

Oakland, California

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To: Comrade Jack Barnes  
National Organizational Secretary  
Socialist Workers Party  
14 Charles Lane  
New York, New York 10014

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

by Bill Massey for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency

It is the understanding of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, whose interests I represent in this regard, that the spokesperson for our Tendency reporting our views before the SWP Convention to be held in Ohio in August, will receive only thirty-eight minutes (38) to make the presentation of the counter-resolution of our Tendency to the N.C. Draft Political Resolution. This is my opinion gathered in a telephone conversation with a spokesperson for the National Office of the Socialist Workers Party.

Let me first state, that this amount of time, which would be half the time allotted to the spokesperson for the N.C. Draft Political Resolution, is totally inadequate, as is any time less than one hour.

To say that the Party protects the rights of a tendency, that is of organized political differences -- and allows it to present its views to the pre-convention discussion and then to arbitrarily give it half of the time of the reporter for the NC Draft Political Resolution is, in my opinion, a violation of democratic procedure. During the pre-convention discussion and during the convention itself, the Party should bend over backwards in enforcing the democratic aspect of democratic centralism. In this concrete instance, we believe that the Party should give the Proletarian Orientation Tendency equal time (or no less than one hour) with the reporter for the N.C. Draft Political Resolution, to present our views in an adequate manner. As Cannon stated in "Letters From Prison" page 108, "Pre-convention and convention discussion should not be restricted to the policy of the NC; it should not be restricted at all." We feel that limiting the time of our presentation to less than one hour would be a serious restriction.

To give our Tendency less than equal time (or less than one hour) would be wrong for several reasons. (1) it would instill, if not reinforce the prejudice that minority views are not as important as what the NC says, therefore it is precisely permissible to give them, in this case the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, "half time," (which is obviously not the same as "equal time") to present our views. (2) this in turn 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. (3) it might leave many comrades with the impression that the Convention, which is the highest body of the Party, did not get a chance to hear adequately and fairly all

viewpoints and thus did not get a chance to take a fair vote. In this regard it is well to keep in mind that what the Proletarian Orientation Tendency is asking for in this regard is a matter of twenty-two minutes (which would give our reporter one hour presentation time) or more adequately thirty-eight minutes (which would equal one hour and fifteen minutes or the same time that we understand the reporter for the NC Draft Political Resolution feels is needed to make an adequate presentation.)

Cannon in "Letters from Prison" also stated:

...I am not of the opinion "that every discussion disturbs the Party." That is a slanderous echo of the petty-bourgeois opposition. To be sure, I am not very much in favor of kibitzing which leads to nothing but more of the same and drives serious workers away, and I am not very much in favor of pampering chronic kickers and windbags. But I am strongly in favor of full discussion which leads to a decision by the party whenever different viewpoints are presented in the proper season. The pre-convention period is the season. (page 108).

It is our opinion that it is the responsibility of the PC to assure a thorough political discussion prior to the convention discussion. This would naturally include the presentation of the resolution of the NC and the counter resolution of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency. When the PC arbitrarily gives the Proletarian Orientation Tendency half the time it gives the NC Draft reporter, it is not assuring a thorough political discussion prior to the vote and is, in fact, implying that for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, the presentation is not very important.

Let me state that we don't look upon this issue as a simply abstract one. Our tendency has conducted itself with regard to the Party in a serious manner and has fulfilled its responsibilities to the Party to the best of its abilities. There is concrete evidence of this, we think you will agree, in the following:

1. We notified the Party leadership of our intentions to submit our differences prior to the opening of the pre-convention discussion. In fact we notified the leadership, early enough for you, Comrade Barnes, to note that we had differences, in your report to the NC Plenum in mid-March of 1971 -- some five months ago.

2. We put our ideas at the disposal of all the comrades of the Party at the very opening of the pre-convention discussion; we presented our criticisms of the NC Draft Political Resolution at a relatively early date in the discussion, for all comrades to see and take note; we fully spelled out what our orientation would mean in all areas of the Party's work, at a time that allowed for a full discussion in all the branches and in the pre-convention discussion bulletins. This we felt was how a serious tendency should act toward the Party.

3. Spokespersons for the Proletarian Orientation Tendency presented its views to most every Party branch in the country. This included: the three branches in New York City; Boston; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; Cleveland; Detroit; Chicago, Minneapolis; Seattle; Portland; San Francisco; Oakland-Berkeley; Austin; Los Angeles; and Houston. Only two Party

branches were omitted, and this was due to the expense and time of travel. We fulfilled this responsibility not only to get our ideas out to the most comrades possible, but to provide the Party as a whole with a clear differentiation of the opposing views reflected in the NC Draft Political Resolution and the Proletarian Orientation Tendency. This we feel contributed to the seriousness with which comrades should treat the pre-convention discussions in our Party.

4. The majority of the material published in the pre-convention discussion bulletins has been devoted to the differences between the NC Draft Political Resolution and the Proletarian Orientation Tendency. This reflects not only how comrades look at the main questions before the Convention but it reflects what are the main questions before the convention. This is not strange, since the Majority and the Proletarian Orientation Tendency are the only alternatives put forward in a serious manner for the consideration of the Party members. It is quite logical and just that the Convention agenda -- with relation to the time allotted for the presentation of these differences -- should reflect this concrete reality. To do less, would encourage an unserious attitude toward the Party and the pre-convention discussion. It would also be an injustice to our Tendency which took its responsibilities to the Party seriously and fulfilled them.

5. It is also a fact, 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. This again is not strange, since even at this late date of July 25th no one -- save possible eight persons nationally -- have been confronted with any other alternatives.

6. Furthermore, the strength of our ideas and the seriousness with which we have put them forward allows us to make a very safe estimate that some ninety comrades (90) nationally will vote for our line in their branches. This estimate is a modest figure if anything. This takes in at least 15 Party Branches. It includes members of both the Party and youth National Committees, members of several Branch executive committees, a goodly percentage of the Party's Third World cadre (15% - 20%), several former Branch organizers as well as youth organizers. The members of our tendency have, are and will be characterized as active participants in building both the Party and youth and participants in the movements of involvement for the Party. Not a few of these are outstanding examples in this regard, and have been for several years. The Proletarian Orientation Tendency has a real life in the Party and that as well as its ideas contribute to its being a serious tendency.

It is correct to say that democracy should be extended to every comrade or group of comrades with differences. However, it is also true, and thus a corollary to this, that democracy does not exist in the abstract but in the concrete. A serious Tendency, that treats the Party as well as its ideas, with seriousness should be extended the time necessary to present its views to the highest body of the Party and not treated like an unserious group of, to use Cannon's terms, "chronic kickers and windbags" who fail either to get their views to the Party or take the norms

and traditions (in addition to the comrades) of the Party seriously.

It is not only in the interests of the Party but also of its co-thinkers everywhere, that our Party puts a high priority on the democratic aspect of our dialectical organizational method of democratic centralism. To limit the presentation of our reporter in the Political resolution discussion to 38 minutes or less than at least one hour, would not only be a mockery it would be cause for scandal. It would make any pronouncements that we would make to our co-thinkers, seem like empty rhetoric marked "Make in the U.S. for Shipment Abroad." Further it would not only cause a unserious attitude toward fulfilling the responsibilities of democracy but it would impair the centralist side of our concepts also.

If a Tendency treats the Party in a serious manner, as our Tendency has done, it deserves serious treatment from the Party also. It is on this basis that the Party after it has voted for its positions is 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.

The members of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency will in the future as we have in the past, act in a loyal and disciplined manner toward the Party, we are Leninists and put no conditions on our Party patriotism. However, we are aware that the type of treatment, reflected in the 38 minute-type proposal, will undermine the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, which we pride ourselves on.

The restriction on our rights, and that is what the 38 minute-type proposal (or any allotment of time less than one hour or one hour and fifteen minutes) would be, could only create not only in the minds of the members of our Tendency but in the minds of the Party members as a whole, a cynicism toward democratic centralism itself. This situation is not our creation and therefore we cannot take responsibility for its adjustment -- we seek to change the minds of the PC members in order to avoid this type of situation.

Comrades will travel thousands of miles to participate in the decisions of this convention, we believe these decisions are of historic importance, therefore we feel that the presentations of the different points of view contained in the NC Draft Political Resolution and the counter-resolution of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency should be allowed adequate time to develop their alternate lines in a complete and comprehensive manner. To deny this would be a ludicrous injustice not only to the members of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency but the Party as a whole, as well as the International. When you realize that what we are asking for is an additional 38 minutes (added onto the proposed 38 minutes) our request is not only fair but in the best interests of the Party. In that the Convention of the Party is once every two years and that it is our highest body -- we feel our request is in order.

When you also realize that the Convention schedule could well withstand this minor change, especially since several days at the end of the convention have been set aside for an educational conference, though important, this educational conference still takes a secondary position with regard to our Convention and its working out of our differences in coming to our decisions.

We of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency ask that the Political Committee meet and discuss this matter, taking seriously the information and views put forward in this letter. On that basis we request that they make the necessary adjustment. This would give the entire Party represented at the Convention, a chance to hear an adequate presentation of our views put forward in an adequate fashion before our Party's highest body. If the Party did not consider Conventions important enough to allow adequate presentations of ideas and differences -- the federated mail-in your vote procedure of Burnham, I believe, would be most sensible. But since we rejected that un-Leninist fancy, I believe we must have an adequate presentation of the differences to aid the discussion and the decisions coming out of it.

Finally we state that thirty eight minutes or anything less than at least one hour for the presentation of our report on our counter-resolution, would be inadequate.

We further request that this decision be made as soon as possible so as to allow our reporter to prepare the presentation before the last minute. We assume that the reporter for the NC Draft Political Resolution already has a good idea of how much time will be allotted for that presentation and thus has ample time to prepare that documents presentation. We of the Proletarian Orientation would like the same ability to prepare. Not knowing whether to prepare an inadequate-to-begin-with thirty eight minute presentation (which is impossible to cover the material) or to prepare an hour and fifteen minute presentation is a serious disadvantage to the ideas that the comrade will be representing. We hope that the Political Committee will act in a responsible manner in this regard.

Comradely,  
s/Bill Massey  
for the Proletarian Orientation  
Tendency