

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

July 22, 1976

TO ALL ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Recently, Mohammed Karimi, a long time leader of the SWP, resigned. Enclosed is Karimi's letter of resignation and a report by Mac Warren, the Roxbury SWP organizer.

This report may be shared with any comrades who may be interested in knowing the circumstances of Karimi's resignation.

Comradely,

Doug Jenness (initials)
Doug Jenness
National Office

COPY

SWP
510 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Mass. 02215

SWP National Office
New York

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a copy of the letter which Mohammed Karimi (Norman Oliver) submitted upon resigning from the Roxbury branch. Also enclosed is a transcript of the report which Mac Warren, Roxbury branch organizer, gave to the branch on behalf of the executive committee in motivating the EC's recommendation that Mohammed's resignation be accepted. Although this is somewhat late, both Mac and I thought this report should be sent to you for your information. I would like to add that this report prompted a very rich and educational discussion in the Roxbury branch, from which all the comrades - new and old - learned a great deal.

Comradely,

s/Susan LaMont
City Organizer

Text of Mohammed Karimi's letter of resignation

In recent months, I have developed a deep political difference with the party. As you know, Marxism is founded on the rejection of religion. Marx and Engels began their criticism of the world with a thorough-going criticism of and rejection of religion. I disagree with this basic tenet of scientific socialism.

For a long time, I have tried to reconcile my essentially religious world view with that of Marxism. My success in doing this was due only to the fact that I never really acted on my beliefs.

However, recently I've become committed to a religious movement that has made it impossible for me to gloss over this contradiction. Through my discussions with comrades, reading, and a lot of thinking on my part, it's clear that I cannot be a member of the SWP and a Sufi at the same time.

It is for this reason that I am resigning.

This is the only tenable situation for either myself or the party. In resigning I do not intend to remove myself entirely from political activity. As a sympathizer of the SWP, I hope to do everything I can to aid it and its work. My resigning is done so as to make clear the position of revolutionary Marxism on religion to both those in and outside of the SWP and to allow me to freely exercise my beliefs.

Fraternally,

s/Mohammed Karimi

Report given by Mac Warren to Roxbury branch on resignation of Mohammed Karimi, May 11, 1976

Mohammed's resignation raises three important questions. They are: why joining this group, the Sufis, is incompatible with party membership; what the party's position on religion is; and what is our attitude toward radicalizing young workers who will come around the party who still may have religious beliefs.

The party as a Marxist organization has a position on religion. As Cannon said, "We Marxists are by definition hostile to each and every form of religious superstition. We believe with Marx that religion is the opium of the people and we are not Marxists, not genuine socialists, if we do not say so openly, regardless of whether our opinion is popular or not. Our business is not to save souls for another world, but to tell the truth about this one." This is the general attitude of the party toward religion. In the case of Mohammed, he was a leader of the party. He has run for office for the party many times. For him to continue to be in this group and in the party would have meant that the party's position on religion would have been compromised.

This group, the Sufis, carries out public activities, basically recruitment activities. Mohammed would have been placed in a position of choosing which organization to try and recruit the contacts he makes through his political work to. Does he get some independents to go to the branch meeting and to the activities of this group? Does he choose between the two?

The party is not sectarian on the religion question. We work with preachers in the mass movements. We get new members who join and still have religious superstitions. But we don't share leaders of the party with religious organizations. That is, the public face of the party has to be consistent with our political position. We say that religion plays a role of pulling the masses from struggle. If that's the case, we can't have our members, and especially our leaders, recruiting people to an organized religion. In the final analysis, religion is reactionary. We have to prepare our party to be able to deal with the role religion plays in society, even though this is not a question we have had to deal with too much recently. That can't be done with leaders of our party leading religious organizations.

As Mohammed pointed out in his letter, Marx and Engels began their criticism of the world with a thoroughgoing criticism and rejection of religion. This rejection of religion is one of the foundations of Marxism. At the same time, we will support the right of anyone to have the freedom of worship. Cannon described our attitude toward freedom of religion in Notebook of an Agitator: "The First Amendment to the Constitution is our amendment; and we must defend it tooth and nail against all aggressions, whether secular or religious. It seems to me not accidental at all that the authors of the Amendment linked freedom of worship with free speech and free press in the same sentence. Thereby they clearly indicated that religion is to be considered a matter of opinion, in which each individual is free to choose, and by no means a

revelation binding upon everybody. Moreover "freedom of worship" implies also freedom of non-worship. That's the freedom I am exercising and I would surely hate to loose it."

But we as Marxists reject all forms of superstition and mysticism.

The third question is how does the party approach a new comrade who still has religious beliefs. This is different from a party leader who has led the party over a period of time joining an organized religion. For instance, there is a man, Tommy, who comes around the hall when I am here. He's an older Black man. He comes in and talks to comrades. It's possible he might want to join the party at some time. He talks about the good things the party stands for and he also talks about God. He might even go to church. I think if Tommy were willing, he should be brought into provisional membership. And the correct attitude to take toward Tommy would be to not initiate all kinds of heavy discussions with him about religion, but to try and involve him in the activity of the party. The fact is that people who come around the party with these superstitions will know what the party's position on religion is. I think Tommy will do what I did. He will probably go on the offensive. He will ask questions about the party position. What we should do in the most nonsectarian and patient manner is explain our position and encourage him to do some reading. And it is through discussion, reading and practical work of the party most people like Tommy will be won over to our position. That most likely will be the case with someone from the Nation of Islam or even the Sufis.

With the party's turn, we will be recruiting more and more young workers who will have some religious superstitions. The approach I laid out is the correct one: to have the attitude of "taking these comrades on" or "teaching them a lesson" would serve to drive them away, not integrate them as active party members. It wouldn't be super-revolutionary or anything to do with what's revolutionary.

Losing Mohammed is different from someone who joins the movement and leaves a short time later. He was a respected and loyal member of the party for years. He made many big contributions to our party. But the pressures of being a revolutionary are greatest when you are leading other revolutionaries. The external forces of reaction are always there and these pressures take their toll on some of us. What we have to do is recognize the loss, pull our forces together and move forward. Comrades have dropped out and come back again. But this movement is based on a collective leadership, a cohesive organization.

In closing, I would like to read you something which Trotsky wrote in Problems of Everyday Life: "In their activities, revolutionists are limited only by external obstacles and not by internal ones. That is, they must train themselves to evaluate their situation, the material and concrete reality of their entire arena of activity, in its positive and negative aspects, and to draw the

correct political balance sheet. But if the revolutionist is internally hampered by subjective hindrances to action, is lacking in understanding or will, is paralyzed by internal discord, by religious, national, ethnocentric, or craft prejudices, then he is at best only half a revolutionist.

"Comrades, there are already too many obstacles in the objective conditions for revolutionists to allow themselves the luxury of multiplying the objective obstacles and frictions by subjective ones. Therefore, the education of revolutionists must, above all, mean their emancipation from all legacies of ignorance and superstition, which are frequently preserved even in very 'sensitive' consciousnesses. And therefore, we show irreconcilable opposition to anyone who dares to suggest that mysticism or religious sentiments and frames of mind might be compatible with communism.

"You know that not long ago one of the prominent Swedish comrades wrote about the compatibility of religion not only with membership in the Communist Party, but even with a Marxist world view. We consider atheism, which is an inseparable element of the materialist view of life, to be a prerequisite for the theoretical education of the revolutionists. Those who believe in another world are not capable of concentrating all their passion on the transformation of this one."

Mohammed will be continuing to work with the party. He wants to make a weekly contribution to the party. We should not have the attitude that he deserted the party for religion, therefore we should smash his illusions in religion. As I said before, he was a cadre. He understands clearly what he is doing. To try and take Mohammed on on his religious beliefs would only mean that comrades would be driving him farther away. We should be friendly and comradely with Mohammed the same as he was in his letter and with comrades since I got the letter. With this type of approach I think it's possible that we will continue to have the friendly type of relationship we have with Mohammed now.