

November 12, 1974

To Political Committee Members

Attached is a memorandum on the history of the party's system of minority representation in the selection of delegates for conventions. The memorandum was drafted by Fred Feldman, upon my request. On September 30, 1974 you received a memorandum on this subject from Peter Camejo.

Comradely,

Gus

The current method of proportional representation in the party (including the various percentages needed to win minority representation) has been in existence since the New York District Convention in the summer of 1935 at the latest. It is not at all certain that it was new at that time, but materials from the first two party conventions are unclear as to delegate selection procedures. For all I can tell at the present time, the present system may have originated in the CP. This system has been used at every convention since the founding of the SWP in 1938.

It has not been a particularly controversial or hotly discussed topic. Until 1973, it does not seem to have penetrated the preconvention discussion bulletins. Many minorities -- including Shachtman, Goldman-Morrow, Wohlforth-Robertson, Marcy, Kirk, Boulton, etc. -- have left no written record of objection to this procedure. The Gregorich-Passan POT also falls into this category.

I found a record of two controversies about this procedure, both in the New York local.

In 1935, the Oehler grouping complained that the election of delegates to the New York District Convention was undemocratic. Although they mentioned the proportional representation procedure, they focused on demanding that the delegate ratio be reduced from one to ten down to one to five.

They charged that the existing method had produced disproportionate representation for the Cannon majority as against the various and sundry minorities. There were four such minorities according to the Oehlerites. The Cannon caucus got 108 votes; the Weber group 12, Oehler 61, and a combination caucus of Musteites and Oehlerites got 6 in Astoria. With 51% of the vote, the Cannon caucus got 65% of the delegates.

Under this system, minorities that are divided against themselves or are very small suffer certain disadvantages.

When the Oehler group left shortly after the NYC convention, they left behind a group of supporters in NYC led by Larry Cohen. As the party convention approached, he also complained about the delegate selection procedure in a circular to the party membership which he apparently distributed in leaflet form:

"According to the instructions of the PC, delegates are to be elected on the basis of one delegate for every ten members. Provision is made whereby if only one delegate is allotted to a branch, he is chosen by the group casting a simple plurality; if two delegates are allotted, 40% of the votes cast are required to elect one; if three, 30%; if four, 25%; if five, 20%, etc. While this at first appears to be a fair proposal, closer examination reveals that what pretends

to be the most democratic of schemes would in fact exclude the only group which offers serious ideological opposition

"Cannon knows very well that our group is not only small, but like any other tendency, decentralized; its supporters are scattered in various branches with seven the highest number in any New York Branch at present." Cohen goes on to complain that his group will have no delegates from NYC even though, on a citywide basis, it has enough for a delegate, since the group did not have enough supporters in any one branch to qualify.

Cohen says that he complained about this to the NC Plenum but got no action. He indicates that NC members from the Muste-Weber group did not support him on this.

An effort was made to deal with the last part of Cohen's complaint (although Cohen's group was long gone by then) in the rules for electing delegates to the first SWP convention in 1938. An October 27, 1937 circular states: "Where, in locals having more than one branch, a political minority established by political resolutions, fails to elect a delegate because of its support being scattered in more than one branch, it shall be entitled to one regular delegate of its own choosing with voice and vote, provided that the total recorded number of its supporters amounts to five or more in the local and two such delegates for thirty-one supporters or more."

This rule or a variation of it may deserve some consideration as we begin to have locals again. Since assignments to a branch within a local are often decided by the local leadership, at least in the case of transfers, the possibility of charges of manipulation could arise in such a situation. In 1973, however, such a rule would not have affected the the delegate selection in either New York or L.A.

There is no indication that this was an issue in the Shachtman fight, probably because of the size of the Shachtman grouping. Goldman and Morrow, who complained about everything, seem to have forgotten about delegate selection. They were an extremely small grouping with only 3 delegates at the 1946 convention. But at their height they had four NCers.

The next dispute was with the Bartellite wing of the Cochran-Clarke grouping in NYC. Here, too, a local convention, not a national convention, was in dispute. The Bartellites did not challenge the general procedure for electing delegates, but only the way it was applied in the Brooklyn Branch.

This situation was described in a letter from Reba Hansen to Rose Karsner on August 2, 1953. Hansen wrote (she was repeating shorthand notes from the meeting; hence the somewhat stenographic style) "Minority of Brooklyn wishes to enter a statement protesting the fact that majority took all

three delegates. The majority of the credentials committee opinion is that this case is a clear-cut and indisputable one. Convention call was adopted with complete unanimity on the basis of representation to convention. It went unchallenged until after the elections took place. In cases of differences, election of delegates is on basis of proportional representation. Brooklyn has 20 members in good standing. A total of 19 votes were cast in branch -- 11 Majority, 6 Minority, 2 Marcyite. Neither the Marcyites nor the Minority achieved 33% to get one third of the delegation."

Reba writes that "The Convention Call spells out representation to be allowed in a 2-way division of vote; a 3-way is implicit in the call."

The Bartellites wanted delegates divided according to proportions between the Majority and the runner-up, the Bartellites. Since the Marcyites did not get enough, they should not be counted in determining delegate representation for the Bartellites, they held.

And that's it as far as I can tell. No further sharp controversies around this, with written documentation, until 1973. I think I remember grumbling by minorities about this, especially after the POT leaders got over their delusions of grandeur in 1971 and realized they were going to be quite small. At the Oakland-Berkeley election meeting, Massey mentioned that the representation system favored the majority over the minority. That, of course, would not have been true had the minority had majority support or even close to it in the branch.

One thing that may have helped produce the spate of complaints at this convention was the absence of any national leaders of the party supporting the minority, plus the absence of any branch under their domination. All of the recent minorities have had the support of at least one and often several National Committee members who were elevated to their positions in the course of normal leadership selection process before differences took tendency form. This was true of Swabeck, Kirk-Kaye, Robertson-Wohlforth, Marcy, and even Boulton. Many of them had firm control of individual branches, assuring them of representation (Milwaukee, Seattle, Buffalo). A minority which is unable to win any national leaders to support it, or get the majority in a single branch vote is at a certain disadvantage -- a well-earned one, in my opinion. I think that explains the spurt of complaints at the last convention, to the extent that they represented anything more than ammunition shipments.

In short, I haven't turned up much. The most interesting discovery is the fact that this has not been a particularly controversial aspect of party life. The original motivations for it have not been laid out in the material I've had at my disposal and no document has attempted to defend it against the rare attacks against it.

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Finally, here's a list of party conventions, delegate ratios, and number of delegates to each convention as far as I know at present.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Ratio (one to ___)</u>	<u>Number of Delegates</u>
1937	20	75
1939	apparently same, but can't find call	78
1940	15	89 (Shactman split)
1942	15	43
1944	10	56
1946	10	117 (Morrow split)
1948	10	103
1950	20	55
1952	10	52
1954	7	48
1957	7	62
1959	7	59
1961	7	59
1963	7	63
1965	7	60
1967	7	55
1969	7	71
1971	7	113
1973 (July-August)	15	75