

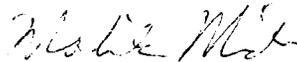
14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
November 30, 1977

TO ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The attached correspondence on Black recruitment and the assignment of Black comrades to branches is for your information.

Comradely,



Malik Miah
SWP National Office

Excerpts From September 15 Letterto Wendy Lyons From Jim Burfeind

In my opinion one of the best results of the projections on branch size and functioning in the organizational report at the convention is that it opens the possibility for feedback on our experiences. More importantly, at least in my case, it makes it possible to look at the branch and feel that it is in order to ask for help or not feel so much pressure to do things it is not possible to do for size reasons. This past spring there were many times when I could have written a letter saying we were too small but I thought I would just be informed that things were tough all over.

So with that I would now like to raise the question of how the decisions are made on the assignment of Black comrades to branches. Specifically I want to raise the need for Louisville but in a sense all of our cities to have one.

I obviously don't have the national picture so I would like to get some feedback and/or corrections.

Basically my experience here and in Austin, Atlanta, and NY indicates that it is an incredible disadvantage to place on a branch. I think comrades in the NO should consider getting a Black comrade into every city (not each branch) as on an equal priority with having 20 comrades in the branch.

In Louisville for example I think we have done the right things and will continue too but it could take a few years to recruit and keep our first Black cadre. Comrades should stop and think if they haven't already of the tremendous need. For example I think it means that in cities without Black comrades many of the proposals at national meetings can take on either an unreal, unserious or at least almost impossible tone.

On the opportunity side in Louisville we have had 3 Black provisional members. Two went to Oberlins. All dropped out. Recently we have been working with Black women in abortion coalitions. We will try but recruiting them will be almost impossible.

On the other side. The polarization and activity of the racist forces here is constant and on a large scale. Every week there are Blacks' homes attacked, KKK rallies, etc. In fact I think the branch here has been negligent in sending in reports and articles because it seems so commonplace. At any rate I can't think of another city with this kind of activity at this level that does not have a Black comrade.

I would like very much to be consulted on the party's attitude to this last question.

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
November 12, 1977

Jim Burfeind
Louisville

Dear Jim,

I want to give you my reaction to the questions you raised in your September 15 letter to Wendy concerning the recruitment and integration of Black members into the party as well as "how the decisions are made on the assignment of Black comrades to branches."

As you indicate in your letter the opportunities for recruiting Blacks to the party in Louisville (and for other cities as well) are growing. The government's offensive against working people, which has hit the Black community very hard, has encouraged overtly right-wing organizations like the Ku Klux Klan to carry out attacks against the Black community. The resulting polarization has posed a serious political challenge for the branch on how to seek ways to mobilize the Black community and their allies to fight back. Overall, I think the approach of the branch to this situation has been correct. Our election campaign and other propaganda activities have been aimed in good part at the Black community. This has led the SWP to become more known and respected in the Black community, which is why we did recruit three provisional members (who later dropped out) and will recruit more Blacks to the branch.

The correct political approach towards Louisville politics is the main reason, I think, we made these modest gains. It is also why the branch should continue to feel confident that it can deepen its involvement in the struggles of the Black community.

To have a correct political orientation, however, does not equal easy recruitment and development of new Black comrades. (This is also true in relationship to the recruitment of new women, student, and trade-union activists to the party.) But having a correct political understanding of the problems and opportunities facing the party is essential to carrying out party-building work that will win radicalizing workers to the party. This holds true for our political activity in the Black community.

The recruitment of Black comrades to the party flows from our overall political analysis of American society and the program we present to solve the problems working people, including the oppressed nationalities, face. We orient to oppressed nationalities, especially Blacks, because of the role these oppressed peoples will play in the coming socialist revolution as they fight for national liberation and to end their oppression as the most exploited section of the working class.

It is the presentation of this perspective to Black workers and students that has and will continue to win these radicalizing elements to the SWP--whatever the present composition of the party is. The projections we make at national conventions and plenums is based on this--and nothing else. How much each branch can do to deepen its involvement in the Black community is based on the size and capabilities of each branch.

The key political point is this: every branch can and should seek ways to increase its influence in the Black movement and thereby recruit Blacks to the revolutionary party. Only by having this perspective will comrades in the branches feel confident that they can recruit, and then integrate, Blacks into the SWP.

This is not to say the job of winning Blacks to the party will not be easier as the composition of our branches changes. Of course, this is true. Because of racism and national oppression, most Blacks are hesitant to join a predominantly white organization--socialist or not--until they are convinced that this organization is seriously committed to the liberation of Black people. This stands in our favor. No other organization in the Black community presents a solid program for Black self-determination and national liberation.

This is why the recruitment of Blacks, and keeping Blacks in the party (like other members), is tied to these comrades becoming well-rounded revolutionary Marxists--Bolsheviks.

Now this is the way I think we should look at the question of Black recruitment and the development of Blacks into leaders of the SWP.

I think if "Black work" is looked at in this way, your past and present efforts in Louisville can be seen as positive learning experiences. (Note: the turnover rate among Blacks is probably no higher (maybe lower) than among the total membership.)

This brings me to your specific proposal: "getting a Black comrade into every city (not each branch) as on an equal priority with having 20 comrades in the branch." This suggestion presents two major problems. First, it attempts to solve an objective problem (the lack of Black comrades) with an organizational solution. The only way to get Black members is to recruit and train them into cadre. The 20 member-per-branch proposal made at the convention is based on the fact that our experiences over the last year pointed out that a viable SWP branch needs to have at least 20 members to carry out the major propaganda activities of the party over any period of time. (Not that an at-large member or a group of 5 or 6 comrades in a city can't do political work, which does happen, but they're not a branch by any relevant definition.)

The party is still quite small and cannot take advantage of all the openings that exist. This is why priorities must be made

and re-made to facilitate our involvement in the struggles in the Black community and in the working class as a whole.

It is through our participation in different struggles (like South Africa and Bakke) that we will recruit and train Blacks, women, students, and trade-union activists. Every branch of the SWP can do this through consistent political work.

It is in this framework of seeking to expand the influence of the party and increase our size that party expansion and assignments are made. Our decision to build a branch in Louisville, for example, was facilitated because of the busing battle. And our recent decision to build a new branch in Morgantown was encouraged by the need for the party to get some comrades there to take advantage of the new battles in the mines.

Because the party has only a limited number of Blacks, and fewer cadre, the assignment of Black comrades is completely based on the real openings that develop, which could speed up the recruitment of new members and/or develop new Black leaders. But the truth is we only have the cadre to take advantage of a small percentage of these openings, so we have to pick and choose even among the best openings we have. Based on past experience, it is my opinion that the assignment of Black comrades to new cities--at this time--should be based on these factors. I generally believe that we must try to avoid a situation where only one Black comrade is by him/herself in a branch. Because the tendency is to place enormous responsibility on this comrade since the opportunities are so great. This can lead to overly high expectations by the branch, and when it doesn't pan out, demoralization.

We can't start from the premise that only Black comrades can recruit and integrate Blacks into the party. It is the party's program and activity that wins Blacks and keeps them in the party. If it is really "almost impossible" to recruit and hold Blacks without Blacks then the party has no serious hope of penetrating the Black community in cities where we have no Black comrades. But that doesn't reflect the reality of our recruitment. Almost all the Black comrades in the party now joined over the last ten years. I would estimate that few were recruited by Black comrades. However, it is true, to recruit Blacks it does take special attention by Black and white comrades to convince nationalists why they should join a multi-national party.

Also it means that we have to be conscious about utilizing leading Black comrades who have national assignments or more flexible local assignments to help branches and locals with few or no Black comrades recruit and educate new members. Speaking tours, classes, forums, and election campaigns are valuable aids in this.

In summing up, I believe the points you raised in your letter are important ones for both the leadership and membership of the party to understand. Because the recruitment and development of Black Marxists is essential to build the multi-national combat party needed to lead the American working class to power.

Comradely,

Malik Miah

cc: Wendy