

7/23/78

To: MA, Jack, Gus, Barry, Joe, Doug

Three older comrades from the RCP in H.K. came to New York last week requesting to have a discussion with someone from the SWP leadership. Two had been living in North America for a long time and one has been in Vancouver for only two years and plans to go back to H.K. next year.

First they spoke with Les about the situation in China, and then with me and Natalie. Comrade Jane from New York also attended and translated. They explained that they carry on regular correspondence with comrades from the RCP leadership and that the purpose of their trip here was to find out "the SWP's position" on the fusion process in H.K. so that this position could be communicated to the congress of the RCP scheduled for August, which is to take up the question of fusion with the RML.

We explained that we could not give them any "SWP position" except that we were in favor of the fusion as quickly as possible, just as the whole United Secretariat (or Bureau? I couldn't remember exactly) had hailed the decision of the two organizations to seek fusion. I noted how all fusions were concrete, etc., and that to have an opinion on the concrete problems you had to be on the spot.

They said they wanted us to know that the older comrades had no "stubborn idea" against fusion and that they all realize that linking up with new young forces that have come to Trotskyism was a matter of survival for the RCP. They said they also understood the problem of the "generation gap" and the need to bring the young comrades onto the leadership replacing older comrades.

The political situation is also a pressure toward fusion, they said. Horse racing is a big thing in H.K. and now there is a big strike of stable boys. In addition there is an important strike by students and teachers in a big government-run high school. The government has charged that Trotskyists are leading the strike, which is not true, but we do have influence with some of the leaders.

They said they knew the RCP had had weaknesses in its past of a dogmatic and sectarian type, but insisted that this was not the predominant reason for the resistance of some comrades to a rapid fusion. Rather, they thought there was a tendency in the fusion process to underestimate the importance of arriving at a principled programmatic basis for the fusion, including especially a clear statement of democratic centralist norms.

The insistence on democratic centralism refers to recent problems they have had in the youth groups associated with the RCP, the RCY and YSG. The comrade leading the youth work has a minority position in favor of a quicker fusion,

and has apparently taken some steps toward fusion in the youth without the agreement of the majority of the RCP leadership.

I explained how this kind of problem did not necessarily reflect differences over conceptions of democratic centralism in general and how it has come up in other countries (such as Spain) in the course of fusion processes; that you can't solve the problem merely by appeals to democratic centralism of one of the organizations when you have two Trotskyist organizations discussing fusion.

As to the program for the fusion, they proposed six major points: 1) the Stalinist bureaucracy in China is an obstacle to the revolution; 2) against the theory of socialism in one country; 3) for socialist democracy; 4) Hong Kong and Taiwan problems are part of the world revolution and not isolated questions (I'm not sure what this means); 5) the need for political revolution in China; and 6) democratic centralism.

I said it sounded principled to me, but that the agreement would have to be worked out by comrades on the spot. I reminded them that the international reunification document had been principled even though it didn't use the words "political revolution," since there was agreement on the content of overthrow of the bureaucracy.

Finally, they said the older comrades in H.K. thought Jim's trip there last August had had a negative impact because it had encouraged the young comrades to go along the line that the old comrades were stalling the fusion and were not needed for moving forward, and that this was portrayed as the "SWP's position." I said I was certain Jim had never claimed to be representing the US SWP's position, but that individual comrades from the International leadership, such as Jim, Barry, or Roman, who are more familiar with the situation in H.K., justifiably form their own opinions of the way the fusion process is being handled by the comrades.

The comrade who is returning to H.K. next year would like to come to New York another time to discuss more thoroughly the question of party-youth relations and also our experience with book stores, since he wants to set up a book store when he gets to Hong Kong.

Caroline