

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 60, December 11, 1976

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Garza, D.Jenness, Jones, Lovell,
Lund, Lyons, Miah, Seigle, Sheppard, Stapleton,
Thomas, Waters

Guests: Clark, Jaquith, Morell, Petrin, Wohlforth

Chair: Garza

AGENDA: 1. Structure and Organization of Party Leadership
2. Political Committee
3. Puerto Rico
4. IMT "Self-Criticism on Latin America"

1. STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PARTY LEADERSHIP

Waters reported. (See attached.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report for
presentation to the plenum.

Carried.

2. POLITICAL COMMITTEE

Barnes initiated discussion on the composition of the
Political Committee to be proposed to the plenum.

Discussion

3. PUERTO RICO

(Pérez and White invited for this point)

Garza reported on his recent trip to Puerto Rico.

Discussion

4. IMT "SELF-CRITICISM ON LATIN AMERICA"

(Foley and Hansen invited for this point)

Barnes reported.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report for
presentation to the plenum.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Proposal on the Structure and Organization
of the Party Leadership

by Mary-Alice Waters

(Adopted by the Political Committee December 11, 1976)

As of December 1, 1976, the Socialist Workers Party has organized units in 40 cities. These are located in 26 states and the District of Columbia. All but 11 of these units have been established since January of 1969.

More significantly, however, exactly half of them have been established since the August 1975 convention of the party. That gives us a rate of more than one new city a month over a 16-month period.

Since January of this year we have reorganized the structure of our city units to enable us to take better advantage of the political openings analyzed in the resolution "Prospects for Socialism in America." In many of the large cities where we have a sizable number of members, we have divided into two or more branches and established local leadership bodies. In August 1975 only New York and Los Angeles were organized as locals. Today we have 16 locals.

Altogether we have 73 branches and 3 branch organizing committees.

During the same period of time the party membership has grown steadily though not by any qualitative leaps. The decision to constitute a formal category of provisional membership has helped us to recruit and integrate new members, especially the growing numbers who come directly to the party rather than through the student movement and the Young Socialist Alliance. At the August 1975 convention our membership stood at 1,139. As of October 31 we had approximately 1,560 members, including 185 provisional members. That is a net increase of about 420, or a 37 percent increase.

All indications are that this steady expansion of the party into new cities and new areas of the country will continue. While there is no reason to expect any qualitative change in our rate of recruitment, we can anticipate continued growth at a relatively slow but steady pace, including a stepped-up rate of recruitment of members of the Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and other oppressed national minorities. We can also expect more young industrial workers to join.

While we have made substantial progress the last year in reorganizing our membership structures, and establishing local leadership bodies, the process has been uneven from one area to another, and we still face a number of unresolved problems and challenges. Among the questions that we need to discuss more thoroughly at the January plenum of the National Committee are the character and functioning of the local executive committees and their responsibilities toward the branch leaderships and the city-wide fractions.

We have to take a close look at the institutions of branch

functioning such as weekly forums, education, and finances and reestablish some of the norms that have slipped in the reorganization process during the last year. This is closely related to the character and viability of the new, smaller branches we have established.

On all these questions we need to share experiences that can be helpful to comrades grappling with local leadership responsibilities in different areas of the country.

However, we cannot wait until we have satisfactorily resolved and met all these challenges before we take the next step. We must now reorganize the national leadership to catch up to the expansion of the party and prepare ourselves for further growth. The restructuring of the national leadership will in turn facilitate new steps forward in the local and branch leaderships.

The statistics already cited clearly pose the problem we face. In the last 16 months we have reorganized the entire membership of the party but we have only partially reorganized the leadership structures to correspond to our growth and expansion. The result has been an increasing difficulty in meeting our leadership responsibilities on a national level. A good many examples of this could be cited but two will suffice to make the point.

During the fall of 1976 the Political Committee was unable to organize systematic visits to even a portion of the branches and locals. Of course, Political Committee members and other comrades carrying national leadership responsibilities visited a good number of cities for specific reasons. Helpful though they may be, such visits cannot substitute for a more thorough organizational tour during which comrades take time to discuss out all the areas of work, meet with many of the work directors and fraction heads, discuss with local and branch executive committees, and get to know the situation well enough to be of some help to the local leaderships. As a result, comrades on the Political Committee probably have a less accurate and thorough picture of what is happening in each basic unit of the party today than at any time in the last few years.

We have been unable to organize visits to all the branches because the national office is about the same size as when we had units in less than half the cities and a quarter of the branches we do today.

A second and related example of the difficulties we have had in meeting our national leadership responsibilities this fall is that we have not been able to get adequate numbers of comrades released from the larger city locals to rapidly move into new areas as the opportunities developed. In the same way, we have been unable to reinforce some of the smaller branches in new areas when they needed help to take advantage of the political openings. The large locals certainly have the comrades available and willing to move wherever they are needed, as is the norm in our movement. But

the national leadership located in New York doesn't know the party well enough, and the structure of the party is so cumbersome that it takes hours and hours of meetings and phone consultation to come up with even one person to move to one city. Meanwhile, we need dozens to move to a dozen or more new cities. Our inability to move rapidly means we are not only missing out on important opportunities but we are placing an unnecessarily heavy burden on comrades in new areas.

* * *

The national leadership is still structured as it was ten years ago when we had a membership closer to 500 than 1,600 and a dozen branches rather than seventy-five.

In considering the situation the Political Committee decided that we had two alternatives:

1. A major expansion of the national office and all national departments in order to have enough personnel to direct the political campaigns from New York plus keep a number of comrades on the road to systematically collaborate with the branch and local leaderships.

2. To move toward the establishment of a formal district structure for the party by designating a number of national field secretaries to function as district organizers. These initial district organizers would be directly responsible to the Political Committee for collaboration with the branch and local leaderships in their districts, working with them to help lead the party's work. Instead of one field secretary such as we have had for the last two years (Betsey Stone), we would have eight.

The advantages of the second alternative as opposed to the first seem obvious and overwhelming. The second alternative moves toward the future structure that will be necessary rather than trying to patch up a structure suitable for the past and make it work for a few more years (perhaps). It begins to reverse the balance of national leadership located in New York. It will give us an intermediate leadership structure that will qualitatively enhance communication in both directions between the Political Committee and the branches. It gives us a structure that will facilitate expansion into new areas of the country and make it possible to work with at-large members. It will be a help in collaborating with the YSA and coordinating regional work. In short, it moves toward the kind of structure a growing combat party will need to intervene in the struggles that are coming.

The Political Committee recommends that we proceed along the lines of alternative two as rapidly as possible. To facilitate discussion on this point at the National Committee plenum, we wanted to outline the proposal to National Committee members and organizers in advance.

A number of points should be clarified.

1. This is a first step toward establishing a constitutional district structure. It is not yet a district structure with district committees and organizers democratically elected by and responsible to district conventions.

The party constitution states: "In such cases as may be decided by the National Committee, State or District Executive Committees, elected by State or District membership meetings or by State or District Conventions shall be formed." (Article IV, Section 3.) Further, "The relations of such State or District Executive Committees to the Locals and branches within the state or district shall be determined by special by-laws to be approved by the membership of the state or district, subject to final approval by the National Committee." (Article V, Section 8.)

Only twice before in our fifty-year history has the Trotskyist movement in this country reached a size that made it necessary to begin to develop district structures. Once was the late thirties between the time we left the Socialist Party and the 1940 split. The other was in the immediate postwar upsurge. Both of those experiences were short-lived and did not provide us with sufficient experience to enable us to write into the constitution an entire plan for district structures. Even if they had, such structures might not be applicable to the kinds of problems and opportunities we are trying to grapple with today. So the constitution does not try to resolve all the questions of responsibility and authority that will have to be codified in establishing district structures.

Most important is the guarantee of the democratic rights of the membership, and the codification of democratic control by the membership over district committees and the executive officers of those committees. This is the base on which the party's centralism is founded. The character and frequency of district conventions, the powers of the district committees, their financial structures, and many other questions have to be thought through and appropriate by-laws codified.

We are not yet ready to propose the answers to these questions. We need some experiences with the problems that will be posed and how to solve them before we can take that step. Working with the rest of the national leadership to prepare the proposals for district structures will be one of the responsibilities of the initial district organizers.

2. Since the initial district organizers will be designated by the Political Committee rather than elected by district conventions, they will have no special authority or prerogatives vis-à-vis the branches and locals in their districts. Their job is to collaborate with the city leaderships. The body to which they are responsible is the Political Committee.

3. The Political Committee is proposing an initial eight districts. These districts are very large, encompassing huge areas

of the country. By the time we are ready to set up district structures the number and geographical boundaries of each district will probably be quite different from the initial division. We are making no attempt to predetermine future districts. That is one of the questions that will have to be answered by our collective experiences in the months ahead.

* * *

Appended to this report are two maps. Appendix 1 shows the approximate boundaries of the eight districts we are proposing.

Appendix 2 and the accompanying commentary entitled "A 16-State Nation" is taken from the 1976 People's Almanac. We discovered this second map after we had discussed and drawn tentative boundaries for our initial districts. We were amazed to discover that it coincided almost exactly with the divisions we were considering. We thought it would be useful to comrades in thinking about the character and boundaries of the proposed districts.

Like the author of the 16-state map, we decided that for our purposes today the arbitrary legal boundaries between states were not the logical boundaries between districts. Instead we tried to take into account various industrial, geographic, historic, economic, social, and cultural factors, as well as the current location of our party units and proposed initial organizers.

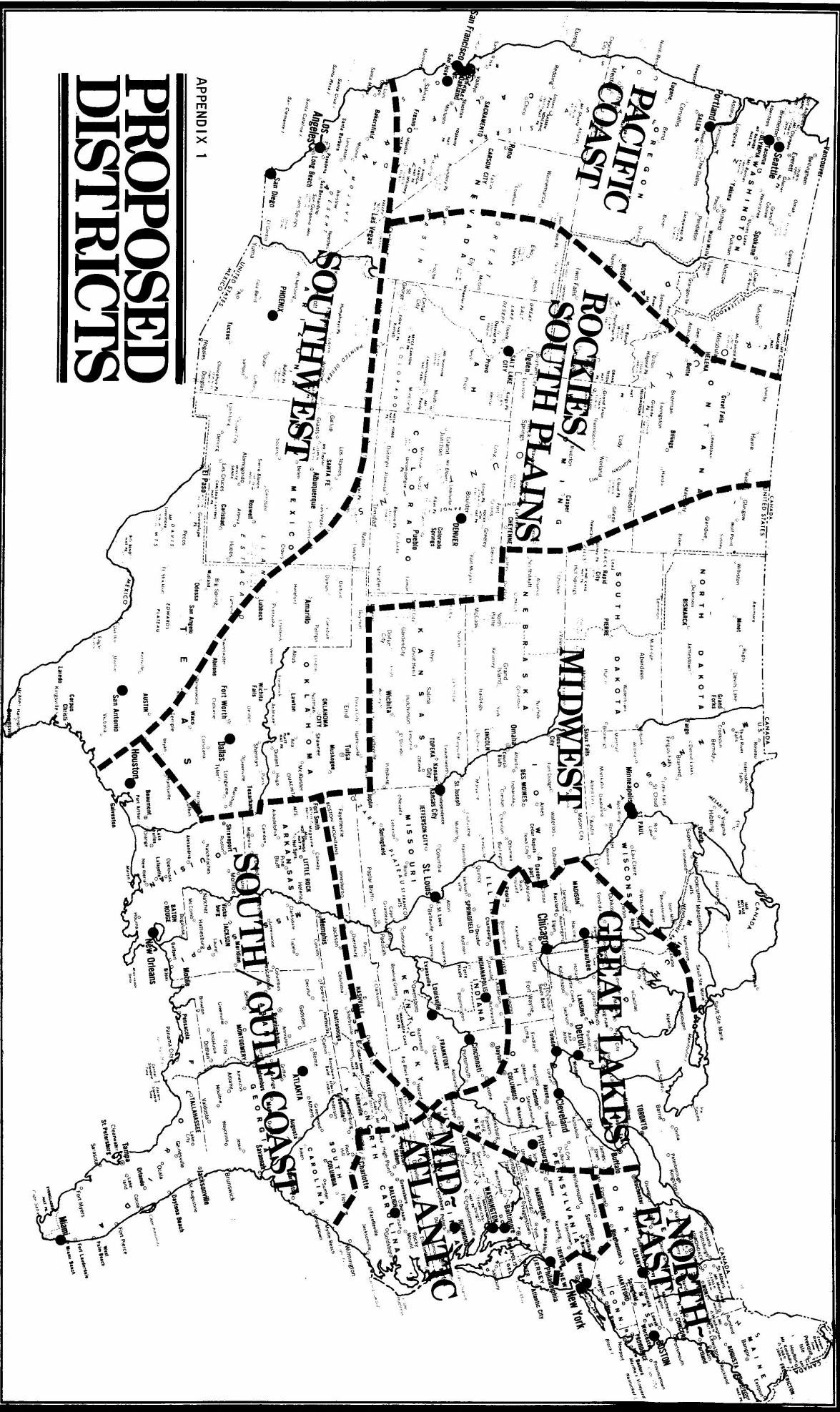
We discussed the pros and cons of statewide structures and whether it was necessary to have all the branches in a state in the same district. In many cases (California, Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania) where we have a large state with party units in more than one city we ended up placing the party units in different districts. We decided that most of the problems of statewide coordination of activities based on the existing political subdivisions (e.g., state election campaigns) could be handled at the present time by inter-district, inter-branch collaboration. This will be facilitated by the district organizers. But there are many political tasks that cut across state lines and are determined by general industrial, geographic, historic, and cultural factors.

Concretely we propose to divide the country into eight initial districts as outlined on the map in Appendix 1 and authorize the Political Committee to designate district organizers for each. The organizers the Political Committee proposes are the following:

1. Northeast--Doug Jenness (resident New York)
2. Mid-Atlantic--Andrea Morell (resident Washington)
3. South/Gulf Coast--Pearl Chertov (resident New Orleans)
4. Southwest--Peter Camejo (resident Los Angeles)
5. Pacific Coast--Tony Thomas (resident Bay Area)
6. Rocky Mountains/South Plains--Steve Chainey (resident Denver)
7. Midwest--Wendy Lyons (resident Minneapolis or St. Louis)
8. Great Lakes--Joel Britton (resident Chicago)

These district organizers will be in the field and ready to function immediately following the plenum.

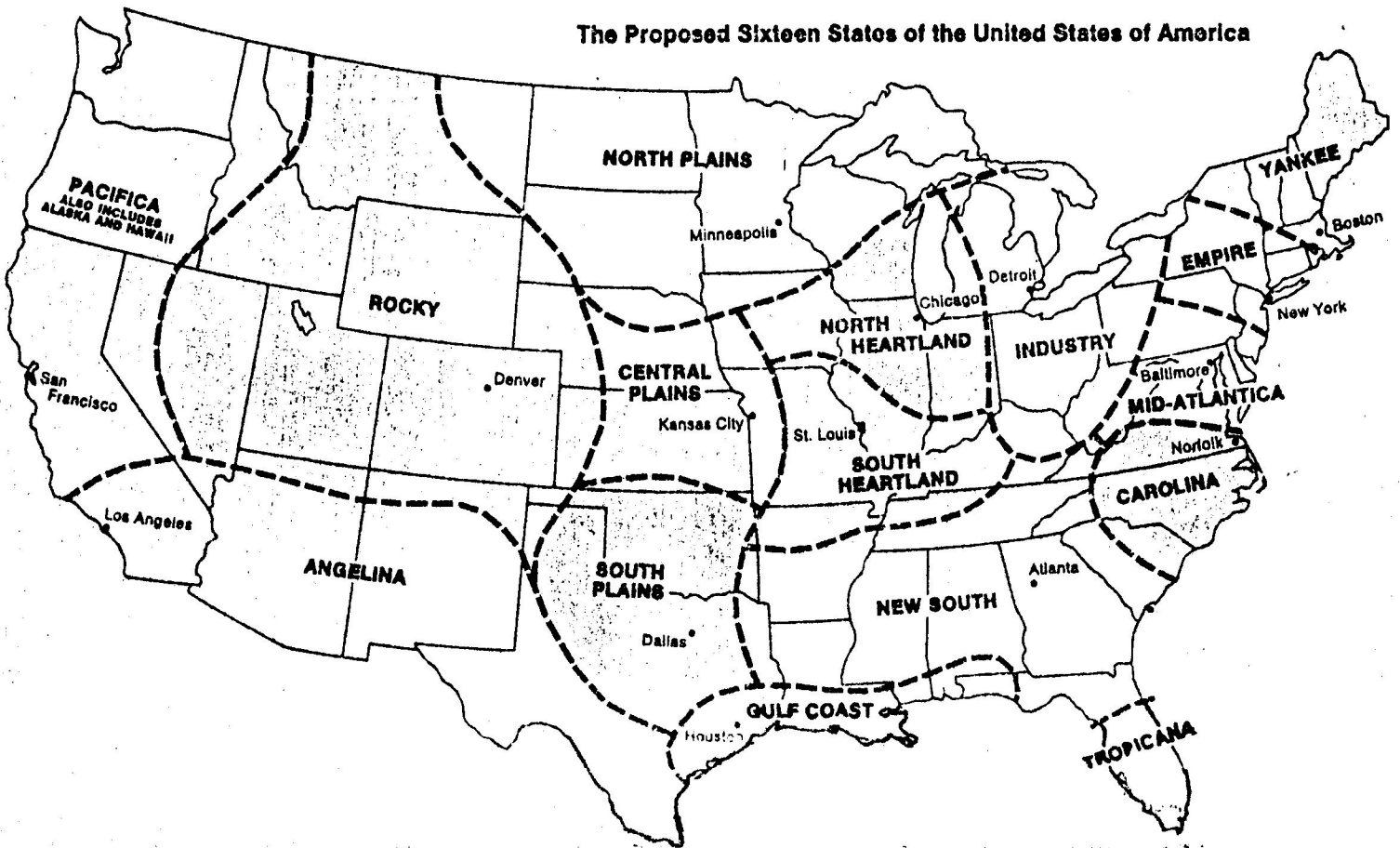
There are many questions, ideas, and suggestions about the proposal that are not covered in this brief written outline. We will discuss as many of them as possible at the plenum. It would be helpful if comrades would write down any observations about the proposal and send them in ahead of time so the Political Committee can consider them in drawing up the plenum report on the Structure and Organization of the Party Leadership.



APPENDIX 1

PROPOSED DISTRICTS

The Proposed Sixteen States of the United States of America



A 16-State Nation

Remember the Bluegrass State of Kentucky, the Buckeye State of Ohio, the Keystone State of Pennsylvania, the Sunshine State of Florida, the Hawkeye State of Iowa, the Lone Star State of Texas? Such could be the recollections of U.S. inhabitants of South Heartland, Industry, Mid-Atlantica, Tropicana, North Heartland, South Plains—in the year 2000.

Inventor of this geographical brainstorm (opposite) is Dr. Stanley D. Brunn, associate professor of geography at Michigan State University. His map divides the U.S. into 16 newly named regions, each with a designated capital. In drawing the map, Brunn separated the States "on the basis of similar economic orientation, social and cultural heritage, and political ideology." Each State is geared toward one or more metropolitan areas.

Brunn believes that the country's current political structure, based on a 50-State map, is outdated and reflects the agrarian culture and economy of the last century. He states that today's mobile and urbanized society demands a new political framework—one that efficiently meets the need for better economic and social programs. "The States as they now exist are really barriers to legislation and political progress," says Brunn.

Why should heavily populated States such as New York, California, and New Jersey have the same number of U.S. senators as North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Wyoming? Shouldn't a resident of Indiana, who lives on the outskirts of metropolitan Chicago, be concerned about Chicago's air pollution problem? If voting is a national right, why should "mobile" Americans be subjected to an array of State and local residency requirements in order to vote? How efficient is a political system with 50 versions of how to interpret laws concerning welfare payments, unemployment, education standards, marriage and divorce regulations, job equality, criminal penalties, environmental protection? Brunn answers, "With a society that is acquiring more national

than State or local awareness and orientation, and where centralized planning is more accepted, increased standardization of laws is sought.

According to Brunn, a more consolidated map will not only correct "social inequities" but will save the taxpayers money. For example, the plan can also consolidate suburban services such as water, police and fire facilities, and school districts. If Pearcy's map of 38 States (See 38 State-Nation) claims to save \$4.6 billion a year in "fixed" State costs, then Brunn's plan should save considerably more.

Changes which may lead to a new regrouping of the States are already taking place. Zip codes cross State lines in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Carolinas. Regional commissions such as the one operating in Appalachia, are working to improve an area's economy, not a State's economy. The Nixon Administration's plan for city revenue sharing bypassed States' rights.

If Brunn's predictions concerning a move toward standardization of State laws does happen, some areas will lose certain "liberal advantages." Good-bye to the Nevada divorce laws, New York City's welfare payments, New Mexico's lax land development laws.

How will Americans react to losing their State identity? Brunn says, "If you come from the State of Industry, you can still say you're from Michigan. Industry will just be another label for administrative purposes. I don't think it would be that upsetting."

Brunn is the 1st to agree that his map proposal leaves many unanswered questions. How to finance the new States? How to organize political representation? What will happen to the 2 major political parties? "Realistically," he says, "I don't suppose you're going to get ¾ of the States to go along with a Constitutional convention that would put them out of business. But at least this is a plan that can set people talking and thinking about the problems."

—C.O.

APPENDIX 3

CITIES WHERE THE SWP HAS ORGANIZED UNITS

LOCALS

Atlanta	New York
Boston	Newark
Chicago	Philadelphia
Cleveland	St. Louis
Detroit	San Francisco
Houston	San Jose
Los Angeles	Seattle
Minneapolis	Washington, D.C.

BRANCHES

Baltimore	Oakland
Berkeley	Phoenix
Cincinnati	Pittsburgh
Dallas	Portland
Denver	Raleigh
Indianapolis	Richmond
Kansas City	St. Paul
Louisville	San Antonio
Milwaukee	San Diego
New Orleans	Tacoma
	Toledo

ORGANIZING COMMITTEES

Albany (will become branch before plenum)
Miami
Salt Lake City