of the party between conventions, are binding party policy until and unless they are altered by the national convention. This does not prevent comrades from giving critical views the attention they deserve.

You make the charge that if the reporter for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency receives less than one hour for his or her presentation, it would "make any pronouncements that we would make to our co-thinkers, seem like empty rhetoric marked 'Made in the U.S. for Shipment Abroad.'" This is a slanderous and false accusation. The convention delegates will make their decision on this question in accordance with the SWP's democratic centralist principles -- principles

which the SWP has always affirmed and defended in relation to our co-thinkers in other countries as well as to its own functioning.

You go so far as to warn the party that if your demand for a minimum of at least one hour reporting time should be rejected by the delegates this "would impair the centralist side of our concepts." You contend this would prevent the party -- after the convention delegates have made their decisions -- from being able to exert its moral influence in its expectation, that every comrade to the person, carry out these decisions in a disciplined manner until the next convention." This is an erroneous assumption on your part.

It will not be clear until the branch votes are taken whether the Communist Tendency will win any delegates or not, nor will it be clear how many delegates the Proletarian Orientation Tendency will get. When this information is available, the Political Committee will make further recommendations to the National Committee plenum.

Comradely,
s/Jack Barnes
for the Political Committee

cc: Barbara Gregorich
Communist Tendency
National Committee