

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 44, October 25, 1979

Present: Barnes, Britton, Dixon, Hawkins, Horowitz, Jaquith, Jenness, Kramer, Lyons, Mailhot, Manuel, Morell, Ring, Seigle, Stone, Waters

Guests: Halstead, Leonard, Rose, Shilman

Chair: Stone

AGENDA: 1. Bay Area District Committee Correspondence
2. World Congress Delegation
3. Miners
4. Nicaragua
5. National Committee Plenum Dates

1. BAY AREA DISTRICT COMMITTEE CORRESPONDENCE
(Lovell invited for this point.)

Barnes reported. (See attached.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve proposed letter to Bay Area District Committee.

Carried.

2. WORLD CONGRESS DELEGATION

Waters reported.

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

3. MINERS

(Cole invited for this point.)

Shilman reported on developments in UMWA and coal industry since 1977-78 strike, progress of our fraction, perspectives for the December UMWA national convention, and proposals for future work. (See article by Nancy Cole in November 2 Militant.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

(over)

4. NICARAGUA

(Baumann, Feldman, and Pérez invited for this point.)

Barnes reported.

Discussion continued from previous meeting.

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

5. NATIONAL COMMITTEE PLENUM DATES

Jeness reported on proposal to hold a National Committee plenum January 5-8 in New York City, and that all branch, local, and district organizers be invited to attend.

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Report on 1980 California Election Campaign

by Lew Jones

(Adopted by Bay Area District Committee, September 30, 1979, by a vote of 11 for, 1 against, and 1 abstention.)

The purpose of this report is to initiate discussion in the District Committee on some of the key elements of our 1980 state election campaign. Our discussion here will aid the discussions that will be necessary with the national office and leading party units in Los Angeles and San Diego. In addition, our discussion will aid preparations for the upcoming branch tasks and perspectives reports.

The world political situation today opens many opportunities and responsibilities for us. There are many examples--the revolution in Nicaragua and Carter's war threats, the state of the world economy and the American recession, and the fight for ERA ratification and its support in the labor movement. All were discussed at the national convention and we're acting on them.

An important new propaganda opening is John Henning's Labor Day message calling for a discussion on the need for a labor party. Discussion on this will help us to clarify this particular opening and will aid our turn.

The introduction to the political resolution adopted at last summer's convention gives a summary of the evolution since World War II of the labor movement and the petty bourgeois bureaucracy encrusted on it. This evolution indicates the character of upcoming battles that will change labor. Henning's initiative is related to this.

The political resolution states that after World War II, "Modest but real wage increases and 'fringe benefits' were negotiated as the postwar economic expansion unfolded. In exchange, the bureaucracy collaborated with the employers and the government to gut the unions as fighting instruments." And

"For almost a third of a century, this conservative bureaucracy blocked the union from participating in, much less leading, important social and political battles. Growing numbers of organized workers accepted the argument of the labor bureaucracy that class collaboration was the road to prosperity and security and that the sole function of the unions was to bargain for periodic wage hikes and 'fringes' for their members. These workers saw little connection between their desire for better living standards and job conditions, and most progressive social and political protests."

This situation prevailed for close to 30 years. It is now changing.

(over)

"Today, this changing social consciousness among American workers and their growing desire to fight back against the rulers' austerity offensive make it possible to begin tearing down the bureaucracy's roadblock and drawing the ranks of the labor movement into political action. The workers' growing need to take hold of their unions and use them to resist the attacks on their living standards and job conditions, combined with the radicalizing influence of movements of social protest originating outside the union movement, will make the class struggle in the 1980's. This combination of economic and social struggles will be at the center of the battle to transform the unions into organizations of mass political combat."

Workers are feeling the necessity to fight back and break through the bounds imposed by the bureaucracy. In doing this they will begin "to look for a program and a leadership that can point the way out of the class collaborationist straitjacket the bureaucracy has strapped on the unions."

In this situation--working class resistance to a ruling class offensive--the room for maneuver by the bureaucracy becomes reduced. In order to maintain their "jobs" they must produce something for the membership, but over time this becomes increasingly difficult. On the other hand, to prove to the rulers that they are responsible collaborators the bureaucracy must discipline and tame working class militancy. But this, too, becomes more difficult in the context of ruling class attacks. The bureaucracy, in short, is becoming caught between a rock and a hard place. They have fewer answers that seem to realistically provide results for militant workers.

To win in today's battles a new strategy is required. Under the ruling class blows and the bureaucracy's inadequate response more and more workers are beginning to look for the answers, the big strategic answers, to their questions. We, then, find ourselves in the beginning of a period where it is more and more possible to explain the need for a transformed labor movement, and for a class struggle left wing to fight for this transformation. The strategic course projected in the transitional program becomes more explainable. That is, many of the concepts are explainable and understandable to co-workers. The opportunities for political discussion and therefore contact work are growing and flow from day to day political life.

For example, comrades have reported in the last weeks how some of the most significant elements of the transitional program have been part of discussions by fraction members in the plants.

1) Sliding scale of wages and hours. The fight against unemployment and inflation is certainly timely now and becomes more so as the current recession gets worse. Moreover, the current auto contract talks provide opportunities to discuss the UAW escalator and its relation to our concept. The contract also opens the door to discuss the UAW's obligation to fight against unemployment and inflation for all.

2) Class independence of the working class. This fight has many elements, all relevant. The fight for union democracy, which

includes, for instance, the right of UAW workers to know the content of negotiations, to see and read the contract, to be able to discuss the contract, etc. The element of solidarity, demonstrated here in the Bay Area many times in the last year in struggles from Newport News to Safeway to BART. The element of political action and a social strategy, highlighted recently by Henning's statement, for his own reasons, of the need for a new political course for labor.

In short, the current situation is one ripe in opportunities for us, for discussion of some of our fundamental ideas. More and more, the situation cries out for a new strategy--ours. More and more workers are looking for and willing to discuss these ideas. We have seen this time and again in our industrial fractions here and in the labor battles here in the last year. And it's sensed by all. It's no accident that the Wall Street Journal recently printed the kind of article it did on labor and the 50th anniversary of the depression. Of the 50 years since then they chose 1934 and the social battles then.

Henning's call for a labor party fits in here. The labor bureaucracy is not dumb. It sees that the future is not getting any brighter for them. The ruling class attack makes life more difficult for them, harder to produce results that will satisfy their ranks. They also know the mood of workers and what it will take in the long run to meet their demands. In this situation it is only natural that the idea of breaking with the Democrats and Republicans arises, just as it does on the lines we work on. As part of the fightback locals, individuals, official leaders are going to talk about independent political action and a labor party.

Henning's statement is part of this process. What his motivation is and what he really is after is not the key to us. What is most important to us is the facts of the objective situation that produce a Henning statement. What is relevant is that a leading body of the state AFL-CIO discussed and voted on a statement calling for a discussion about a labor party and then printed it or a description of it on page one of their paper two issues in a row.

Henning's initiative deepens and legitimizes a process that is already underway. He calls for a discussion, and a discussion there will be. In other words, this is an ongoing discussion, which we must participate in.

The basic conclusion that we can draw from the opportunities in the situation we face is that we need our 1980 campaign for the US Senate in California right now. Not having the campaign running at a good clip right now has hampered our ability to take advantage of the growing opportunities to spread the truth about Nicaragua and other questions of world and national politics. A candidate who had been stumping the state right now on the eve of the NOW convention campaigning to ratify the ERA would be a big help. It would give us a further propaganda tool today to say what we think on Henning's proposal.

Specifically on the Henning/Labor Party aspect: In our previous discussion of Henning's initiative we outlined the following things

to do: 1) We wanted to use Henning's statement to advance one-to-one discussions on the job. We thought we could xerox Henning's statement and give it to co-workers and get into some discussions on it. Out of that we could ourselves learn what others are thinking and how to better formulate our ideas. It is a good vehicle for explaining our entire strategy and therefore for doing some good contact work. 2) We thought we could take steps to advance Henning's discussion in formal, organized ways. Here, we hoped to get local papers to reprint the statement and invite discussion in the letters. Also, we are seeking to get education committees or other official union bodies to give talks on the question of a labor party. In addition, we want to, where possible, pass motions hailing Henning's initiative and urging him to take further steps, such as organizing the discussion thoroughly throughout the state. Similarly, we favor individual union locals sending their officers to the upcoming statewide meeting to consider the labor party. 3) In addition to its other tasks, we want to use Sylvia's campaign for Mayor in San Francisco to advance the labor party idea. We want to make an attempt to get Sylvia before as many union meetings as possible. 4) We want as much as possible to bring the discussion of the labor party, that we know is going on, into the light of day through the pages of the Militant. Here we want to interview labor officials on their feelings on Henning's proposals and then report them in the paper.

Our industrial fractions obviously will help take the lead in this effort. But, all our fractions around the state could use an election campaign to round out and lead our work around the call for discussion of the labor party.

If we had the 1980 senatorial campaign right now, it could aid our labor party propaganda by: 1) making a candidate available for meetings all over the state. This means for union meetings, campaign meetings, and informal gatherings in someone's home, to discuss the campaign--including the idea of a labor party. 2) issue statements and make speeches that are current--that is that fit in and help our industrial fractions' efforts to formulate and make more precise our ideas. Our candidate could also help by bringing experiences from one end of the state to the other. 3) Our candidate could intervene where appropriate. For instance, right now it would be good for a party spokesperson to try to talk with Henning. 4) In general our 1980 campaign will be the most visible vehicle of all our big propaganda efforts.

This is how the labor party idea and our election campaign fit together. The 1980 campaign will help all our party campaigns in a similar way. So the important proposal in the report is to begin now to put together the 1980 California state campaign.

We must begin now to discuss the candidate. We will want to run, if possible, an industrial worker. Led correctly, the campaign can inspire the party and help deepen the colonization into targeted plants.

In this respect we want to especially emphasize the statewide character of the campaign. Here it is important for our fractions to be involved from the beginning in planning, developing and leading the

campaign. One idea in this regard is to convene statewide meetings of our growing industrial fractions to discuss out the best use of our campaign to advance our work. In the course of a day or two we could discuss out how best to concretize the political points we want to cover, character of meetings, how to use the campaign to talk to our co-workers, literature, tours, youth support, funds and other aspects of the campaign. In general, we should expect that the industrial fractions can play a big role in leading and setting the tone for the campaign.

One important aspect of the campaign that must be decided on is the question of ballot status. Although we don't have to decide here today, the proposal is that we decide to get on the ballot and plan to launch an ambitious campaign to do it. Political developments dictate that we do this. The revolution in Nicaragua, recession in the economy, the fight for the ERA--all point to an ambitious campaign and one therefore that has the most authority. This means being on the ballot.

With the petition drive--as with the entire campaign--we have a new political situation and a new party to take into account. In 1976 the need for a turn was not as obvious as it is today, and in 1976 we did not have large industrial fractions around the state. Thus in 1980 we can look forward to conducting the campaign and the petitioning in a new way--as part of our turn and helping to deepen it. We can look forward to the industrial fractions playing a new role in the petition drive. Each fraction will need to discuss this out--what areas where co-workers live and shop would be good places to petition, how to petition in plants where we are, how to combine with other activities, etc. If our fractions can set an example in this manner, it will inspire the entire party in all the aspects of petitioning, which, of course, we will carry out: teams, big mobilizations, etc.

So, therefore, we should propose to the other party units in the state and to the national office that California become a major project of the 1980 national campaign.

With the 1980 senatorial campaign we have the opportunity to move the Bay Area forward in the "turn." If we can do the things outlined here, the campaign will make the turn more concrete to members still looking to be convinced to get into industry. It will inspire and therefore advance the turn.

In this regard there is a relationship between the 1980 campaign, our fractions, and completing the turn. We are now building fractions with some success in five priority plants. This process is well under way--we are clear on where we are going and know how to go about accomplishing our goals. In a sense it's only a matter of time until we reach where we think we ought to be. Moreover, our fractions are just now getting into a position--off probation with some experience--to do some good work relating to the situation in the plant and around Nicaragua, sales, subs, Iran, raising the labor party idea, etc. This work will inspire the party and show what can be done. The 1980 election campaign can help generalize, lead and organize this work.

There is, right now, a sizable layer of party members who are working with the jobs committees trying to get into key places. They will succeed in time. There is another layer that is ready to be politically inspired to get into industry. The work of the party and the fractions will convince them.

Thus, we can say that we are going in the right direction, and moreover the election campaign gives us a good vehicle to accelerate and make better the whole process. The current opportunities around Henning are simply a little gravy on the whole thing.

So, we need the campaign right now. Fred and Matilde's tours here this fall will be the first installments of this campaign.

Our solidarity campaign for the Nicaraguan revolution is a central priority. This work means spreading the truth about the revolution as widely as possible and to participate in the movement demanding material aid to the revolution.

This is an unfolding revolution, led by youth. It's already having a major impact on world politics. The revolution in Nicaragua is inspiring the oppressed and exploited masses of Central America and Latin America and may lead to its emulation. Most comrades were not in the party at the time of the Cuban revolution and did not see the effect of that revolution on Latin America and world politics, but the effects can be the same, only in a new world context.

In the USA the Nicaraguan revolution will provoke two reactions at least. On the one hand will be the overt aggression of the rulers, who are preparing their steps. On the other will be the reactions of working people, who will not support intervention in Nicaragua, and as the truth is spread will increasingly be inspired by developments in the revolution.

Thus big changes in world politics are coming. We have already mentioned the state of world economy and the evolution of working people's thinking in the U.S. From Central American now comes another changed aspect.

All this leads to the need to establish our campaign for political and material aid for Nicaragua as a central aspect of party work. Key to this is the need to get the facts and truth out about Nicaragua and Cuba. Sales of the paper are key--one needs no better motivation for the current sales and sub drive. PM sales especially can get really established through the Nicaraguan revolution. Our weekly forums can play a similar role.

Here in the Bay Area 70,000 Nicaraguans reside (and 40,000 El Salvadoreans), most of whom support the revolution. Casa Nicaragua and Nicaraguan consul have ties to the community and together provide a powerful organizing core for a solidarity movement that can draw together a wide range of forces with diverse political views and affiliations.

We can expect that American workers will react strongly to an attempted intervention in Nicaragua. The campaign to get the truth

out and to get people participating and committed to the campaign for aid is good preparation for mobilizing that sentiment--especially among industrial workers--if military intervention takes place.

This focuses another light on the role of the industrial fractions. As American imperialism considers overt intervention, one factor they will weigh is the potential opposition among workers. To the extent that that opposition can be organized, to that extent will Washington's hand be stayed.

Already the auto and rail fractions have discussed Nicaraguan activities. These fractions are now attempting, for instance, to get meetings for Casa Nicaragua in local meetings or just informal meetings at someone's house. Other support activity is being elaborated. Our aim is to aid the Nicaraguan people and thus also lay the best basis for the response to the anticipated Washington aggression in Nicaragua.

The 1980 state campaign would be a big addition to the work. We need right now to have a candidate barnstorming the state telling the truth about the situation in Nicaragua, warning of the danger of American intervention, and helping to organize the aid campaign. A socialist presentation of what is involved in Nicaragua would aid in the recruitment of the activists we are going to meet in this work. This is also true in the plants.

Going side by side with our Nicaraguan revolution support activity is our sales. The Militant and Perspectiva are the best sources of news, analysis and support for the revolution. Already readers are coming into our San Francisco bookstore looking for the latest issues, especially of Perspectiva. Our papers are an indispensable aspect of our support work. The current sales and sub drive gives us the opportunity to get launched on the right foot.

Similarly the Militant and PM will be the best source of news about the 1980 election campaign. Reportage on the fight for the ERA will be unequalled. In short, the Militant is more needed than ever by its readers and potential readers in the plants and yards. We can look forward to increased sales to industrial workers where the center of our work is. In the remainder of the sales drive we want to put special emphasis, therefore, on our plant gate sales--making them the political center of our sales effort. Even though we won't sell the bulk of our papers at plant gates, centering our sales there makes the political point that these are our most important sales.

Other aspects of our sales need improvement, but if we begin with the plant gate sales, they will fall into place easier. Among these aspects are improving sales regularity at particular times and places, improving our political meeting sales, sub drive organization, etc.

The fight for the Equal Rights Amendment is beginning an important and perhaps decisive stage. In Virginia important figures in the labor movement and in the women's liberation movement have united around a tactical approach which, if generalized in the entire

country, could win the fight for the ERA. This approach of attempting to mobilize labor independently of the ruling class is just what has been needed.

The Virginia/LERN call for actions in December 2-8 and January 13 can be important actions and stepping off points for the final stage of the fight for the ERA. These actions will provide the axis for our participation in the forthcoming NOW conference.

Here in the Bay Area we will want to play our part in establishing a LERN-type mobilization. Aiding NOW and CLUW in efforts to mobilize labor for the ERA will be a central aspect of work for the foreseeable future.

Here again the 1980 campaign will be an indispensable ingredient.

The thrust of this report is to indicate that the center of politics and our work is in the plants. Having the center there, of course, is relatively new in American politics--at least in the last 2 to 3 decades. It is thus new for our members--those in plants, those not yet in and those not yet convinced.

Politics on the job is an 8-hour (at least) per day experience, and the discussion is not simply around one thing or an aspect. These plant discussions run the full gamut and involved is a consideration of the most concrete grievance to what makes capitalism act the way it does and why society doesn't have to be this way. Such discussions prompt a need for education, to return to the basics of our movement.

A fall campaign to study many of our most fundamental works was projected at the convention. This campaign is particularly important to us. This education is not about academic, abstract, or old ideas. It involves ideas that are of everyday usage in the plants. They involve ideas we will want to popularize in our election campaign.

We need to put together these series soon, as well as plan a fall educational conference. With a district we can offer help to branches in these educational plans. But our goal should be to have many of the classes led by those comrades who are leading party activity as branch leaders in the plants.

Defense of our comrades in Iran and support for revolutionary developments there will be a continuing important element of party activity. In the most immediate sense helping the Committee to Save the Iranian 14 is our key task. Industrial fractions can play a big role here.

The YSA is just now getting its members into plants where we have fractions. We now look forward to a YSA component in these fractions. As our work develops, it will naturally involve regular collaboration with the youth. We want to promote this collaboration now as much as possible.

It would seem that a great deal of the YSA's immediate future can be tied up with the Nicaraguan revolution, a revolution that after all was made by youth and will inspire youth. An active participation in the Nicaraguan aid work will put the YSA into the center of world politics, bring them in contact with radicalizing youth and

give authority to the organization.

In previous perspectives discussions we have discussed a great deal, branch perspectives and our colonization perspectives. This report has nothing new to add to those discussions. We have consolidated the Berkeley and Oakland branches into an East Bay branch that is doing well and we have no plans at this time to consolidate more or to set up new branches.

Our concrete colonization perspectives are clear now, after some discussion on establishing priorities. We should reaffirm our colonization perspective of implementing the national convention decision on building national fractions in certain key industries through establishing substantial fractions in the Pittsburg steel plant, in the UTU in the Oakland yard, in the GM/Fremont plant, in the Ford/Milpitas plant, and in the Mack truck plant.

In conclusion, we will want to go from here to our District Convention. We will want to use the District Convention to launch the 1980 campaign following agreement with comrades in Los Angeles and San Diego. Thus, we will want to plan this convention as soon as possible. That will involve discussions with other party units in the state and with the national office about the big plans and particulars of the campaign.

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OCT 3 1979

October 1, 1979
San Francisco, Ca.

Political Committee, SWP

A discussion will shortly take place in the branches here around the perspectives report referred to in the enclosed statement. Because of the ramifications of this discussion on the party as a whole I want to make certain we do not stumble over some procedural question and therefore solicit from you your suggestions for correct procedure to follow in branch discussions.

Comradely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Nat".

September 30, 1979

Nat Weinstein
489 27th St.
S.F., Ca. 94131

Political Committee, S.W.P.

Dear Comrades,

(I voted against the tasks and perspectives report by Comrade Lou Jones presented to the S.F. Bay Area District Committee of the S.W.P. -- a copy of which I presume has been forwarded to you. As a member of the National Committee, I feel it proper to make my statement available to the National Committee as a whole.)

At the heart of the Jones report is the proposal to center the California election campaign of the party on the labor party slogan. This proposal follows the action taken by the 1979 SWP national convention to similarly center the presidential campaign on the need for a labor party based on the unions.

But questions in my mind expressed at the time of the Spring 1979 party plenum in N.Y. as to what was meant by the proposed labor party focus of our national presidential campaign has developed into deeper concern by this latest interpretation of our labor party policy.

I want to state once again so that there should be no misunderstanding, I am completely in favor of the correct tactical application of our labor party slogan. The question that is in dispute is the correct way to use the slogan.

The Jones proposal, as we shall see, goes beyond permissible propaganda, educational speeches and statements by our candidates and would involve the party more intensely in a labor party agitational campaign than I believe is warranted. The labor party campaign being proposed would be justified if it was in response to evidence of heightened labor party sentiment within the workingclass. Of course the need for a labor party seems, to those already convinced, to grow greater with each manifestation of the bankruptcy of class collaborationism. But, I repeat, there is as yet no overt evidence produced that this has resulted in any significant growth of labor party sentiment in the union ranks -- and it is the union ranks that are our central target.

The Jones report included a proposal for a U.S. Senatorial campaign in California and a petitioning effort to place state and national SWP candidates on the California ballot with which I concur. But Comrade Jones also projects a petition campaign stressing mobilization of our industrial comrades in the plants to gather a considerable bulk of the necessary signatures from among their co-workers. Whether

a significant number of signatures can be gathered in the workplace as proposed, is highly questionable, and the price we would pay for the effort would be too high. It would result

in an indiscriminate exposure of our industrial comrades as open members of the SWP without regard to specific conditions in each plant and the particular status of each comrade.

This goes counter to all our experience in the unions and to everything written on the subject by Trotsky, Cannon, Dobbs and Kerry. Such a socialist "coming out" would erect an obstacle to effective participation by our comrades in the struggles that will erupt with increasing frequency on the job. Generally speaking, identifying all industrial worker comrades as open SWP members at this stage of our entry into the industrial unions will tend to exclude them from playing the most modest roles in leading struggles on the job.

Such a campaign to gather SWP nominating petitions on the job violates the most elementary rule of revolutionists to carefully determine who should and who should not function as open SWPers. It replaces a flexible approach with a rigid tactical prescription.

Of course, it is entirely possible and necessary to orient and encourage comrades to find ways to get out our ideas and our press that are reasonable and sober, and as circumstances permit.

The effect of a wholesale socialist "coming out" that such a petitioning campaign would incur will have virtually the same objective effect as a blanket proscription against fraction intervention into union struggles around safety, speedup, union security and other such issues, except as passive participants carried along by events.

Worse yet, despite such a policy of self-isolation comrades will be caught up, willy-nilly, in the heat of events and find themselves providing convenient, albeit unwitting, targets for the bosses and their tools inside the unions.

By opening ourselves up so heedlessly to ready victimization at the hands of the bosses we will harm the party's credibility as a revolutionary workers' organization that knows how to fight. Such a turn of events, too, would contribute to demoralization and thus add to the ultimate effect of forcing ourselves onto the sidelines in upcoming struggles.

It might be argued that we should avoid taking responsibility for the guerrilla-like confrontations breaking out so long as the class collaborationists continue to retain their hold over the unions; that these encounters will almost always end in setbacks under these circumstances. My view, simply stated, is that such experiences are an inevitable stage workers must go through to reach class struggle consciousness. We must go through these experiences with them -- not blindly and passively, but as revolutionists -- attempting to whatever extent possible to intervene with class struggle methods. It is only in this way we will learn how to apply our program to the real live struggle, and prepare ourselves for the decisive battles to come.

Light is shed on the thinking behind the misuse of the labor party slogan by the proposal for comrades in our industrial fractions to petition on the job to put the party on the California ballot. Together they show a tendency toward a purely propagandist approach toward intervention in the unions. According to this method, socialist propaganda which includes the use of the labor party slogan to help explain our ideas is counterposed to the method of the transitional program. Jones' report, as presented, leads the party in the direction of sectarian abstention from those struggles in the plants out of which a class struggle left wing can and will emerge.

The political line of this report goes counter to the SWP program and I therefore vote no.



Nat Weinstein
San Francisco Branch

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
October 25, 1979

Bay Area District Committee
San Francisco

Dear Comrades,

On October 3, the Political Committee received the two attached letters from Nat Weinstein indicating his disagreement with the perspectives report on the 1980 California election campaign adopted by the Bay Area District Committee in order to implement the convention decisions. He also asks for our opinion on the correct procedures to follow in light of his disagreements.

I was going to be in California in connection with other business, and it was possible to stay an extra two days and discuss these matters with Nat and Lew Jones, the District Organizer, and then with the National Committee and Control Commission members in the Bay Area, and two of the three branch organizers. Thus I was able to speak with a majority of the members of the District Committee. I would have liked to stay longer and meet with the district committee as a whole, but it was not possible. All the comrades I discussed with agreed it would be useful to report these discussions to the Political Committee, and for it to write a letter to the Bay Area District Committee concerning these issues.

* * *

The two political disagreements raised by Nat concern the role of the labor party slogan in our election campaign propaganda, and the broad guidelines for the functioning of our comrades in industry. What's fundamentally at issue politically is not the Lew's preliminary perspectives report on launching the 1980 California election campaign adopted by the District Committee but the perspectives decided by the party's national convention in August.

First, on labor party propaganda in our election campaign. The party's approach to this question was laid out in the Political Committee's report "The Working Class Alternative in the 1980 Elections," adopted by the National Committee in April (see SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 36, No. 4, June 1979), and in the Political Resolution and the Political Committee's report on the resolution, both of which were adopted by the National Convention in August. (See Party Organizer, Vol. 3, Nos. 5 and 6, October 1979.)

In the report on the Political Resolution we explained:

"Objectively, there's no question that the need for and timeliness of the labor party is greater now than in any previous presidential campaign we've run. Moreover, there's an increasing ability to get a hearing on this among working people. Comrades in our industrial fractions confirm this assessment and we put it to a successful test in the Chicago mayoralty campaign of Andrew Pulley.

(over)

"We must adjust how we present this slogan to the current mentality of the workers and the stage of development in the overall class struggle. That's why we project the slogan right now, not as an agitational campaign, but as an important general axis of our election propaganda. That's the way we explain to fellow workers our alternative to the bankruptcy of the two-party system and the labor bureaucracy's dead-end reliance on the Democratic Party.

"Whether, how, and under what conditions the labor party will emerge as a slogan of agitation and action will depend on big changes and advances in the class struggle that we can't foresee. They've not yet ripened.

"But whatever specific issue our campaign is concentrating on-- whether it be a war threat, the energy crisis, layoffs and double-digit inflation, organizing the open shop states, or the fight for Black, Chicano and women's rights--it gives us an occasion to explain in this election year the need for a labor party to carry these struggles onto the political level.

"We explain this to our co-workers and to as many other workers as we can reach through our campaign. We explain it to the oppressed. We explain it to everyone we talk to during the election campaign. Since people are thinking more about parties and politics at such times, we can get a better hearing. We are expressing our working-class viewpoint on a topic that is being considered and debated in society at large." The adopted resolution and reports develop further aspects of this approach.

In respect to utilizing the excellent opening presented by California AFL-CIO Executive Secretary-Treasurer's Labor Day message calling for discussion on the labor party, the Political Committee has no tactical advice. However, we see nothing in the initiatives outlined in the report adopted by the District Committee that runs counter to our general line on labor party propoganda adopted at the convention. Nothing in the report "goes beyond permissible propoganda, educational speeches and statements by our candidates" or "would involve the party more intensely in a labor party agitational campaign than... is warranted," as Nat charges.

To the contrary our main impression is that, if anything, the District Committee might have decided its course around the Henning statement more quickly and thus been able to move on its campaign around it with greater dispatch. It's clear from my discussions that this is not because the majority of the District Committee have any important differences, but because they hadn't quite made the switch from pre-convention to post-convention functioning. We'll return to this when we discuss procedure.

Nat also objects strongly to the District Committee's decision that it be the norm for comrades in industry to petition on the job for ballot status. He argues that this "would result in an indiscriminate exposure of our industrial comrades as open members of the SWP without regard to specific conditions in each plant and the particular status of each comrade."

He adds that, "The effect of a wholesale socialist 'coming out' that such a petitioning campaign would incur will have virtually the same objective effect as a blanket proscription against fraction intervention into union struggles around safety, speed-up, union security and other such issues, except as passive participants carried along by events."

The difference with adopted party policy here is even clearer than on the question raised about our labor party propaganda.

In the report to the convention on the Political Resolution, which drew on our last four plenum discussions and adopted reports and the growing experience of our industrial fractions, we briefly summarized our position:

"Trotsky and Jim Cannon laid down two basic guidelines that our fractions are finding to be good starting points:

"•Trotsky explained the need for workers to think socially and act politically;

"•Cannon urged us to talk socialism.

"The more progress we make in our turn, the more we've found that these are the best guide for our fractions in industry. We're making the turn precisely because of the burgeoning politicalization and radicalization of sections of the working class. The combination of what is happening to workers on the job and what they see happening to them in capitalist society as a whole causes them to be more and more interested in politics, and more and more to turn to their unions for answers. These are the factors that transform their consciousness and that we must relate to.

"We want to be known on the job by our paper; we're the Militant people, the Perspectiva Mundial people. We've made progress on this. Socialist workers are selling the paper on the job during their own shift and at the gates during other shifts.

"We also like to be known as the supporters of the Militant because in that way our co-workers know who we are when fights spring up around one thing or another. This avoids confusion. We're the advocates of the fight against nuclear power. We're the supporters of Black rights and women's equality. We're the people who are defending the Nicaraguan revolution and think the energy monopolies should be nationalized.

"Comrades are discovering that being a SWP candidate is one of the very best ways of introducing yourself and your ideas on the job. We want to urge our co-workers to become supporters of socialist candidates. Our comrades can take part in the contest of stickers and tee-shirts that goes on in the plants nowadays. We can plaster Pulley and Zimmermann slogans all over ourselves. We can pin a Pulley button next to our Milwaukeegate button."

Maceo Dixon's "Organization and Education Report," discussed and adopted by the convention (see Party Organizer, Vol.3, No.3, September 1979), following the discussion and adoption of the Political Resolu-

tion and report, deals concretely with the question Nat raises:

"Our industrial fractions will play a big role in building the SWP 1980 election campaign. We want to get co-workers involved-- coming to campaign events, carrying out campaign activities on the job, making contributions, holding meetings in the lunchroom, selling buttons, signing and distributing petitions, wearing stickers on hard-hats and Pulley and Zimmermann t-shirts. We want our candidates and their representatives to speak to union meetings. We'll experiment with many different ways of campaigning both in plants where we have fractions and where we don't.

"A big part of the campaign will be petitioning to get on the ballot. We should aim to be on the ballot in as many states as we were in 1976. A place on the ballot gives us opportunities to reach thousands of people that we would otherwise never be able to talk to during the course of the campaign. It adds to the seriousness with which people view the party and our candidates. This becomes even more important as we deepen our roots in the working class. Our party fight to obtain ballot status is also an important part of our ongoing battle for maintaining party legality."

Everybody agrees that we're not going to get a major proportion of our signatures from petitioning in the plants. What we reject is the idea that petitioning in the plants and activities of this kind means:

- 1) a tactical application "without regard to specific conditions in each plant and the particular status of each comrade"; or
- 2) "self-isolation" excluding comrades "from playing the most modest roles in leading struggles on the job."

To the contrary our policy of open socialist activity is precisely one of the ways we are going to get to the "union ranks," that is, the young rebels in the plants. This estimation is based on several years of discussions where we have analyzed the big changes in the objective economic and political situation, closely examined the qualitative changes in the composition and consciousness of the working class, reviewed our programmatic and strategic guidelines, and absorbed the initial experiences of our industrial union fractions.

This general policy that we approved at the convention doesn't mean that all comrades at all times should function openly as socialists on the job. There are comrades on probation, working in open shop conditions, or in particularly difficult situations who may not find it advisable, at least at this time, to function openly. But are we for "a wholesale socialist 'coming out'" in the plants? Yes. While we would choose different terminology, that is our general policy, the norm not the exception. This is what was adopted by the convention and what Nat disagrees with.

Nat says that, "It might be argued that we should avoid taking responsibility for the guerrilla-like confrontations breaking out so long as the class collaborationists continue to retain their hold

over the unions; that these encounters will almost always end in setbacks under these circumstances."

It's true that this argument might be made, but no resolution or report or elected leader of the Socialist Workers Party makes it. In fact the opposite is our policy. As we stated in the political report to the convention:

"Our experience is that the industrial fractions that operate most politically and most audaciously are also becoming the best at union work, at participating with their co-workers in job-related struggles, at drawing militants around them."

Nat also is convinced that talking socialism on the job as practiced by the fractions "leads the party in the direction of sectarian abstention from those struggles in the plants out of which a class struggle left-wing can and will emerge."

But the class struggle left wing will be built around more than just the guerilla-like struggles in the plants, mines and mills. It will grow out of a combination of these struggles and those around broader political and social questions, including the fight for a labor party.

All of these points were dealt with thoroughly during the preconvention discussion, and were taken up in detail in reports and discussion at the convention which set our policies.

* * *

Nat asks for an opinion on correct procedure given his differences with these party policies.

Our guideline on matters of this kind is the organizational resolution adopted by the 1965 party convention. And the key is how we function after a convention. The pertinent section reads:

"While a decision is being reached, comrades holding dissident views receive all normal minority rights, including the right of organized dissent. After a party decision has been made the democratic rights of the majority take precedence. All members are required to accept the majority decision and help to carry it out. Comrades holding minority opinions are not disqualified from serving the party in any capacity; nor are they asked to give up their dissident views. They must simply await a new opportunity to present their views when internal discussion is again formally authorized."

The national convention just two months ago adopted a line for the party's work. We are now applying that line in practice, and in the course of events it will be tested like all political lines. The job of party bodies such as the District Committee is not to attempt to reach consensus, but, after normal discussion, to vote and by majority decision apply the party line.

If the experiences that our industrial union fractions are going through prove some aspect of our line wrong, then it will be the responsibility of our National Committee plenum and the 1981 national convention to change it.

In the case of National Committee members, it is appropriate for them to raise proposals to adjust or otherwise change the line when the National Committee meets in plenary session to review our work and perspectives.

On the specific question of procedure when a District Committee member disagrees with a decision of the District Committee: the general norm is that comrades should not try to use branch meetings to attempt to reopen discussion on questions decided by the convention. However, this does not mean that a District Committee member who feels very strongly about some decision of the District Committee can't state his or her views at a branch meeting. A normal courtesy would be to inform the District Committee if one intends to do so.

The responsibility of all comrades, whether or not they agree with decisions adopted by the convention, is to carry out those decisions. The most important for the party now are:

1) Deepening the party's turn, i.e. getting the big majority of comrades into targeted fractions in basic industry. Through the experiences of these fractions we will learn what adjustments in our policies to make.

2) Building the solidarity campaign for material and political aid to the revolution in Nicaragua.

3) Organizing the 1980 presidential election campaign, which has as one of its central components, finding ways to propagandize about the need for a labor party.

Nat concludes by saying that he thinks current party policy in the unions in "counterposed to the method of the transitional program" and its application, in at least this one instance by the Bay Area District Committee, "goes counter to the SWP program."

We find it hard to see any programmatic differences that are involved. The important tactical differences will be tested by experience. Plenums of the National Committee and the next convention will determine on the basis of this experience whether or not our methods are at variance with that demonstrated in the Transitional Program.

When the next preconvention discussion period is opened, all comrades will then be able to present their proposals to the party in the Discussion Bulletin and in their branches.

* * *

Nat charges that the course adopted by the party "goes counter to all our experience in the unions and to everything written on the subject by Trotsky, Cannon, Dobbs and Kerry."

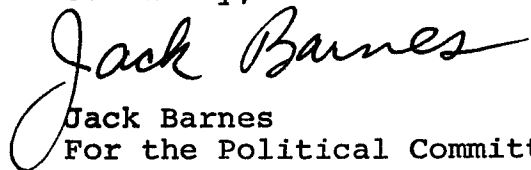
We could easily add the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Lovell and the charge would still be dead wrong.

What we're doing now is drawn from the party's long and rich experience of party building in the unions and is based on the fundamental observations of the masters of Marxism. A review of the resolutions and reports the party has adopted will show how we've carefully reviewed and applied this experience. In several instances we've appended key reports or articles by Trotsky, Cannon and Dobbs as special guides. And the manuscript of a new book collecting some of Tom Kerry's articles written over the past few years on the party's approach to the American labor movement is in the final stages of being prepared for the printshop.

Above all, the experience of the Teamsters strikes in Minneapolis and the over-the-road organizing drive has been our richest guide. The nature of that period and the character of the experiences of the communist workers who led these struggles are the most relevant for our union work today. It is well worth the time of comrades to read or re-read, as the case may be, Farrell Dobbs' four-volume account of this experience. Also, as we've pointed out several times, the strategic conceptions presented in the Afterword to Teamster Bureaucracy have been the single most important guide in hammering out our present course.

Since questions of party procedure in the post-convention period have been raised, comrades on the District Committee might find it of value to re-read "The Organizational Character of the Socialist Workers Party," the organizational resolution adopted by the 1965 convention; and Farrell Dobbs' three classes on the "Structure and Organizational Principles of the Party," where he outlines in greater detail the background to the resolution. This material is all available in Education for Socialists Bulletins from Pathfinder Press.

Comradely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jack Barnes". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Jack Barnes
For the Political Committee