

BALTIMORE STATEMENT ON THE

P.B. VISITATION - BY J. G. Inch & R. Kaufman

Page 1 "BALTIMORE STATEMENT..." Baltimore Md.

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"They answered their enemies with a shrug of their shoulders; to the workers they explained their position and sometimes found themselves out-voted. They were only the first among comrades..." From Lenin to Stalin, Victor Serge

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On Saturday, 17 December 1966, a Political Bureau delegation consisting of cmds. Albert N., Harry T., Jack G., and Paul G.* met with the Baltimore (*Jim R.) Organizing Committee. Our analysis of the confrontation follows below.

ON LEAGUE DISCIPLINE, EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL

The Baltimore Committee denied emphatically that we have ever had anything other than a League perspective. Cmd. Harry T. expressed his "personal" impression that the P.B. was suprized that Baltimore allowed it to come down. This impression apparently reflected the opinion of the entire delegation because none of the other P.B. delegates contradicted him. They were apparently convinced that we were going to split from the S.L. and seemed temporarily at a loss for words when we assured them otherwise. The intimidation of such a view on the part of the P.B. both shocked and puzzled us. Further we denied that we had ever engaged in double recruiting. To substantiate this, we pointed to the cases of Gallitin D., our new recruit who knew nothing of our inner-League struggles until he joined us, and Fred C., our closest new sympathizer who knows nothing of it now. For our own part we brought up the incident in New York when a non-member, Mike Walters reported that S.L. members in NYC spoke disparagingly of cmd. Bob K. The P.B. delegates, when pressed into even acknowledging the incident, chorused that nothing could be done about it without positive identifications. This is the type of response worthy of a police commissioner dismissing a Negro's complaint because he didn't get the cop's badge number.

Cmd. Jim R. stressed that Baltimore must recognize the right of the P.B. to regulate internal discussion. We equally emphasized that we have always recognized this right. In the case of the communications in question we explained that it was not an attempt to open discussion on a political issue for internal discussion as charged but was merely an attempt to correct a number of falsehoods, misinformations and attacks on the Baltimore Committee which had appeared in recent P.B. minutes. We have in a democratic-centralist organization every right to do so without asking anyone's permission. An indication of the P.B.'s "protection" of rest of the organization from the knowledge of the activities of the Baltimore Committee was that a recent phone call revealed that cmd. Shelly W. the recent downtown N.Y. organizer did not even know that we were conducting an electoral campaign until he was informed by a non-member some 5-6 weeks after we had begun to send large packets of samples of our election material to the P.B. for distribution. This case is particularly interesting because we sent reports and new literature packets practically every week to the P.B. and there is a P.B. report made at each N.Y. local meeting. We felt that in the light of the above, our communication had to be distributed before harmful impressions began to harden, we simply lacked confidence in the administrative capability and good will of the P.B. to distribute it without delay. It had been over three months since we had received a reply to any of our letters to N.Y. Moreover, during a visit by cmd. Lou D., we had learned that P.B. minutes had ceased to come to us. Without P.B. minutes and with the P.B. playing possum with our letters, the defacto status of the Baltimore O.C. was that of an expelled local!

Consequently, we personally sent our communications to central committee members and alternates- exclusively. Still the P.B. remained impassive until its very recent pronouncement that a strong delegation would descend upon Baltimore, apparently in our minds, to find some pretext on which to legalize our expulsion. When we stressed that sending our communications directly to C.C. members and alternates and not through the P.B. was a matter of protocol and not principle, and pointed out the fact that the REB upheld this view with respect to cmd. Doug H.'s communications out of Ithaca earlier this year, the P.B. delegation did not dispute these points.

On the past history of New York's nonfeasance in this respect, cmd. Bob K. related his experience when he attempted some time ago to reopen discussion about the possibility of the S.L. sponsoring a Vietnamese tour. After being told by Al N. what the proper channels were, he sent a written request to New York, followed some weeks later by a second written request for a reply. Both seemed to have died in the P.B.'s circular file in the corner. To this story cmd. Jim R. retorted at the meeting, "It wasn't worth my time to answer you." About six months later Herbert Aptheker, Staughton Lynd and Tom Hayden went on such a trip which received international publicity and resulted in numerous interviews and talks.

With respect to our correspondence with cmd. Tom S., we affirmed that we had never been informed that he was on any proscribed list. Even when we asked the P.B. for such a list at the time we sent our last communication, the P.B. sent no reply. Apparently, there was no proscribed list. As far as we knew, Tom S. was receiving P.B. minutes and we had every right to correspond with him. Nevertheless, we never sent him minutes or extracts of them as charged. Only in one letter did cmd. Bob S. refer to comments in the P.B. minutes about the status of cmd. Tom S. Of course, we assumed that Tom S. was receiving the same minutes. Bob S. made no reference to formal charges or a

trial as somehow Tom S. and Jim R. later convinced each other he had. Even after a phone call to Baltimore in which Bob K. made it perfectly clear that nothing had been said about formal charges or a trial, for reasons which he did not explain Jim R. persisted in contending the opposite in P.B. discussions as reported in the minutes. The irresponsibility surrounding this affair rests solely with the P.B. and its failure to inform comrades of Tom S.'s peculiar status. Further, to deny us minutes on the basis of this incident is to compound this irresponsibility. With respect to cmd. Tom S.'s letter to Joe V., we still disagree with the P.B. when it labeled this letter "disingenuous" and with cmd. Joe V. (with the apparent P.B. endorsement) when he accused Tom S. of trying to form a Foxite tendency.

We are still waiting for cmd. Joe V. and Jim R. to point out specifically how the politics of cmd. Fox are expressed in this letter. A failure to do so amounts to serious politics being replaced by simple personality mongering and assumed guilt by association- with a political friend of the S.L. no less. Since there has been no internal discussion in the S.L. on differences with Fox we feel that such a discussion would be educational. At least it could give us some idea as to what our P.B. is talking about. Moreover, in cmd. Joe V.'s letter to us there appeared a certain Stalinist passage to the effect that "lower bodies in a Leninist organization may not criticize higher bodies." That this view appeared in a letter from Joe V. is particularly disgusting because a communication from Joe V. is not simply a personal communication but one from a central committee member. Although the P.B. delegation took no concerted action to disassociate itself from this view, we registered our hope that the P.B. will correct Joe V. on this important point. Finally, with respect to Jim R.'s letter to Tom S. for the P.B., we consider its pugilistic, either-or, "Since-You-Raised-The-Question" manner entirely uncalled for and unjustified. It is a fitting commentary on the PB that it has only now gotten around to instructing Tom S. as to what the duties of League membership are. And by what the letter says, it appears that if it

had not been for recent events, the P.B. would never had gotten around to informing Tom S. what his duties are! Even here the letter goes too far and makes certain unusual, and unreasonable demands.

ON LEAGUE ADMINISTRATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE COURTESY (OR LACK OF IT)

We voiced a number of protests about the administration of the press. We noted that when we asked cmd. Helen J. to send a xerox copy of our original CORE article so that we might check it with the published version for changes, Helen promised she would. When he passed through Baltimore several weeks later Al N. promised that he would remind her. Then the P.B. followed up with a juvenile comment in the minutes to the effect that if he really wanted a xerox copy, Bob S. would send the money to NY for one. With our last communication we sent NY a dollar for the copy. When we queried the P.B. delegates about our copy, Jim R. reacted by saying that we had stirred up this affair "because you just wanted trouble." Finally, we have just received our copy 15 weeks after the original assurance that it would be mailed!

Next we raised the question why our articles on our intervention in the fascist rallies in Baltimore and our participation in the Maryland General Election did not appear in the latest Spartacist. The P.B. had elicited these articles and promised that they would be used. Although Jim R. previously had noted that the Baltimore comrades literally risked their lives in their intervention in the fascist rallies and although he previously expressed his resolute determination to make our campaign in Maryland a "national issue," Jim R. completely flip-flopped at the meeting and rationalized the P.B. omission by saying that the actions were "not important enough!" Bob K. pointed out that the article on the rallies would have revealed the rotten role of the established civil rights groups especially CORE and the vanguard role of the S.L. in its organization of ghetto self-defense by

intervening through the Civic Interest Group (the Negro ghetto group that sponsored the counter rally and march that actually caused the city government to issue an injunction against the second series of fascist rallies.) Jim R. picked on the point that the police actually saved us. Bob K. reminded him that our article provided the political analysis of why the police had to come to our aid for fear of dangerously exposing themselves to the entire ghetto. Also Bob K. enumerated the many accomplishments of our recent electoral campaign and expressed the opinion that it was the most politically profitable (eg. bringing S.L. program to large numbers of sympathetic workers and students) action in which he had ever participated. In addition, Bob K. made the point that the main task of an Iskra press ought to be to highlight the exemplary work of the local branches which are building the vanguard party! Jim R. continued to act as though he refused to recognize the importance of our actions to the movement. All he could do was force himself to throw a sop to the effect that a quarter of a page on the electoral campaign might have been squeezed into Spartacist "Just to keep you happy". Nothing was mentioned about the fascist rallies. Earlier, cmd. Harry T. expressed his "personal" impression that the P.B. excluded the article because of fear of an impending split. We suspect that this "personal" impression is closer to the truth. For the benefit of cmd. Harry T. and every other comrade who does not know it yet such an attitude is classically known in our movement as opportunism and sectarianism!

During the course of the meeting we denounced the arbitrary and authoritarian manner in which the P.B. has recently treated the Baltimore Committee. Although we recognized that it had every legal right to do so, why did the P.B. order us to stop work on our local publication Workers Power, an unpresided intervention that cost us \$40? Cmd. Jack G. expressed his "personal" impression that the P.B. feared that the publications name was indicative of a split perspective on the part of Baltimore. What nonsense! Further, we notified the P.B. delegation of our reaction

of disgust surrounding the officious manner in which our electoral platform was chewed up by the P.B. Instead of offering comradely suggestions, the P.B. waited until its next full meeting and then sent out to Berkeley its revisions. The manner of its intervention delayed the printing a number of days precisely when we most needed the platforms. Despite cmd. Al N.'s editorializing in the P.B. minutes it is impossible to rationally construe our line on the Negro Question as a "simplistic black and white unite and fight." We presented our line in the CORE article mentioned above, and the P.B. printed it without change. In addition we refuted Al's accusation in the P.B. minutes that omission of mention of Negro struggle in our "mass leaflet" was "unprincipled opportunism" on our part. We explained again that this so-called "mass leaflet" entitled "Why We Are Running" was merely a generalized theoretical class analysis introduction to our platform which in turn dealt at length with the Negro struggle. It very purposefully did not mention any specific issues of the campaign, eg. poverty, racism, Vietnam, etc. For the same reason that the platform handles issues and not general theory. In fact, when he was in Baltimore, Al N. never raised his accusation. Although the section on the Negro question that cmd. Geoff W. was directed to write was of such a quality that it did in fact add to the leaflet, it nevertheless was an obvious appendage and had no more reason to be included than possible sections on any of the other issues. Our real mass leaflet—drawn up before this criticism and distributed during the campaign to over 5,000 workers, mostly white—included a hard-hitting section on the Negro struggle. During the meeting Jim R. threatened that we could be put on trial for calling Al N.'s accusation a slander. We invited him to do so and personally welcomed the opportunity to defend ourselves. We reiterated to the P.B. delegation our dismay and disgust at the fact that Jim R. had failed to contact the BBC, ABC, NBC and the National Guardian during the election—as he had promised. The loss was incalculable.

Cmd. Jim R. dilated upon the fact

that Baltimore recently stated in a communication to the P.B. that, for all practical purposes it was responsible for the only recent intervention by the League in mass movements. He contended that Baltimore Spartacist had been misinformed by its leaders on the lack of national activity by the S.L. To this we replied that there are three avenues of communication in the League: P.B. minutes, Spartacist, and personal discussion with P.B. members. There has been little or nothing in the P.B. minutes which we have received to indicate any specific activity by any other locals. Unfortunately, there was no reference in the current Spartacist to any such activity. Specifically with respect to our statement cited by cmd. Jim R., when cmd. Bob K. spoke to him over the phone some weeks back inquiring what the other locals were doing, Jim R. replied, "Nothing". We took him for his word since we do not assume without sufficient cause that our national leader is a liar. Now he is implying otherwise.

With respect to the manner in which we presented our factional document at the conference, We reminded Jim R. that although we had accepted at the conference his observation that the PB would have to reprimand us, for the record, for our technical faux pas of laying our document on the table at the back of the room instead of taking it first to the front of the room and submitting it to the conference committee. The tone of the criticism in the PB minutes was not at all in keeping with this comradely attitude. We also criticized the NYC locals for not allowing us to speak to them. We were willing to go to the mountain before the mountain came to us. Here cmd. Jack G. expressed his "personal" impression that NYC refused because of fear of an announcement of a split. What paranoia!

Finally, on league administration, we take exception to two statements made by cmd. Jim R. during the evening. Firstly, we reject any system of cryptopolitical cost accounting that states in effect that a local of the SL deserves attention only in proportion (to the second decimal place) to its strictly financial contributions to the organization. We were particularly hard put to see the relevance of

this statement to the discussion at hand since Baltimore has not received a reply to any of its letters to NYC for three months. Secondly despite what Jim R. propelled himself into saying during one of his paroxysms of self-dramatization, building a viable national movement-meaning maintaining the internal lines of communications of the League and servicing the locals- does not preclude but does take definite priority with corresponding with Timbuktu.

ON LEAGUE DEMOCRACY

Jim R. opened the evening by attempting to convince Baltimore of its "hopeless isolation" with testimonials from comrades in the field supporting the P.B. and attacking the Baltimore Committee. Particularly vindictive were the remarks of Chris K. (another CC member) that our election material was "pretty shitty" and that Baltimore should be reorganized and recolonized. To this we reply that we did not become Bolsheviks to win popularity contests. It is interesting to note that cmd. Chris K. had corresponded with us in Sept. to apologize for neglecting to deliver a proof of our platform and WWRP leaflet to Marion which had resulted in a delay in receiving them from 7 to 10 days. The delay would have been longer still if we had not gone to the expense of two cross-country phone calls. Chris K.'s reaction at that time was one only of praise of our electoral literature. We wonder what could have caused him to change his evaluation at this late date? Could he be lining up against the critics - no questions asked and to hell with the truth? This is hardly an example of serious Bolshevik criticism.

We agree with cmd. Harry T. when he remarked that attacking the creditability of the leadership is a serious affair. But we affirmed that the repeated vindictive misrepresentations about the Baltimore Committee, whether conscious or unconscious, that have been circulated by P.B. members and the simultaneous administrative boycott of Baltimore, reflect a state of affairs prejudicial to the long-run health of the internal life of the League and are, therefore, intol-

erable. In fact, even if all these misrepresentations have been unconscious and have stemmed from a simple predisposition to think the worse of fellow comrades, then those who fabricate them are not thereby less culpable. It has been a bitter disappointment that we had to come to our own defense. Other comrades ought to have long ago raised their voices. The initial mistake of the American Stalinists was to refuse to believe that Stalin and his American leadership could do wrong. A Trotskyist organization should be particularly attuned to the necessity of freedom to criticize ones leadership. Therefore, to preserve the effectiveness of the S.L. to lead the struggle to build a vanguard party in the US we have felt it our duty to combat violations of the spirit of inner League democracy and to defend the proposition that each comrade has the right to raise his voice in criticism and administration of the League without the fear of systematic recriminations and that, further, it is the responsibility of a Bolshevik leadership to cultivate painstakingly an open democratic atmosphere for discussion rather than to try and strangle discussion by organizational maneuvers, however technically correct, that tend to generate a poisoned atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Moreover, a Bolshevik leadership ought to encourage and nurture activism in the locals rather than be trigger-happy with the accusation, ("they want trouble") when that consciousness is directed toward comradely criticism of the leadership.

It is altogether laudatory that our leadership should try to imitate Lenin and Trotsky. However, it is inaccurate to assume that their wishes are reality. Nevertheless, they seem to view all criticism from the ranks as tantamount to erstwhile criticisms of Lenin and Trotsky. Since they know that they (as Lenin and Trotsky) can do no wrong (of a significant nature), they look not for the log in their own eye but for the moat in the eye of their accusers. They naturally assume that any criticism on the face of it can not be valid as such but must be due to some opportunist, unprincipled, unkosher, pettybourgeois inadequacy of the critic comrade! This, of course, was

not the method of Lenin and Trotsky. A leadership that can not admit its own faults is not a leadership capable of correcting and overcoming the pragmatic mistakes of the working class!

Cmd. Bob K. emphasized that we have not seen ourselves as a victim of a conspiracy. Apparently the P.B. delegation thought that we did and that we were going to split. This attitude indicates how poorly attuned the P.B. is to reality within our organization. If they are no better attuned to the class struggle in the US than they are with the recent vicissitudes in our organization, then, comrades, we are in trouble - if we expect to lead the working class in revolution. We realize, that, the entire League is being victimized by administrative nonfeasance, and a grease-lighting proctivity among prominate comrades to rationalize away and to project onto others their organizational failures and personal inadequacies. Other comrades simply have allowed themselves to be cowed into lowering their voices at this point. The leadership has never directly answered any of our criticisms, much less engaged in any meaningful dialogue, but instead has attacked us personally. Thus at the conference we were accused of being a renegade faction with a split perspective. Since we disbanded as a faction at the conference we have been depicted as a defacto faction with a split perspective. However, raising specific criticisms in reply to P.B. attacks does not warrent such a designation. Since the conference we have not been "looking for trouble" but have merely refused to turn the other cheek when attacked. When organizational fantacies became unusable at our meeting, cmds. Al and Jim launched into a lengthy, unBolshevik personal attack on cmd. Bob S. that consumed about half of their speaking time. In soap-opera, "Let-me-tell-you-something-about-Sherwood" atmosphere, the personal attack delt exclusively with supposed events in Bob S.'s history that occurred before he even came to Baltimore. It was a divide-and-conquer tactic in the crudest demogogic tradition. It failed! It turned the Baltimore comrades completely off. We were disgusted that the P.B. delegates stuck together in the face of such a nauseating spectacle.

WE DEMAND AN END TO SUCH DEMOGOG RY

AND VERBAL TERRORISM AND DECLARE OUR INTENTION NEVER TO REMAIN SILENT SO LONG AS IT IS USED IN RETALIATION AGAINST LEGITIMATE CRITICISM OF THE LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SPARTACIST LEAGUE!

Democratic centralism is democratic as well as centralist. To fulfill their obligation to uphold the democratic element, all comrades of whatever tendency has the right as well as the duty to speak out against such intimidations and personalized attacks. As a warning to the comrades we cite Voix Ouvriere's observations about Healy in the latest Spartacist; Namely, that bureaucratism, as well as arising from social and economic causes, can arise as a product of one's incapacity as a revolutionist! Thus to demand that Baltimore must have political differences with the leadership is to beg the question as ACFI begs the question when it demands that Spartacist explain the social roots of Healy's bureaucracism. Furthermore, in our opinion, trying to find an organizational solution to everything and sending strong-armed delegation to a local that you have not communicated with for over three months is flirting dangerously with bureaucracism.

Speaking for Balto. Bob K. was first to waive the olive branch when he said we were willing to observe the more formal channels for distribution of communications as well as to use more comradely language. In the sprit of reconciliation he then invited comperable concessions from the hitherto sinless P.B. Comrades we must be graced with the first sinless Bolshevik leadership for we are still awaiting a response!

At the conclusion of the meeting the following resolution was passed unanimously by the Baltimore Committee: We agree to go through channels with the profound hope that the P.B. will execute its responsibilities. We will attempt to conduct our criticisms in a more comradely fashion in the hopes that the P.B. will do likewise. We reject any implication that we had a split perspective or that we have acted unprincipledly. Although we are not satisfied with most of the replies- or lack of replies- to our criticisms, we have found the discussion valuable and somewhat clarifying.