

April 7

TO ALL POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Attached are two internal SLP documents sent to all delegates to the forthcoming SLP convention. These are for the information of PC members only.

Delegates to the convention have also been sent copies of all substantive correspondence from the SWP to the SLP.

I also have a copy of Bob Massi's report on the SWP plenum. It's pretty interesting, but it's also 22 pages long, so if you would like to see it, let me know.

Syd

December 13, 1977

To the Members of the NEC

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed you will find a copy of the minutes of the NEC Subcommittee meeting of December 1.

You will note on page one of those minutes (paragraph 4) the passage of a motion that establishes a new procedure for handling the minutes of Subcommittee meetings. The objective, of course, is to get the minutes to the NEC members more quickly than in the past. Whether sending the NEC members minutes that have not yet been approved will prove to be a desirable procedure time will soon tell. It appears to be worth a try.

I also call your attention to pages six and seven of the enclosed minutes, on which is summarized my verbal report to the NEC Subcommittee of my recent trip to the East Coast. What follows is a somewhat more complete summary of my meeting with Messrs. Stapleton and Barnes. The summary will unavoidably repeat much--if not all--of what appears in the minutes with regard to the SWP.

You will recall that at the last NEC Session I had mentioned the invitation I had received to visit the SWP's national headquarters and that after brief consideration the NEC without formal action and with no objection concurred in my doing so. Developments mainly in the East following the NEC Session, however, created doubts in my mind about the advisability of doing so. There were reports of SWP members attending SLP social affairs, study classes, lectures, etc.; of SLP members being invited to attend SWP activities, display SLP literature at those events, even invitations for SLP members to speak at SWP affairs; of a number of SWP members, including Stapleton, having made reservations to attend the Eastern Interstate Thanksgiving affair at which I was to speak; etc. There were reports of some SLP members being very favorably impressed with these developments, a few to the point of seeing "important" areas of common interest between the two parties. There were other related considerations.

In view of all this, I decided that a visit by the National Secretary of the Socialist Labor Party to the national headquarters of the SWP could be subject to wrong interpretations. Therefore, upon my arrival on the East Coast I promptly informed Stapleton that I would not visit the SWP headquarters. Stapleton accepted that decision without any effort to pressure me for an explanation. He did suggest that we meet somewhere and "have a bite to eat" and discuss a few things. After first making sure that I would have ample time to meet with party members, make the trip to Massachusetts,

confer with NEC members Massi and Taylor, etc., I agreed.

We met in a restaurant on Monday, November 21, about 4 p.m. Comrade Jules Levin accompanied me. Stapleton was accompanied by Jack Barnes, National Secretary of the SWP. There were only a handful of other people in the restaurant so we had ample privacy.

Barnes opened the discussion. He expressed regret that he had been unable to attend the Thanksgiving affair at which I had spoken but said he had received a report of my talk from Stapleton. He added that, of course, he had earlier received a report from Stapleton of his visit to our national headquarters in Palo Alto. He also mentioned reports of the growing contact between SLP and SWP members at the local level. Barnes then stated that he had been reading the Weekly People and had noted that there appeared to be a "convergence" of ideas resulting in areas of mutual interest, possibly even areas of mutual views. As a result, he had some specific proposals to offer.

He said he believed that the point had been reached [when] it would be opportune to initiate an "exchange" between our two parties "at the leadership level." The initial objectives of such an "exchange," either through correspondence or direct discussions, would be to pinpoint areas of agreement; isolate areas of disagreement or seeming disagreement; try to clarify which differences were due to misunderstandings arising out of the use of different terminology and which differences might be basic and/or irreconcilable; exchange views on national and international questions; consider plans for better acquainting the SWP membership with De Leonism and the SLP membership with Trotskyism--possibly through articles in the Weekly People and the Militant; and even look into possible areas of joint educational efforts.

Barnes also posed the possibility and in his view the desirability of stimulating joint educational efforts among members of both parties at the local level, encouraging attendance at each other's study classes, possibly conducting some joint study classes, exchanging speakers, reading each other's papers and other publications.

During his remarks, Barnes repeated the point Stapleton had made on his earlier visit to our national headquarters that the SWP had no intent to "entice" SLP members, or to embark on any "raiding" attempt, etc.

In response, I stated that in my view and in the view of our party there was no basis for a fusion between the two parties and that at the present stage there was not even any basis for any "exchanges" or "discussions" of the nature he had proposed.

I then added that judging from the information that had reached our national headquarters it was my conclusion that the SWP had been less than candid in its approach. I stated that it appeared obvious to me, and others in our party, that the SWP "leadership" had discussed that party's attitude toward the SLP and, despite statements to the contrary, had then set in motion a planned "pro-

ject" aimed at probing for weak spots in the SLP presumably with intent to exploit them if possible. I cited examples that I believe tended to substantiate that judgment, among them the following:

The sudden attendance of SWP members at a variety of SLP-sponsored activities in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, California and elsewhere.

Invitations to SLP members to speak at SWP-sponsored affairs in New York and Boston.

Invitations to at least two SLP members to attend the SWP convention last August.

Invitations to SLP members to participate in SWP-sponsored forums and to display SLP literature at SWP-sponsored events in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and elsewhere.

The effort of Shelley Kramer, former RMC member now of the SWP and recently added to the staff of The Militant, to interview some of the women members of the SLP.

The request of one of the New Jersey SWP members to one of the New Jersey SLP members for information on how to go about organizing students at Montclair State College. (This, I said, was an obvious "come-on," since the SWP probably has had more experience organizing on college campuses than any other organization on the left.)

The fairly large SWP attendance at the Eastern Interstate Thanksgiving affair (at least 12, I was told).

The statement by Larry Siegle at the recent SWP convention re possible fusion with "SLP activists" by the time of their next convention.

The obvious "feeler" character of the Stapleton-Weinstein visit to the National Office.

All this and more, I stated, in my mind added up to a planned, coordinated effort with a definite motive.

Barnes then offered the following explanation:

Until several months ago, the SWP attitude toward the SLP was one of complete disinterest. It did not consider the SLP a factor in the socialist movement. It simply wasn't involved in anything.

Then it began to hear of "changes" taking place in the SLP. Their original premise was that a dissident faction had developed among the rank and file that was challenging the "leadership." Barnes explained that as "leaders of the working class" the SWP believed it had a duty to seek out dissidents in other groups and convince them that their place was in the SWP. Accordingly, they decided to go after the presumed "dissidents" in the SLP and see whom they could entice. (It was this premise, according to Barnes.

that led to Siegle's "prediction" of fusion with a group of "SLP activists." And Barnes designated that "prediction" a "bad mistake.")

Apparently, the "changes" in the SLP were discussed by the SWP political committee (and possibly by its National Committee) and the word went out to the SWP membership to "approach" the SLP. Before long, as a result of reading the Weekly People, reading some of the 1976 convention report and other experiences, they began to question their original premise regarding a dissident grass-roots element. Barnes bluntly stated they had made mistakes in their premises and their approach. He said their whole outlook was different now, hence the proposal for a direct "exchange at the leadership level." At the very least it would make possible a determination whether the "convergence of ideas" that the SWP saw was due to changes in the SLP or changes in the SWP or changes in both. Stapleton stated again that it would also afford an opportunity to clear up the meanings of terms being used by both parties, which he said he thought was important because a misunderstanding of terms might be contributing to misunderstandings re goals.

I restated that we in the SLP did not see any basis for initiating such "exchange" in the prevailing circumstances and again stressed the fallacy of the premise that there was any realistic basis for believing fusion between the parties possible.

Barnes then modified his original proposals. He suggested that contact at the local level be limited to such cooperation as may result from our members' participation in the same demonstrations, mass protests, coalitions, etc. He also proposed that it be left to the local members to determine whether or not to attend each other's lectures, or study classes. He declared that there would be no effort by SWP members to disrupt, or proselytize, or agitate at SLP events--that they would "stick to the text," the purpose being to learn, not to debate.

At the national level, he suggested he as National Secretary of the SWP send me, as National Secretary of the SLP, copies of any letters to the SWP membership that might have reference, or be of interest or concern to the SLP. Also that he send me copies of policy statements and/or documents on national or international matters that the SWP might issue. I stated I had no objection to his sending me whatever material he wishes, but that I made no commitment to respond or reciprocate in any way. Barnes stated that he understood and he would not expect any reciprocation.

The meeting ended on that note. The entire discussion had been conducted in civil terms and in a civil atmosphere. Both Both Stapleton and Barnes are capable and articulate men. As far as one can judge from relatively brief conversations, they are familiar with the works of Marx, Engels and other socialist writers. Though I cannot judge what they know of De Leon and De Leonism, there is little doubt in my mind that they are reading the Weekly People regularly and carefully and making it their business to know what is going on in the SLP. I believe they are urging their members generally to do the same. And from what I observed and learned on my trip East added to what I had learned earlier from other sources their members are doing so.

February 8, 1978

To the Members of the NEC

Dear Comrades:

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On February 1, the Socialist Workers Party extended a verbal invitation to the Socialist Labor Party to send one or two observers to the plenum of its National Committee which is scheduled to be held in New York City at the end of this month.

I understand that this is generally a closed meeting of the full National Committee of the 60 or more regular members and the 30 or more alternates. At these plenums past party activities are reviewed and evaluated, future plans and policies are considered, domestic and international events are discussed, etc. On the agenda for the coming plenum, we were told, will be the matter of relations with the SLP. It was stated that if the SLP accepted the invitation and sent an observer or observers to the SWP plenum, the SWP would not expect any reciprocal invitation from the SLP.

I conveyed the above information to the NEC Subcommittee at its special meeting of February 4. The NEC Subcommittee discussed the matter at considerable length. Following the discussion, three of the members (Pirincin, Sterioff and Birum) expressed the view that the party should send observers to the SWP plenum. The other two (Bills and Radov) were undecided, being doubtful that there was anything to be gained, and concerned with a possible negative membership reaction. (Since the meeting, Radov has informed me that she is now against sending any observers to the SWP plenum.)

Personally, I have given the matter a great deal of thought. It also has been discussed among the members of the headquarters staff. Here we feel the direct pressure of the SWP's overtures. We also feel the pressure of the party's long history of refusing to rub shoulders with anyone at any level. As a result of that legacy some members seem to assume that any SLP response, however limited, reserved or noncommittal amounts to either (1) acceptance of the SWP contention that there is a growing "convergence of views" which justifies the conclusion that fusion between the two parties is not only possible but eminently desirable; or (2) a readiness to accept reformism and opportunism as appropriate tactics for the SLP in its rebuilding effort; or, at worst, (3) a move in the direction of selling out to the SWP.

This impresses upon us the need for a clearly defined policy and course of action vis-a-vis the SWP based upon a determination of what will best serve the interests of our party.

February 8, 1978

Our efforts to end the party's isolation and establish a presence in the eyes and minds of the American workers has just barely gotten off the ground--and even that may be stretching a point. We are still doing more talking than acting. Some are still arguing over policies overwhelmingly approved by the membership but implemented only incidentally or not at all.

Even that limited effort, however, has compelled us to confront questions, attitudes and problems that we have not directly confronted for decades, including our relations with parties on the left.

I hope I have made it clear that I am convinced that there is no basis for believing that fusion between the SLP and SWP is possible or desirable. I believe the SLP has its own positive revolutionary role to play. But in playing that role I do not believe we will profit, or play it better, by following a policy of avoidance at any level.

The SWP won't just disappear. No doubt their overtures are calculated and self-motivated. No doubt also they have a termination point, as Comrade R. Bills put it. I do not believe they will continue to make their overtures indefinitely. Sooner or later they may attack us or return to their former policy of ignoring us.

Our primary concern, however, should be not what the SWP will do but what we should do. By the time the 1978 National Convention is over we should have a specific policy in this connection. To be sure that policy is the correct one, it should be the product of collective knowledge and informed opinion. The December 14 letter from Barnes, the January 19 letter from Stapleton, the letter currently said to be in preparation by Jenness should contribute to that knowledge and help shape our informed opinion. The upcoming plenum affords an opportunity for party members other than the National Secretary and members of the headquarters staff to have some direct contact with the SWP and its spokespersons; to observe and evaluate them at close range; to then add their reactions and impressions to our consideration of the matter.

A thorough, informed response to the initiatives of the SWP can aid us in defining ourselves, our party, our objectives, etc. The experience can, and I think will, contribute to our development.

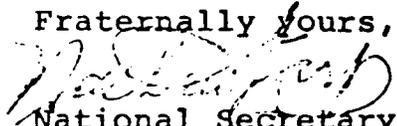
All the Subcommittee members were agreed that the final decision re the plenum should be made by the members of the NEC. Accordingly, I ask each of you to consider the question of whether or not to send an observer or observers to the SWP plenum at the end of this month and then let me know your decision by calling me (at 415-494-1532) preferably by Monday, Feb. 13, but no later than Wednesday, Feb. 15. (If possible, please make your calls after 5 p.m., your time, dial direct and then bill the National Office for the cost of your call. This is the most economical way to handle the matter.)

To the NEC

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February 8, 1978

If you are in favor of sending a representative or representatives, please be prepared to state who you wish to designate for the assignment. In this connection, the Subcommittee members (and I) would suggest NEC members Robert E. Massi (Region 1) and George S. Taylor (Region 3), because of their experience and their proximity to the meeting place.

Fraternally yours,

National Secretary

NK:DGB

P.S. If you must call after 8 p.m. Eastern Standard time, or after 7 p.m. Central Standard time, or 6 p.m. Mountain Standard time, or after 5:30 p.m. Pacific Standard time, please call (415) 969-4064.