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PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE DRAFT RESOLUTION

by Murray Zuckoff

The Draft Resolution submitted to the party by the Political Committee contains a number of basic errors in the analysis of prevailing conditions in the American economy and the consciousness of the working class, the Negro people and the youth. It contains a number of self contradictory statements about the objective situation; slurs over the form that the basic drives of American capitalism takes at this time; minimizes the specific character of new conditions in class relations and presents an erroneous picture of the regroupment activity which the party engaged in for the past two years.

The tactical considerations flowing from this, impose an incorrect perspective for the party and a general line which can only be characterized as generally abstentionist, tail-endist and "expectationist". It fails to indicate the necessary steps to be taken in the next period which would link the party to the mass movement and lay the groundwork to make us the revolutionary nucleus in the gathering conflicts.

It is impossible to gather from the Draft whether it considers the war drive of American imperialism the main danger at this conjuncture; whether capitalism is capable of extricating itself from its present crisis; whether this is a conjunctural crisis or deep going social crisis; whether the party must realize the possibility of preparing for a retreat or sharper intervention in the mass arena.

The Draft fails to characterize what is new in the present crisis and its specific dynamics. To the extent that it attempts a partial analysis it is either incorrect, when it states in paragraph #8 that: "Capitalist production is nearing a point where excess capacity imposes serious limitations on further investment for expanded productivity, thereby losing in ability to stimulate boom conditions"-- or it contradicts itself in paragraph #11, where it refers to the "rapid extension of automation".

Paragraph #1 accepts the Theses on the American Revolution and its perspective when it notes that: "Whatever the exact course of history may be, the imperialist drive toward war 'will not cancel out the socialist alternative to capitalism but only pose it more sharply'. Subsequent events confirm this analysis". Yet the rest of the Draft gives no clear indication of the extent to which this period tends to confirm this analysis. There is only passing reference to the necessary work the party must engage in to lay the basis for realizing this development. The Draft creates the impression and mood that the party can only adopt a wait and see attitude until the 1960 presidential election campaign which looms "as the next major political action". (paragraph #33)

It is insufficient and misleading to point to the "next major political action", without indicating how to proceed from now till then. Election campaigns are only one sphere of party activity. They should consolidate, not begin, our activity. Election campaigns is party activity carried on by more concentrated means. If we are not to be reduced to parliamentary cretinism the party must find ways of actively intervening in the labor, Negro and youth arena on a year round basis with a concrete analysis of each arena and proposals for sustained and consistent activity. The party must be capable of linking its "major" political actions with the smaller, less spectacular and unobtrusive political actions. The Draft fails to indicate this need.

The Draft evades the changes and developments in class consciousness. It fails to indicate the line of motion and the direction of the motion of the workers. The Draft indicates that "we may anticipate" and it "may be expected". (para. #6) "...the workers can be expected to break through the present limitations". (para. #13) "Confusion among the workers as to the real aims of the government's labor probe will begin to disappear as the anti-labor drive hits home in the unions". (para. #17) "Possibilities exist..." (para. #20) "In time radical moods will increase among worker youth as well". (para. #30) "Some degree of activity may be possible through the developing unemployed movement..." (para. #32)

To expect all these developments only poses the problem of what to do next. It is not enough to merely list these expectations but to prepare and organize the workers along these lines, if these expectations are realistic and not just literary. Socialist consciousness is not automatic. It must be prepared and organized. The Draft merely expects.

The party, for the greater portion of the past two years, has been engaged in a process of regrouping with pent-house socialists. The regroupment line of the party, as it was carried out since the defeat of the Hungarian revolution, has taken place outside of the mass movement and in conflict with our trade union and other mass work activity. The past period, especially highlighted in the last New York election campaign, confronted the party with the serious danger of ideological liquidationism.

The Draft, however, reaffirms that "our regroupment policy remains valid as an approach to dissidents moving away from the CP milieu". In paragraph #28 the Draft notes that: "In our united actions with people coming from the CP milieu we have sought to emphasize points of agreement rather than dismiss collaboration because of remaining political differences". This is a false either/or conception. What the Draft refers to and dismisses as "remaining differences", were differences of a fundamental and principled character. "Points of agreement" were essentially points of a secondary and tertiary nature. The regroupment

policy, especially as it was carried out in the ISP campaign constituted a violation of the Leninist concept of the United Front. What began as an electoral bloc was transformed into an ideological bloc. Instead of retaining our identity of Trotskyism, we mixed our banner with that of petty bourgeois radicalism.

On the basis of this general disagreement with the present Draft Resolution the following counter-resolution is proposed.

This resolution is based on the general line of a series of documents published since the last national convention:

- 1) Regroupment Policy (Minority Report to Plenum) -- Joyce Cowley. Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20 No. 1.
- 2) Memorandum on the United Socialist Ticket -- Murray Zuckoff. Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20 No. 2.
- 3) Contribution to the Discussion on Youth Perspectives -- Ann Zuckoff. Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20 No. 3.
- 4) Review of Past Years Work in the NY Local -- Alvin Berman, Joyce Cowley, Nat Weinstein, Murray Zuckoff. Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20 No. 4.
- 5) On the Draft Resolution -- Harold Robbins. Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 20 No. 9.

This resolution is submitted to the convention for adoption of the general line with a provision that discussion of the fundamental features of the world situation and the developments in the United States be continued after the convention.

It proposes:

- 1) To elaborate a program and tactical orientation which recognizes basic and new developments since the last convention.
 - a) We are witnessing an upturn in the economic situation. There are many symptoms that the deterioration of the economy is being retarded. This by no means indicates the beginning of a new epoch in the growing health and stability of American capitalism. This is the characteristic of the present conjuncture. The party must take this into consideration in order to formulate the correct tactics for the next period.

The characteristics of a boom condition are present in the form of increased investments for new plant facilities and automated production facilities in a whole number of fields; productivity in capital and consumers goods is beginning to catch up with and surpass the previous post-war high in 1955-57; increased government spending for public works, housing, foreign and military aid grants and increased expenditures for military equipment at home; increasing expenditures by private and government investors in building construction. Retail trade is on an upward climb.

At the same time, there is more unemployment today than there was a year ago when there was lower productivity and smaller utilization of plant facilities. The general reasons for this are to be found in the rapid automation in all sectors of the economy, decentralization of plants in the move outside the U.S., increased competition of both foreign made consumer products and American foreign financed consumer products; restrictions in the world market, primarily in the sphere of investments due to the extension of the colonial revolution, the entry of the Soviet bloc countries and their competition for world trade and the extension of non-capitalist economies.

The alternating cycle of boom-bust is concentrated and combined in the present period in a single phase, creating the condition for a highly explosive situation in class relations.

b) Capitalism either on a world wide scale or in the U.S., has by no means solved its economic contradictions. But there is no last crisis of capitalism. It can always find a temporary solution and postpone the final accounting. The last crisis can only consist in the revolutionary overthrow of this system. At present the crisis of the American ruling class takes the form of a crisis in exports, growing intensification of the crisis in agriculture, a crisis of state finances, resistance to granting any concessions to the workers, the utilization of unemployed workers and youth just entering the labor market as strike breakers, the military stalemate with the Soviet Union, the intensification of the struggle for markets which is taking a hastily improvised and ill-fated form of the European and Latin American Common Markets.

c) A number of basic changes in working class conditions and class relations offer the possibility for reversing the trend that caused the party to lose many of its ties with the working class. The psychology of the workers is undergoing a sharp change. Previous illusions developed during post-war prosperity, that the nation could surmount all crises are dissolving. Earlier moods of conservatism and quiescence are giving way to restiveness and disquietude. There is the emergence of a large army of unemployed. A rapid worsening of their living conditions has resulted in the pauperization of over a million families. In spite of employment fluctuations the unemployed army is replenished from two major sources: the influx of young people and from layoffs due to productivity changes in the factories, offices, mines, railroad, agricultural and other establishments. They are beginning to realize that they are not only workers permanently, but permanently unemployed workers. This fear affects the outlook of workers now on jobs. The Washington Conference on Unemployment reflected this mood and revealed the pressure that the unemployed workers can bring to bear on the union bureaucracy; the steel workers are reflecting this mood in their demands for greater fringe benefits such as earlier retirement, paid vacations up to three months and the general demand of both employed and unemployed workers for a shorter work week. Distressed areas and "ghost towns" are spreading to greater numbers of industrial centers in the coal, steel and farming areas.

2) While there are no signs as yet, of any mass radicalization, it is necessary to reject the concept of spontaneously developing left wing caucuses which we will enter into after they are organized. The party must adopt a trade union orientation; party members, adults and youth must try to get into the shops to build not only seniority but to establish relations with the workers on the job. Trade union fractions must be re-established in the party to meet regularly and discuss ways of raising issues in their shops without incurring any danger of victimization. We must begin to project a number of transitional demands in the press and in the shops and unions. Transitional demands can have weight and meaning only if we are in the workers movement. It is ineffective to project them primarily from the outside.

We must seek in our propoganda activity to win support on the issues of trade union control of production norms, automation and the growing trend of run-away shops as a pre-condition for raising the demand of workers control of production. This demand can fire the imagination of many workers, especially the unemployed. Organize support for legislative action such as the McNamara 35 hour bill while continuing and extending the support for 30-for-40 by popularizing the Sliding Scale concept in the press and in the shops and unions; call for city wide unemployment demonstrations and meetings; union control of surplus food for unemployed workers. Lay the basis for the development of a left wing in the unions around the struggle to obtain a greater portion of the national product for the workers, the slogans of union democracy and the need for a Labor party.

These demands take their point of departure from the needs of the objective situation. We cannot ascertain in advance the degree of responsiveness. But we must constantly draw the attention of the workers to the most effective method of closing their ranks against capitalism and the limitations imposed upon their struggle by the labor fakers. We cannot launch a frontal attack against the bureaucracy and it would be incorrect to do so at this time. But our comrades in the shops can press to put into practice the demands which the bureaucracy raises in a hypocritical manner as sops to the pressure of the rank and file, and demand that they put them into practice. We cannot wait till things get hotter in the unions. We can and must begin to lay the groundwork today without developing a concept of sponteneity. If the capitalist class is not to use the youth and unemployed and turn them against the labor movement as strike-breakers, if the union movement is not to become demoralized and derailed from its tasks, if the treacherous policy of the Stalinists is not to establish a beach-head, correct tasks and perspectives must be posed and undertaken.

Precisely because of the difficulties that still exist in the unions for party activity, the party must be especially alert to seize every opportunity that opens to us.

Before specific avenues of union activity are discussed and proposed, the basic problem is that the party "must first have an orientation toward the trade unions, consider that your

field of work, proletarianize the membership, especially the younger comrades, and send them into the factories; that is the precondition for the opening up of specific opportunities. That's the way our trade union activities began almost everywhere." (James Cannon in a letter to Joe Hansen. March 10, 1953. Emphasis in original. M.Z.) This approach, in answer to the pessimism of the Cochranites, entirely correct then, applies with equal validity today. The situation is far more favorable for us today than it was in 1953.

"Neither impoverishment nor prosperity as such can lead to revolution. But the alternation of prosperity and impoverishment, the crisis, the uncertainty, the absence of stability -- these are the motor factors of revolution...This lack of stability, the uncertainty of what tomorrow will bring in the personal life of every worker, is the most revolutionary factor of the epoch in which we live." (Trotsky, Summary speech to the Third Congress of the C.I.)

We are living in the beginning of such a period. The working class is carrying on a series of disconnected, sporadic and relatively isolated-one-from-another defensive struggles. Strike activity alone has increased 20% in the first quarter of this year compared to last year, according to the Department of Labor. Our task is to extend this defensive struggle on the economic plane, to deepen it, to enlighten the consciousness of the working class by clearly and precisely formulating the conditions of struggle, to invest it with political forms and to transform it into the struggle for political power.

3) Realistic proposals for more concentrated and sustained work in the Negro and Puerto Rican communities must be elaborated. The most militant section of the population are the Negro people. In the South their struggle for integration and civil rights is taking a sharper and more political form, bringing them in direct conflict with the power of the state. The marches on Washington are beginning to dispell many illusions about the support they can expect from the capitalist class and their representatives. In the North, especially New York City, hospital workers now on strike are involving new layers of Negro and Puerto Rican workers. They are being drawn into the vortex of strike activity, union consciousness and class struggle solidarity.

The do-nothing policy of the official NAACP leadership is antagonizing a growing section of the Negro people. The idea of committees of self-defense, growing out of the intensified atrocities in the South against the Negro people, proposed by Robert Williams, reflects a growing mood of impatience and combativity among these beseiged fighters. The party should call to link the committees of self-defense with union support and participation, and with political self-defense in the call for the formation of a Labor Party. Modest steps can be taken by the party to link itself with this struggle. The CCRI was a beginning in the right direction. But to give this any meaning and fruitfulness we must lay the basis for greater intervention

by day to day activity, and consistent and persistent work in the Negro community and organizations.

We cannot simply engage in forays during election time or when some big issue develops. We must adopt a policy of activity which would give us a standing in the Negro community. Branches should undertake to organize or re-organize their fraction work in Negro organizations. Party spokesmen should take every opportunity to appear at legislative and council hearings in their cities when hearings are held on housing and schools, on slum clearance projects, and police brutality. The party must try to participate in demonstrations of the Negro people and raise the most advanced slogans and demands. It must link their struggles with that of the organized labor movement and try to win support of organized labor for their struggles. In contrast to the legalistic methods of the NAACP we must counterpose class struggle methods of action and independent political action. We can thus lay the basis for developing and effectively participating in the formation of a left-wing in the NAACP.

4) The youth will constitute a very important ingredient of revolutionary struggle in this country. Younger workers are the chief victims of unemployment. Approximately 2 million jobless young people represent almost a third of the total unemployed force. Among workers under 30 years of age, 10.8% are unemployed. In the group from 30 to 44 years, 5.9% are unemployed. In the age group between 14 through 17, 15% of the close to 2 million unemployed are unable to find jobs. Among those between the age group of 18 to 24, 14% are unemployed. Many of the younger workers are developing hostile attitudes toward the unions, which they feel are preventing them from getting or retaining jobs due to seniority clauses. Antagonisms are developing between them and the older workers. The bosses are using this to their advantage in the union busting drives.

We can popularize and dramatize the plight of youth who cannot find jobs. Their anger and hostility must be directed away from the labor movement to their real enemies. Our intervention should be one of winning support of the youth around a program of revolutionary demands and around the realistic perspective of the struggle for socialism in our time. The task is to link the fate of the young people with that of the working class and the Negro people. Without this they stray into a blind alley of frustration, pessimism and despair. This approach would stand in sharp contrast to the Stalinist and Social Democratic method of organizing one-at-a-time actions to resolve the problem of youth under capitalism, or to tie the youth struggles to the needs of the foreign policy of the Kremlin bureaucracy. Neither the Stalinists nor the Social Democrats propose transitional demands because neither tendency poses the perspective for the revolutionary abolition of capitalism.

The party can win support of youth by campaigning on the issue that jobless youth must be entitled to unemployment compensation upon graduating from school. They are on the scrap-heap of unemployment before they even begin to work. School age

should be extended for those who wish to continue their studies with a grant for working class family support. Reduce tuition fees. Trade schools under union control and supported by the federal government.

It is the responsibility of the organized labor movement to organize youth committees in the unions to study the needs of youth. Young workers should have the right to choose their own delegates, whose task would be to draw the attention of the adult delegates to the specific demands of youth, and to tie these demands to the demands of the working class as a whole. This can act to prevent the bosses from opposing youth to the unemployed and older workers.

The party can initiate a propaganda campaign to demonstrate to youth that their future is bound with the struggle for political power. Let the youth of 18 and over have a right to vote. This can aid in the general struggle for the formation of a Labor Party. This series of transitional demands are capable of realistic application in the arena of party youth activity.

We have to approach youth both in the shops and on the campus. Youth will be attracted to genuine Marxism if they see that it is capable of providing them with a fighting program. A transitional program is imperative if the party youth are to play a leading role in winning adherence to the banner of Trotskyism. Such a program was drawn up and adopted in 1938 by the International Conference of the Youth of the Fourth International. What is important, is that the resolution, not in detail, but taken as a whole, in its approach and its method remains basically valid today. The task of party youth is to use it as a guide, bring it up to date, concretize it and put it into practice.

The erroneous and misleading dead end of IBM must be scrapped. A revolutionary youth group must be established. Both the CP and the SP-SDF are re-doubling their efforts to win young people to their ranks. We have not yet settled scores with either tendency. Social-Democracy is succeeding in misdirecting a number of newly politicalized youth. The CP takes on a new glamour for youth, who know very little or nothing of the treacherous policy of Stalinism, in light of the new developments in the Soviet Union, China and the Soviet zone. Even pacifism is succeeding in attracting a number of youth. Our tasks are just beginning, but we must begin immediately and without delay.

5) The drive for total war has slowed down considerably due to the growing strength of Soviet technology and science, the colonial struggles and the demands of the working class for an end to war. Capitalism has retreated momentarily to "local police actions" but has not relinquished its dream of world wide re-establishment of private property in those sections of the globe where the working population has abolished this outmoded form of production in favor of transitional economies.

If the energies of the workers are not to be sapped by pacifism, Stalinism and the general faith that conferences conducted by the ruling classes and the Kremlin bureaucracy can abolish war, the party must advance demands which clearly link the struggle against war with the struggle for workers power and Socialism. It must expose the petty-bourgeois peace-campaigns as cruel hoaxes and their leading advocates as hypocrites. No faith can be extended either to the rulers of the capitalist nations or their spokesmen. The treacherous policy of the Soviet diplomats must be exposed as deals designed to stifle the revolutionary initiative of the working class and its allies. The working class must be mobilized into independent class activity.

United front meetings of workers organizations should be counter-posed to the self-defeating "peace campaigns". Abolish secret diplomacy on both sides of the conference table; for self-determination of the colonial peoples; convocation of an international conference of labor, political parties and representatives of the colonial struggles. The fate of humanity must rest in the hands of the exploited masses; for a referendum on war and peace to take the war making powers out of the hands of the ruling class. This slogan should receive renewed attention in the press, in the shops and in the unions. War industries and atomic power under union control. Shatter the myth that war means jobs. We must be able to explain to the workers how the war drive is bound up with the present system of production as one element of its basic metabolism. Expose the lie that war is essentially the result of a few hot-headed and imprudent men of the Dulles type, as the Stalinists and pacifists imply.

6) The slogans and demands proposed are capable of realistic application and can be proposed by the party in this period. All of them have the quality of transitional slogans in their effect of bridging the gap between the objective situation and the consciousness of the masses. They serve the strategic aim of the party to organize independent class activity for workers power.

The biggest single obstacle that stood in the way of the party adopting this orientation, and still tends to loom large as an obstacle, is the false policy of regroupment. For the past two years the party has imposed, what in practice has amounted to a policy of self-isolation from the mass movement. While the party was isolated previously by objective events, regroupment tended to reinforce this. It incorrectly tried to break out of this isolation by adopting a policy which created an illusory milieu. It tried to jump over its own head by devising a get-rich-quick scheme. The milieu it created existed largely in the exaggerated reports of leading comrades and seldom approximated a real situation.

The great expectations of immanent recruitment, growing numbers of co-thinkers and co-fighters from the regroupment arena diminished daily. We incorrectly estimated the forces involved in splitting from the CP, the direction of their motion

and the duration of time within which a regroupment orientation could have provided fruitful results for the party. The pent-house socialists, with only the most tenuous ties to the working class or to revolutionary ideas and traditions have either returned to silence or are finding new paths and rationalizations to return to the Stalinist fold.

Our basic error in the regroupment campaign was the failure to realize the change in the radical movement after the defeat of the Hungarian revolution. This defeat acted as a brake on any further revolutionary developments in the Stalinist orbit and signaled the re-stabilization of the bureaucratic incubus and the Stalinist leadership in the CP. At the same time growing unemployment, repeated attacks on the labor movement, assaults on the Negro struggle, in contrast to the growing strength of the Soviet Union and China in the technological and scientific fields turned the eyes of many workers toward the Soviet camp and its policies. The easing of the cold war tensions aided this process too.

The revelations of the 20th Congress had no lasting significance for radical workers because it constituted no defeat for the Soviet Union and its leadership in the way that Social-Democracy had been defeated in action against their own ruling classes in the 1930's. It also came at a time when there was no radicalization among the workers and, when on a world scale, many of the victories of the oppressed peoples appeared to be led by the Stalinists. The 20th Congress dislodged the bourgeois democrats from the CP. But the basis for that had in large measure been prepared by the years of prosperity, the witch hunt and to no small measure the activity of the SWP in exposing and counter-posing our methods to theirs in the mass arena, especially in the electoral arena, which we now, for the first time, relinquished.

Regroupment, correctly formulated by the party in its statement, "The Regroupment of Revolutionary Socialist Forces in the United States", was abandoned in favor of a tail-endist and adaptationist policy of "regroupment of socialist-minded and honest socialists". The analogy between these elements and the Musteites and the left wing in the Socialist Party of the 1930's was ill-founded and misdirected. In these two instances the forces involved "were essentially progressive, even if somewhat confused, breakaways from the ideology of the labor bureaucracy, the old guard right wing socialists and the Stalinists". (James Cannon to Murry Weiss, 1955. Emphasis in original. M.Z.)

In contrast, "the National Guardian Monthly Review outfit, as far as I know does not object to the general ideology of Stalinism on any important point. They are willing to endorse everything from the Moscow Trials to the Second World War and the pacifist ballyhoo for peaceful-coexistence, if only they are allowed to sit in as an independent party...The great bulk of these dissident Stalinists are worn out people, incurably

corrupted by Stalinist ideology, who haven't the slightest intention or capacity to do anything but grumble at the official CP and to demand a stagnant little pond of their own to splash in". (same source) This proved to be as true in 1958 as it was in 1955. The National Guardian, Lamont and Hallinan, and the other spokesmen for this milieu continued to repeat the time worn cliches of Stalinism on all the basic questions as if they were new revelations. The party did little to expose their views or to clarify our differences with them. We violated the Leninist concept of a united front, which demands complete clarity of banners, but which the party blurred into an ideological front. This posed the danger of the ideological liquidation of Trotskyism.

Regroupment led the party into a blind alley and aroused illusions which were not borne out by subsequent events. The election campaign in New York took the form of an ideological bloc with people who were essentially hostile to the ideas of revolutionary socialism. The press tended to become an organ for these petty-bourgeois radicals, expressing in the main, their ideas and methods on national and international issues. Our fundamental differences with them were not stated and expressed. Secondary issues were taken as sufficient basis for consummating an ideological bloc.

The assumption that these people were coming closer to us found no support in reality. The direction of motion was mistaken. We were coming closer to them. They were friendly enough, but only because the party was becoming transformed into leg-men for getting them on the ballot and propagating their ideas. The Obvious political slap in the face by the ISP by denying the party electoral representation on a United Socialist ballot was dismissed as a small and insignificant concession to the bright future of recruiting hundreds of radical workers. Since the election campaign ended, both regroupment and the regroupers have all but disappeared from the scene, have discontinued any real activity, and have returned to their usual political haunts.

The party gained little from this totally incorrect regroupment approach and lost a great deal. We lost a number of active and old time comrades and a number that we recruited in this regroupment period. Total party membership increased little, if at all. We lost the chance to make the voice of Trotskyism heard in a period of growing crisis and struggles, in a whole number of areas where the regroupment election campaigns were carried out. The radical workers, whom we sought to attract, failed to respond to us because we failed to play an independent role as an effective force in those areas where radical workers were. We neglected the real arena of mass work and independent party electoral activity, which attracted the attention of radical workers to us to begin with.

Regroupment, which was originally proposed as an aid in attracting and recruiting radical workers to the party, and as

an adjunct and aid in engaging in more effective mass work, was slowly counter-posed to mass work as the primary task. Mass work was subordinated as a secondary tactic to the strategic aim of regroupment. The concept of the general day to day participation in the unions and struggles of the Negro people and youth, as the real method of yielding genuine cadres to us in the regroupment process was rejected as a "sectarian" approach to the realities of the day. Yet, it is precisely in this arena, not in the regroupment milieu, where the party will have to prove its capacity to organize, prepare and lead the struggles in order to win the adherence of the radical and the politically uncommitted workers.

For the past two years, the party largely neglected, and failed to provide leadership around a number of problems agitating the working class and the Negro people. Unemployment, automation, the struggle for union democracy, the situation of the American economy, the developments in the Soviet zone and China, the growing resistance of the working class to any encroachment on its hard won gains, and the ever increasing explosiveness of the Negro struggle has found scant and insufficient attention either in the press or internally. Indicative of this is the situation in the New York local, where a discussion on the Troop slogan, initiated a year ago, is still awaiting summation by the reporter. Aside from one presentation by Comrade Dobbs on the problem of trade union democracy, the branch has had no serious discussion on any trade union question for the past year, in spite of the fact that the last convention projected this as an important arena for party discussion and activity. The important, though modest struggles of the workers in the shops in New York against discrimination and gangsterism, the current hospital strike, the strike struggles and unemployed demonstrations, the struggle for surplus food, the Steel convention, either has not reached the branch for discussion and assessment, or has been given 10 minutes on the business part of the agenda, and that long after the event took place.

The party has recently redirected its activity away from the regroupment arena since the election campaign. This took place not as a result of evaluating the past course, or the nature of the activity which the party could now engage in, but empirically. The milieu had fallen apart and largely disappeared and other events came crashing upon the head of the party. We drifted out of one arena into another. The arena of the labor movement and the Negro people is the correct one to be in, but it must be a conscious orientation on our part, not one that we drift into or one that is approached as an arena for a few forays. For the past two years the attention the party paid to mass work was the exception, and to a large extent, literary. We must make this arena the norm -- not just literary, but in practical activity.

The convention must critically re-evaluate the regroupment policy of the past two years and reject it as the tactical course for the next period.

7) Not adventuristic skirmishes, but a realistic appraisal of the possibilities that are open to us in the mass movement can be assured only if we are in the shops and the Negro community. Our main task is to take the transitional program and apply it not just in the press, but also within the working class organizations. The transitional program must stand as the most advanced and consistent spokesman for the demands of the working class. It can also stand in sharp contrast to all the wise-acres and skeptics who are looking to forget and ignore the past struggles, lessons and traditions, while looking for new gimmicks to derail and dissipate the energies of the workers for future struggle. This is the most realistic way of approaching all workers, radical as well as uncommitted.

The present actions of the exploited sections of American society are to a great degree defensive, sporadic and uncoordinated. It is precisely this which necessitates a revolutionary program to guide these struggles from one stage to the next, to help consolidate the fighting forces and to raise the consciousness from the immediacy of the specific struggle, to the larger view of closing ranks against the enemy. A crisis far deeper and far more devastating than that of the 1930's is inherent in the present situation. Out of it will open the most grandiose revolutionary possibilities in the U.S... This must be at the base of the policy and perspective of the party from now on.

The present period is not distinguished for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day to day work, but that it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution. The immediate central task of the party is to act as the revolutionary leadership of the masses. The present conjuncture does not allow the peace and quiet of abstentionism any more than it can tolerate any half-baked or suicidal adventures. We must continue to keep our program before the eyes of the workers. The best vehicle to link up all the demands, immediate, as well as transitional, is to continue our own election campaigns. But the election campaign would be ineffectual unless it is viewed as the extension, in a more concentrated form, of the party's daily activity. We must begin now to prepare for 1960.

The crisis of capitalism is marked by a permanent and irreversable world wide revolutionary situation. America cannot escape this irrepressable conflict. The later the revolutionary developments unfold here, the greater will the combined character of revolutionary explosions develop. Our task is to penetrate the mass movement as it is, with a program of transitional demands; to establish imperishable bonds with it; to act quickly and decisively as the nucleus of the revolutionary leadership, conscious of the needs and aspirations of the masses and have a

concrete political answer to their problems. This will invariably bring us into conflict with the Stalinists, Social Democrats and labor fakers. To the extent that we act as the revolutionary party -- to that extent will we win the leftward moving masses, expose the treachery of the labor fakers and the betrayers of socialism, gain the confidence of the workers, the Negro people and the youth, and earn the right as the vanguard of the coming American revolution.

June 1, 1959

THE PROLETARIAN ORIENTATION AND THE AMERICAN QUESTION

By James Boulton

I. The Regroupment "Orientation" and the Sectarian Danger

It shall have been splendid confirmation for our theses of 1940, for the aim of destroying the several currents of Menshevism through the building of a proletarian party, when the petty-bourgeois vintage of 1957 soured in its ferment at the thought of a Marxist regroupment. And the SWP has found that it regroups alone.

Now as late as the Party Congress of 1952 it was possible to declare that the defeat of Stalinism in America would be effected at the point of production. And we still believed that a party properly oriented, with a tactic geared to the explosive, if politically retarded American workers would find its reward in the emergence of a Trotskyist inspired labor political movement in the United States. But perhaps we have grown weary of well doing.

It is of course true that the uninterrupted exodus of workers beginning with the departure of Manny Lyons in 1949 has confronted the proletarian party of 1959 with the simple need to find plain people, merely to sustain the elementary party functions in the face of an unyielding glacial stretch-out in American class-struggle politics. It is undeniable that the party continues to age and contract. Certainly a considerable degree of flexibility is requisite to storming the mightiest bastion of all -- time.

For a contrast, the Bolshevik Party of Russia, born in the historic split of 1903, tested in 1905, found favor beneath the sun just 12 years later! And none too soon, if the behavior of some "Bolsheviks" means anything. The American party of Bolshevism, issued in 1929 and raised to party status by 1940, has hungered another 19 years without a substantial opportunity to take to the field of final conflict.

Still, if the Minnesota history teaches anything, it is that a mere handful of proletarian Bolsheviks with a sound orientation will catapult the whole party onto the arena of great historic battles. That much is established.

Today, the question must be raised: On what basis do we proceed? Where is our orientation? The Draft Resolution is too grim, and too evasive. Back in 1884 William Morris wrote a letter to an American: "To infuse hope into the oppressed in fact -- that is our business; and I don't think it is possible for us to fail in it, in spite of our own mistakes and weaknesses."

How much have we been compelled to surrender? As early as 1952 the enthusiasm for the theses and perspectives of 1940 was hardly audible above the scramble to stack the leading Committee in preparation for a succession of splits, of right and left sectarian deviations. At the Congress of 1952 there was a rustle in the tree-tops and a tap upon the eaves in a Seattle resolution to taste the fresh sap from the enriched soil of petty-bourgeois ferment. As if Comrade Trotsky had not informed us very simply a long time ago:

"The petty-bourgeois go with power." In its own way the Draft Resolution senses that much.

The influence of objective pressures and an alteration of party composition is accurately reflected in the splits and turns within the leadership and party.

It was in "Learn To Think" that Leon Trotsky stated: "The mechanistic materialism is essentially the methodology of the right deviation." And we know from Lenin that right-opportunism and left-sectarianism are two sides of the same coin. Now we can make a definition of that common characteristic essential to the motivation of all sectarian deviations, right and left: It is an elaboration of schema to break the tempo inherent in the natural evolution of political societies, governed by the laws of uneven and combined development. Always one-sided, it sets aside the Marxist method of finding expression for its laws in life itself. Marcy performed this feat in exemplary fashion on the Hungarian question.

Opportunist programs perceive the shortest road to sharing power in the state under any conditions. They are designed to mobilize people on a basis in conflict with their aims. Sectarian programs sound the call for an immediate thrust at state power at all times -- and under any conditions. But history has its way.

The political life of the oppressed classes derives from the contraction or expansion of their economic and social environment. Progressive exhaustion, at any conjuncture in these ebbs and flows, of partial struggles on one field is followed by abrupt explosion of new forms of struggle on hitherto excluded fields.

It is a matter of profound importance to Trotskyist-Marxists that the Chinese and Yugoslav Revolutions combined party organization and propaganda with practical leadership action on the military field, into which all economic and social demands resolved themselves in the absence of a parliamentary arena for class-collaboration. In the advanced parliamentary states where the tempo and forms of organization and struggle are far different the Communist parties evolve in a wholly different way, succumbing to all of the evils of class-collaboration.

For this reason a turn to the de-Stalinized milieu in the United States was virtually fruitless and constituted a turn away from the vast untouched American proletariat, despite the appearance of an occasional new face.

For the present conjuncture in America the social lyricism of the labor Democrats has been interrupted by the persistent contraction of living standards, the crumbling away of labor's past gains, and the social impasse in the South. Nor will the Proxmire rebellion, in the face of deepening convulsions in the South, preserve the Johnson leadership against any but a few left petty-bourgeois sycophants.

A genuine regroupment would seek as a potential presidential candidate: James Hoffa. "We don't arbitrate grievances; we strike the bastards." (Life Magazine, May 18.) That's our language.

II. Exodus of the Party Workers

Where are the workingmen who were to constitute a mighty force in the party cadre? We understood the proletarian orientation to mean not even primarily a propaganda directed to the working class but a party commanded by worker intellectuals and leaders.

" . . . But . . . Our party can be inundated by non-proletarian elements and can even lose its revolutionary character. The task is naturally not to prevent the influx of intellectuals by artificial methods. . . but to orientate practically all the organization toward the factories, the strikes, the unions. . . " (Letter, Trotsky to Cannon, Inclusion in Defense of Marxism, p. 108.)

Life Magazine for May 18 has underscored a proposition that the Teamster's fraction, which died an honest death at the hands of the combined American bourgeois state, labor bureaucrats, and Stalinist hatchetmen, is the easiest to replace! There are no phonies with a Trotskyist button in the Teamsters Union.

On the other hand, the degeneration of Bert Cochran into an exponent of classical Menshevism virtually decimated the auto union cadres, to further capitalize the wretched dice-game played with the electrical union comrades. Now the hasty escape of Marcy et al into the prison of left-sectarianism exhausts what remained of the steel fraction.

These events were not calculated to inspire the larger squads of workers who drifted away under the pressure of a sordid prosperity and mounting police-state, nor to fortify the morale of those who lingered on.

These phenomena were foreseeable and it is worth quoting Comrade Trotsky extensively in this connection:

"It would be asinine to think that the workers' section of the Party is perfect. The workers are only gradually reaching clear class consciousness. The trade unions always create a culture medium for opportunist deviations. Inevitably we will run up against this question in one of the next stages. More than once the party will have to remind its own trade unionists that a pedagogical adaptation to the more backward layers of the proletariat must not become transformed into a political adaptation to the conservative bureaucracy of the trade unions. Every new stage of development, every increase in the party ranks and the complication of the methods of its work open up not only new possibilities but also new dangers. Workers in the trade unions, even those trained in the most revolutionary school, often display a tendency to free themselves from party control. (My emphasis -- JB.) At the present time, however, this is not at all in question." (In Defense of Marxism, Trotsky, p. 146.)

"It is moreover impermissible to forget that the actual or possible mistakes of those comrades working in the trade unions reflect the pressure of the American proletariat as it is today. This is our class. We are not preparing to capitulate to its pressure. But this pressure at the same time shows us our main historic road." (Ibid., p. 146.)

III. Workers Under the Police State

Commencing with the all-out assault in 1947 upon the formidable Communist forces at Allis-Chalmers, UAW-248, by the state, all bourgeois instrumentalities, and an emergent CIO bureaucracy, the burgeoning imperialist police-state, bought at the price of package deals for the workers and bloody wars to insure prosperity, rained its heaviest and unremitting blows upon the worker militants, Communists and Socialists alike. These were progressively cut-off from their class function or house-broken.

And this is the crux of the matter: The revolutionary worker is compelled to do little more than stand and wait. He has no other talent than his class-consciousness and his experience. To survive, he has only his labor power to sell. And he may turn nowhere. This will have to be our criteria once again by which we know the laborer and his class; and by which we understand his disappearance from the party ranks. The atomization of the worker cadres in the party simply reflects a process indigenous to the labor movement as a whole in this period.

Nowhere do we find a more dramatic and tragic expression to the stretching-out of the glacial period whereby the flower of the American proletariat is robbed of its vital growth than we find in the Minnesota section of the party. These workers, who had experienced and understood their powers of class leadership, bore the brunt of repression from 1940 on (!) and were compelled to watch the best years of their life slip by in isolation.

Moreover, in the country at large, the party proletarians necessarily had to pursue the adaptation of their class to a suburban mode of living, subjecting themselves therewith to extensive exploitation.

Quest of the American standard of living, no matter how illusory and unstable, is realized by the familiar business of moonlighting, double employment, and very real competition for overtime. Indeed, the 40-hour week is a legal fiction and an historical reference. Yet it is the progressive contraction of these avenues to personal "security," hurried along by automation and inflation that prepares the explosive power of American labor.

A concomitant to this process is a widespread adaptation of the trade union managers to it, while they extend their own personal and "union" participation in purely exploitative business enterprise opened up by the broadened field of housing, health, and welfare insurance and financing. A widening gulf between the ranks and transformed business administrators of their unions has now emerged, describing the objective conditions for a new push toward fulfillment of the "unfinished revolution" begun in the 30's.

The new forms of organization, deriving in part from the class-collaborationist politics practiced by the old bureaucracy and in part from the independent movement of depressed strata of American workers and Negroes of the South, must develop on the political arena.

All roads lead to Rome -- and the overwhelming mandate rendered by the labor ranks to their leader-lackeys of the Democratic Party -- intensifies the antagonism between the factory level trade unionist and the capitulators up on top. The sustained domination of government by the Democratic Party has simply accelerated the speed with which one Democratic leader of the "people's anti-monopoly coalition" follows the other in expending his capital. Kennedy is already unacceptable to a considerable segment of the labor movement.

It is possible to anticipate now the independent development of political strike struggles on the part of organized workers and on the part of the unorganized Negroes of the South. This prospect is still in the tentative stage, but it begins to take shape in the "March On Mississippi" campaign and Jimmy Hoffa's realistic threat to defend the bargaining power of labor through general strike. It is sufficient that Hoffa is compelled to make the threat. Both movements would inevitably merge; and it is along this road that white and colored will unite.

These are the forces that will break up the police-state and necessarily create an environment for a radical labor party.

IV. The Defeat of McCarthy and the Trade-Union Task

The cognizant sector of the American imperialist bourgeoisie, buttressed by rich accretions from the left petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, was compelled to liquidate McCarthyism and a premature fascist development as a liability. In order to modify its rigid patterns of racial oppression and to restore a modicum of freedom to its scientific and educational corps, in order to fortify its world bourgeois ties and their dependence upon class collaboration, in order to mollify the sensitivity of its labor and liberal henchmen and in order to meet the Soviet technological and production challenge, the bourgeoisie elected to adhere to the Constitutional safeguards of the "American way."

Despite its thoroughly motivated retreat from cultural barbarism in the police-state, no capitalist leadership was prepared to surrender any entrenched advantage in the police-state repressive measures for the labor and socialist movement. The Draft Resolution records the fact that there has been but little relief in the mass organizations beyond the apathy of the workers toward the red-baiting.

Yet the Resolution fails to underscore the enormous potential in the objectively developing defensive struggle of the formidable and goaded Teamster's union -- and the remarkable parallel in the new defensive engagements to the pregnant determinants for the Mine Workers on the eve of the turbulent industrial union '30's.

It should be apparent that the party has an especial organizational stake in the conquest of constitutional rights for workers. Still, in the make-shift trade union panel at the show Convention of 1956, an effort by the Milwaukee workers to entertain a discussion of a probing action in that direction was abruptly dismissed by the quick-witted clairvoyance of Comrades Sharon and Tom Kerry. Whatever it was we had in mind, they knew it to be "irrelevant."

This episode was surely an indication of the extent to which the exodus of workers had altered the party composition. And so the burdensome trade-union commission adjourned without a summary of its proceedings. There is more here than meets the eye: For the trade-union question is the American Question.

Virtually the whole political life of the working class has been contained within the juggernaut of social collaboration between the bourgeoisie and labor trusts. It is precisely for this reason that the new upheaval must take on the task of a political break with the Democratic Party, no matter how it begins.

Beyond a repetition of familiar recipes (we must hold on, caution, etc., all good enough in their place) nothing was betokened in the trade-union commission to offer the fraction remnants a concrete political task. And this omission transpires at a time when every trade-union issue poses an urgent political question.

For all that a very real achievement for the workers was scored in life by the legalization of the 5th Amendment by the Teamster bureaucrats. And a very good omen appears in their bloc with Bridges and the Longshoremen.

V. For a Regroupment of Workingmen

The essential and most significant finding of loyal New York minority comrades was that a renewal of our fundamental orientation could not be realized by its inclusion on an agenda, to be resolved by summary motions and instructions. They also observe that our electoral actions, by and large, have provided the most productive arena in which to "regroup" worker socialists.

And that just about corresponds to where the newly awakened worker militants, throttled by a degenerated trade-union bureaucracy, will first turn for solutions. Nevertheless, the minority comrades also describe the increasing isolation of the party from its prescribed milieu.

Nothing works; and paragraph 38 of the Resolution declares "No signs are visible of a prospective organizational merger in the revolutionary socialist regroupment, but our regroupment ((policy)) remains valid as an approach to dissidents moving away from the CP milieu. Even in a mass radicalization the regroupment ((policy)) would still hold good." (My emphasis -- JB.)

If the regroupment ((policy)) has not fulfilled the maximum expectations of its authors, the frantic effort to enlist working forces for the execution of the elementary party tasks has produced a jerry-built youth organization, without regard to standard organizational criteria, that seeks to adapt a scattering of "young" party workers for "youth" purposes. What has happened when we lose sight of the fact that a single proletarian effective in our tragically diminished party is an infinitely precious promise for that future --- which has been so adamantly elusive?

Where the party has attracted an increase in its ranks the arena was not that of the petty-bourgeois radicals dispossessed by

Nikita Khrushchev at the 20th Congress, CPSU. It has been from among those workers and youth whose rebellion against collaboration with the capitalist parties in America was confirmed by the declaration of Stalinist bankruptcy. They were not to be found in the "regroupment" arena, but in their own class milieu. Electoral campaigns only serve to organize leftward moving workers.

To break the knot of social peace in America is our especial task; yet the Draft Resolution offers little more than a promise that things will surely worsen for American capitalism. Still, it affirms that "At present the 1960 presidential elections loom as the next major political action." And with that paragraph 33 fails to offer anything new whatsoever, despite extensive material elsewhere in the Resolution to describe a deteriorating class peace with very shaky economic foundations!

A united socialist ticket, it develops, is uncertain; but a hunt for acceptable Democratic replacements for Hubert Humphrey by our radical allies is certain -- just because of the normal petty-bourgeois disdain for theory and certain knowledge. Everyone in the regroupment enterprise has found the same thing in their experience with de-Stalinized Communists. Nostalgic for the good old days of FDR, they are invariably looking for something "big." That is their sociological criterion. Class criteria and Marxism cut no ice with these thinkers. Frankly, we just are not it. But we also are in need of something big?

If we segregate the serious matter of the capitulatory policy of the party leaders to their intended allies in the New York "regroupment" enterprise of 1958 from their flexible method for tactical accommodation of political tendencies in motion, it is possible to discern a measure of political progress. Not to evade the point, the question is: whom are you accommodating, what class, and with what prospects?

Once again, the tactical accommodation of a mere half-dozen rank and file workers is a substantial contribution to the opportunities that will open up on the morrow, and on the electoral arena. The durable workers and youth to be recruited in this period will be won with a fighting action against the Democratic liberals. And this is exactly what the Guardian troops under Marshall Lamont cannot wilfully understand.

Into the vacuum afforded by the abdication of the labor bureaucrats on the parliamentary arena, the hopes of the SWP must push.

In the evolution of the favored capitalist countries the dependency upon class-collaborationist illusions of sharing power in the state and society have found rebirth in the continuous subordination of the workers' parties to their own petty-bourgeois leaders. In this connection the history of the British Labor Party is of singular interest in that the BLP periodically engenders a semi-Marxist leadership wing within the working class. It was the principal role played by the socialist pioneers, Keir Hardie and the Independent Scottish Labor Party, William Morris and the Socialist League, that determined in large measure the subjective characteristics of the long delayed BLP and its stability as a class party in despite of the McDonalds, Bevins, and Atlees.

The German, the French, all of the Brandts and Mollets of the Western Hemisphere seek mightily to escape their class origins and Marxist fundament. But it is on the terrain of American imperialism that a Trotskyist inspired labor political development can provide a mighty push to the socialist rank and file in the Western world.

We must seize the opportunity to pioneer the labor party in America, not in words but in action. The Trotskyist cadres must commence an organizational initiative now, on the eve of the new upheavals.

VI. The American Question

The American Question boils down to these propositions: Does the deteriorating economic plight of American capitalism, trapped in the contraction of both internal and external markets, preclude a political radicalization of labor as the indispensable expression for the impending social explosion in the U.S.? And if it is true that any major development in the class struggle now must take on a clear political form, can the SWP afford to face the oncoming events without taking immediate steps to mobilize labor party socialists and militants independently of the petty-bourgeois conciliators?

Is it not possible to say openly that the time has come for a small party to grow? To strengthen its proletarian political cadres for leadership on the class front? Can the party -- at a time when all feeble Menshevik currents flow mightily into the Democratic sewer, escape the obligation to boldly seize the initiative to present the labor party alternative in an organized and understandable way?

If the workers are learning daily that the reservoir of Rooseveltian beneficence and capitalist concessionism has run dry, let the Socialist Workers Party be the best reformists on the electoral front in 1960. That is its revolutionary duty. That is the immediate road for development of an agitation to the labor ranks over, against, and despite the trade-union bureaucracy. And with precise tactics like a better defense of the Teamsters Union than the chastity belt.

The next stage, which Comrade Cannon anticipated as a realistic possibility as early as 1943, is clearly the emergence of labor party politics. History does not simply repeat itself without a qualitative leap. The theses for Comrade Cannon's document of 1946 in repudiation of the defeatist perspectives of Morrow and Goldman was reaffirmed against the Cochranite Mensheviks in 1953, especially for its testimony to the new level of working-class consciousness. That is the "Coming American Revolution."

The immediate demands: the right of the Negro children to go to school, the right to a job for all workers, the right to rebuild America's rotting cities, have become defensive struggles for American workers.

Let the American SWP stem the tide of organizational decline, merge in Lenin's word with the working class and its first contingents in revolt by the call for formation and activation of Independ-

dent Labor Party tickets for 1960, embracing all rank, file, and dissident workers, students, and journalists.

If a minimum program for united action with the petty-bourgeois radicals is tactically permissible (when it is not defined as an "orientation") is it not possible to prepare the party for an organizing task on the basis of a minimum program for workers.

A mobilization of the diminished SWP forces behind a "socialist" slate of Lamonts for Stassen will inspire no one. A campaign that sharply identifies our electoral action as the Independent Labor Party will provoke a deep response within the labor movement. It will offer the youth and dissident workers an opportunity to move and develop as candidates. The two-faced operation of the Wallace Progressives is too difficult for workers to handle.

Distinct note should be made of the Seattle campaign. Its success, and its meaningful results for us, stems from the fact that the class content inevitably turned up in the campaign of Comrade Jack Wright, a worker Communist. He even won applause in Labor's Daily.

An ambitious task like the practical organization of Independent Labor Campaign clubs cannot get off the ground by any further steps to transform the whole party into an apparatus through expansion of the National Committee. The party has been contracting while the ruling Committee multiplies. In the interest of efficiency, economy, and political stability the Congress should cut the Committee down to reasonable size. What we need is a transformation in the direction of field organizing.

Nor can the diminished party continue to demand the absorption of membership energy in the sustaining of a multiple press. It should be possible to revamp the Militant into the tabloid format with a monthly supplement to replace the magazine.

A serious turn that seeks to embrace the Trotskyist fundamentals of 1940 demands a remobilization of the broader party periphery on a basis that makes possible the recruitment of workers in action. It poses a demand for unity behind working-class slates and imposes limitations upon the middle-class liberals. A tactic of this kind would assure a broader campaign for 1960. More importantly it would develop worker candidates under the aegis of Trotskyist leaders in preparation for a major labor party development in America.

The essential meaning for American workers of Trotskyist thought on their concrete class problems can be written into a practical minimum program for regroupment of workers. That is the road for flexible Bolsheviks in 1960!

May 31, 1959.