

October 17, 1973

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Political Committee  
Socialist Workers Party

Dear Comrades,

This letter is to inform the Political Committee of what I consider to be useless and destructive harassment by leading members of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction in the Oakland/Berkeley branch.

On Tuesday evening, Oct. 16, I was informed by the Branch Organizer (Frank Boehm) that I should appear before a "Special Sub-committee" of the newly-elected branch Executive Committee, on the following night -- Wednesday, Oct. 17. I was told that a member of the branch Financial Committee, Ernie Mailhot, had signed a statement making certain allegations against me.

This statement claims that on Sept. 12 comrade Mailhot held a meeting with me to discuss branch finances. Comrade Mailhot states that I was unwilling to increase my sustainer to the branch to more than \$3/week, and attributes the following rationale to me: "...although he wasn't contributing to the branch he was contributing to the party because the money he wasn't giving in the form of a sustainer he was contributing to the SWP tendency which supports the IEC Majority Tendency." Comrade Mailhot also claims that I stated that such funds were being used by American IMT supporters to conduct national speaking tours of IMT leaders, to make phone calls, and for "sending special letters such as the Barzman letter." Mailhot also claims that the attitude I expressed was that I would contribute more money to the SWP if I wasn't giving so much to the Tendency supporting the IMT.

Comrade Mailhot's statement is a willful distortion of our conversation, perpetrated in order to bolster up a false picture that members of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction have been trying to create. Mailhot doesn't even hesitate to include wild absurdities in his fabrications. His submission of the letter as testimony against me, and the establishment of this new Inquisitionary Body (the "Special Sub-committee"), are simply an escalation of the warfare which has been waged against supporters of the IMT -- and, in fact, against other advocates of minority views for several years.

I categorically deny that I told Comrade Mailhot that present financial obligations to tendencies supporting the IMT were preventing me from raising my sustainer to the SWP. During the times that such dual obligations might exist, they are separate considerations.

The truth is that I went to great lengths to explain to him my general overall financial situation. Comrade Mailhot knew at that time that since Jan., 1973, I had been an unemployed student -- and in fact at the time of the Sept. 12 interview I was still unable to locate work.

Nevertheless, all during the period of the SWP's preconvention discussion, and in the months following it, I had maintained a sustainer (\$10/month) which was not qualitatively different from many other unemployed students in the branch who supported the Leninist-Trotskyist faction. And this was in spite of the fact that the SWP leadership was

then refusing to separate the expenses of its own International Tendency from the SWP's income as a whole. (I understand from Comrade Sheppard's report to our branch on Oct. 15, that from now on the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction will collect contributions from individuals for its activities. However, as of yet no mention has been made of the Faction's paying back our party for expenses incurred by the faction prior to the implementation of this new method.) Furthermore, I had recently made a pledge of \$25 to the special fund-drive for the New Headquarters.

Therefore, despite my low (or nonexistent) income, I do not believe that my general financial relationship to the party -- and the fact that I could only slightly increase my sustainer on Sept. 12 -- demonstrates an unco-operative attitude.

However, at the end of our interview I did attempt to explain to Comrade Mailhot some of my opinions regarding the financial methods which had been employed by the SWP's Majority Faction in the previous period. I told him that I did not think it was correct for the SWP's Majority to require all minority tendencies within its own national section to finance all expenses during the preconvention discussion period. I pointed to the French Trotskyists as having a preferable method because they establish a special fund to pay the required expenses of all tendencies. I stated that the SWP Majority's approach obligates supporters of a minority to raise their own funds during the preconvention discussion for national tours, phone calls, and communications.

Does Comrade Mailhot really expect anyone to believe that I seriously forward the "Barragan Letters" as an example of a major expense? The attitude supporters of the IMT have expressed -- and which was put in writing by Bill Massey -- is that those letters were private correspondence which were purloined and not any mass mailing which the National Office had the right to intercept.

Comrade Mailhot purposefully twisted certain comments that I made regarding the last preconvention discussion period, and tried to make it seem as if I were employing them in regard to the present. (And I will note that the Sept. 12 discussion took place about a month before I knew about the "Special" December Convention.)

Furthermore, I do not consider Mailhot's misrepresentation to be a mere accident or misunderstanding. On Monday, Sept. 17, Comrade Mailhot approached another IMT supporter, Alan W., during the branch meeting's intermission. He told Comrade Alan essentially what he has put in his Sept. 12 statement. He asked Comrade Alan if he agreed with the false remarks attributed to me. Comrade Alan expressed disbelief that I had made such remarks, and he called me over to confirm or deny them.

At that time I clearly and explicitly denied making those remarks. I told Comrade Mailhot that he had either grossly misunderstood me, or else was willfully distorting. Comrade Mailhot did not contest this clarification -- but simply walked away and never raised the matter again with me. Obviously I assumed that the issue was settled. However, Comrade Mailhot went on to spread this false story privately (which I can prove) and never mentioned the fact that I denied making the remarks! Then he offered his statement of September 12th to be employed by this new Inquisitionary Body.

If Ernie had merely hoped to reach an understanding with me or gain clarification on these matters, then the whole dispute would have ended right there on September 17 when I informed him that I did not hold the views he was attributing to me. Clearly Comrade Ernie had other reasons for acting as he did. His primary concern is the campaign of the branch leadership against IMT supporters. He is striving to carry out that line. His crude attempt to make it appear as if I was counterposing the stolen Barzman letters -- which are falsely construed as "disloyal" communications -- to giving money to the SWP, is an example of where his struggle to mechanically carry out this line dominates over any semblance of common sense.

Comrade Sheppard explained to our branch on Oct. 15 that the "slate had been wiped clean" at the SWP convention, regarding the false charges of disloyalty made against IMT supporters. How can this be so when IMT supporters are denied representation on our own party's National Committee? That fact is a clear indication of the refusal of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction to permit supporters of the IMT to be fully integrated into our party. No wonder then, that the new Executive Committee, which established the new Special Sub-committee, was elected on a factional basis: the branch Organizer notified the membership that since supporters of the IMT were designated as "disloyal," none should get on the Executive Committee because that would force the Leninist-Trotskyist members to hold private exclusionary meetings each week. What has been happening in our own branch flows directly from the fact that we were excluded from National Committee representation -- despite all the pious talk about "wiping the slate clean."

In my own case, I arrived at the Sept. 18 branch meeting to discover that my own assignment -- heading up U.S.L.A. work -- was being switched to another comrade (a Leninist-Trotskyist Faction supporter). When I protested that I had not even been consulted on this matter, the Organizer then announced to the branch that the assignment had really been changed last Spring! That would be rather amazing since this is one of the largest branches in the country and that particular area of work had been designated by the SWP national leadership as a key one. To have no one assigned for the Summer would have been quite irresponsible.

Under present circumstances I can fully understand how many comrades might disbelieve Sheppard's claims about the "slate being wiped clean." I can fully understand how some comrades might feel that financial contributions to the branch and N.O. are largely being used to maintain the activities of a leadership which puts its own narrow interests ahead of our entire party and the World Trotskyist movement. Although I will continue to contribute to the SWP according to my ability, I can only regard this new Special Sub-committee as a harassment device, set up by the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction as a result of their frustrated attempts to drive IMT supporters from our own party.

I urge the P.C. to take steps at once to turn this situation around. And we can only begin by full integration of supporters of the IMT into the party on all levels, including the national leadership. Also required is a halt to provocative acts on a local level -- these will not drive us out, and only interfere with our party's political work and the political importance of the international discussion.

United Secretariat  
Bill Massey

Comradely,

*Lew Pepper*

Lew Pepper, IMT Supporter  
Oakland-Berkeley SWP