

30 December 1973

To the membership and Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party:

This is my letter of resignation.

I am motivated to resign on grounds of principle.

My membership in the SWP is no longer compatible with my commitment to the advance of science in all areas, including human affairs. In my opinion, the SWP has abandoned Marxism and has seriously compromised the principles of party democracy.

Although I personally respect many individual comrades and continue to have high regard for them, I no longer have confidence in the ability or willingness of the leadership to approach any question from the standpoint of Marxism, rather than from such hostile standpoints as reformism, liberal do-gooderism, workerism, neo-Christian charity-mongering, opportunism, or what have you.

The "Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement", approved at last summer's Convention, is testimony to the degree to which the SWP has turned against Marxism. Any genuine Marxist reading that wretched melange of fallacies, lies, doubletalk, and mysticism, would recognise everything that Marxism is opposed to.

I and other comrades fought against the "Memorandum" and for a Marxist approach to gay liberation. We presented a classic historical materialist analysis of homosexual behavior, the development of anti-homosexual taboos, superstitions, and persecutions. The analysis was backed up by considerable evidence of the sort that Marxists use, and suggestions were offered as to where the doubtful could obtain still further evidence. We--and all of the evidence--argued that homosexual behavior, in historical perspective, is by no means unnatural, pathological, or in any way an aberration. Rather, it is the anti-homosexual taboos and persecutions accompanying class society that must be considered transitory historical phenomena.

This analysis, though an application of classic Marxism backed up by abundant historical, anthropological, and statistical evidence, was not acceptable to the leadership of the SWP. Why, we don't know. The leadership has not made its real reasons known, and certainly the rationalisations contained in the "Memorandum", or in Barry Sheppard's final contribution, are not to be taken at face value. I frankly believe that the bigotry and ignorance of a few leaders were allowed to carry greater weight in this discussion than reality--this, accompanied by the intellectual cowardice of other leaders and an opportunistic unwillingness to champion an unpopular cause merely because it was the correct and principled thing to do.

The leadership chose not to answer us with a reasoned analysis backed up by evidence. It had no evidence. Instead, lies, intimidation, and accusations of disloyalty were used. Now, it is true that we were permitted to have our contributions printed in the discussion bulletins, and to debate our positions

in pre-convention discussion, so democracy was not entirely violated. Also, we were not subjected to physical violence. On the other hand, comrades in the leadership falsely branded our positions as "counter-cultural" and "poly-vanguardist", and comrades were led to believe that loyalty to the leadership demanded supporting the "Memorandum". In the Upper West Side Branch, the secondary leadership made every effort to line up comrades so that one after the other, like witnesses at the Moscow Trials, they came forward to say, "Comrades--I support the Memorandum". Grossly contradictory arguments were thrown out, arguments ranging from the idiotic to the deceitful. But the arguments were irrelevant. The only important thing was putting yourself on the line in support of a leadership decision. This is how Stalinists are made.

It should be noted, however, that under the risk of ostracism, many comrades courageously came forward to argue for a principled, Marxist approach to gay liberation.

The Convention was less than a model of democracy. Although no issue had aroused greater controversy, there was allowed no separate point on the agenda to discuss the "Memorandum" and the pro-gay-liberation counter-resolution, thus rendering impossible a full discussion.

Since the Convention, the anti-gay implications of the "Memorandum" have become clear to even the most gullible. Coverage of the gay liberation movement in the Militant has ceased. In New York, several YSA comrades who had been recruited out of the gay liberation movement were forced to sever their connections with the Gay Activists Alliance.

In three television appearances, the SWP mayoral candidate did not once mention gay rights, although several bourgeois candidates stated their support for the homosexual rights bill, Intro 475. The Free Libertarian candidate, appearing on the same television panel with our candidate, made a strong case for doing away with "crimes without victims", including laws against homosexuality. What did our candidate say? He changed the subject.

When with regard to gay liberation the party finds itself straddling the class barricades, and at times on the wrong side of the class barricades, this is related to a neglect of Marxism. For over two years I tried unsuccessfully to get Marxism taught as part of the Upper West Side Branch's educational program. At one time in the SWP's history, classes in Marxism were an important part of the party's activity. No more.

When I was on the branch's Education Committee in 1971, I pressed for a series on the basic ideas of Marxism. The most amazing hostility to Marxism was expressed. I was told that "we" didn't believe in learning through books--only from activity. A "leading comrade" said "we" preferred not to teach Marxism directly, but only indirectly through educationals on current events, party history, etc. The Education Director thought a comrade's suggestion of having an educational on alienation was hilarious and "off the wall"; he had really never heard that Marxism contained an analysis of alienation, and he was unaware

of the excellent pamphlet on alienation published by Pathfinder.

About a year later, an Education Committee report mentioned the possibility of a seminar on The German Ideology. Despite much interest in the seminar, the idea was dropped without explanation. I argued in a tasks and perspectives discussion for a Marxist educational series. The organiser sympathised, but painted the sad picture of overworked leading comrades who hadn't time for such pleasures as book reading.

Later, when I was again assigned to the Education Committee, I pushed more aggressively for Marxist education. I prepared a questionnaire which branch members used to express their degree of interest in various seminar possibilities. The results showed that the branch had a very high degree of interest in seminars on materialism and on Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution. However, the seminars never occurred and the Education Committee was bureaucratically dissolved--unknown to me or the other committee members. In response to my objections that a projected series of educationals contained nothing Marxist, the Education Director retorted, "If studying about the Cochran fight isn't Marxism, then I don't know what is!"

I submit the following theses:

- *there can be no revolution without revolutionary theory
- *Marxism constitutes revolutionary theory
- *there can be no Marxist movement if Marxism is never taught and if no one is encouraged to study it
- *there can be no Marxist movement if the principles of Marxism are consistently violated in practice
- *there can be no scientific and Marxist approach when authority is appealed to rather than evidence
- *a movement cannot be democratic if people are afraid--with cause--to express a dissenting opinion
- *a movement cannot be democratic if rank and file members do not know what decisions are made, do not know by whom decisions are made, and do not know the reasons behind decisions
- *anti-intellectualism is antithetical to Marxism

The atmosphere in the SWP has become stifling. The threat of ostracism hangs over every comrade who offers or appears to offer a dissenting opinion.

Karl Marx was of the opinion that:

"IT IS CERTAINLY NOT OUR TASK TO BUILD UP THE FUTURE IN ADVANCE AND TO SETTLE ALL PROBLEMS FOR ALL TIME, BUT IT IS JUST AS CERTAINLY OUR TASK TO CRITICISE THE EXISTING WORLD RUTHLESSLY. I MEAN RUTHLESSLY IN THE SENSE THAT WE MUST NOT BE AFRAID OF OUR OWN CONCLUSIONS AND EQUALLY UNAFRAID OF COMING INTO CONFLICT WITH THE PREVAILING POWERS."

In the SWP, however, comrades are afraid--with good cause--of coming into conflict with the leadership, even by helping to correct it when it is wrong. And the leadership is afraid of criticising--let alone ruthlessly--the prevailing superstitions about human sexuality. It is afraid to state the historical truth about homosexuality.

I am afraid that success in the antiwar movement has played a part in spoiling the SWP. Visions of masses of people following us, enticed by the verbal magic of our two, three, four, and five word slogans, have lessened the felt need for rigorous analytical thinking based upon material reality, and the need for principled politics.

There is nothing whatever Marxist about pandering to the ignorance, whims and superstitions of the masses. And for my part, I'll add that I am tired of having to submerge my own principles and knowledge of reality out of consideration for the backwardness of the SWP leadership.

There is work that has to be done in changing the world. At this point, I can do more outside of the SWP to work towards the achievement of a rational, truly human society. For one thing, I can participate in the gay liberation movement and say the historical truth about homosexuality. For another, I can teach the various aspects of Marxism.

I take for my ideal Marx's concluding lines in the Preface to Capital: "Every opinion based on scientific criticism I welcome. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now as aforesaid the maxim of the great Florentine is mine: 'Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti.'"

The Florentine Marx referred to was Dante; I believe the Italian might be translated, "Follow your own path, and let the people talk".

s/John Lauritsen