

14 Charles Lane  
New York, NY 10014

October 30, 1978

TO ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached are materials relating to Mohammed Oliver's application for readmittance to party membership. Since many of the questions involved in this case have been or can be expected to be raised in other branches from time to time, this material will be helpful.

This correspondence is for your information only.

Comradely,



Doug Jenness  
National Office

Ys: PC

Mohammed Oliver  
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October 27, 1978

SWP N.O.  
14 Charles Lane  
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Dear Comrades,

At a meeting with Don Gurewitz on October 24 I had an opportunity to read the letter John Hawkins wrote for the Political Bureau dated October 17, 1978. I noted with particular interest your statement that, in many ways, my understanding of what the party is all about was even more muddleheaded than when I resigned.

While this was a fair assessment of where I was at the time of my letter asking to rejoin, the speed with which I was moving back toward Marxism quickly changed my opinion on many questions. In fact, about the time Hawkins must have been typing his letter, I was moving out of the sufi household I'd been living in and severing all my ties with the Sufi Order.

Why this move? If you would bear with me for awhile, I'd like to share with you the thinking underlying my actions these last few years.

Everyone is always quoting Marx's statement that religion is the "opium of the people." The two sentences preceding that phrase need airing as well, "Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."

For a whole host of reasons (most of which need not be gone into here), I was in a state of despair and depression when I was attracted to sufism. However, I would never have been attracted to religion were it not for this aspect of protest -- no matter how passive.

In general I was out of touch with the life of my body -- my feelings, emotions, wishes and desires. I desperately wanted to get into touch with my human "essence" and the Sufi Order seemed to answer my cry. Held before me was the prospect of transcending my wretched condition and establishing truly human relationships in my everyday life. The sufis I met were what I'd call "authentic" personalities -- models of how human beings should live. They told me they had the way to "rise above the distinctions and differences that divide humankind." I bought it.

Of course, to be human in an inhuman world is to claim, even if not explicitly, that the world doesn't enter into the personal realm. Without my being really conscious of it, I had joined the ranks of fanatics, drunkards, and a host of other wretched souls seeking escape from their misery.

Now, my choice of the Sufi Order was in part due to the fact that it, unlike other mystical schools stressed the importance of being active "in the world." Still, the need for staying apart from the world was strong enough to require the maintenance of sufi khanagahs like the one I lived in. They are spiritual greenhouses where, hopefully, beautiful flowers grow.

The entire time I've been out of the party I've been looking for something to do "in the world." I tried a number of things and contemplated many more. However, none of them satisfied me. It began to dawn on me that there were only two things that interested me -- politics and realizing my self. I realized that it was not enough to be human in an inhuman world. To be truly human means changing the world. To do anything else would be, at least, hypocritical and, in my case, criminal.

So, I began having discussions with comrades. I began to do a few things with the Boston branch. I launched into a thorough study of philosophy. My historic responsibility and duty as a human being to do all I could to change the world was clear. Clear also was the fact that I should do whatever was required of me to fulfill this obligation. I knew I had to rejoin the party. It's program, I knew, was the answer -- it was in this sense that I said my politics had never changed.

In anycase I spoke with Tony Thomas at Oberlin and Don Gurewitz in Boston about wanting to rejoin. The content of those discussions you already know.

I also spoke with my sufi teacher. His consistent idealism and the party's consistent materialism were tearing me apart, but only because I was refusing to choose. I never truthfully confronted the question of religion. (Just as an aside, one of my

problems in the past was the inability to say no. I can't recall ever saying no to the party. Not saying no doesn't always mean doing what you really want to do. I found myself beginning to feel that my life was not my own. I was just a cog in the big, red machine and I blamed the party for my feeling non-human. When asked, quite rightly, to make a choice between Marxism and religion, I did my impersonation of a child in its "terrible twos". I said "No!" to the party.)

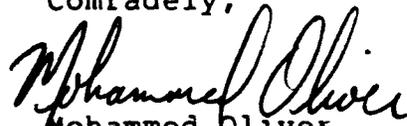
At the sufi khanagah I was a sufi, a believer in God. Out in the world I was a materialist. I was leading two lives. The "great wall" I had erected between these two aspects of my life was shattered by the experiences of the past few months. The world and all that's in it is humankind's to dispose of as it chooses. There is no necessity and hence no reality to God.

So, I am an atheist. Of course, I claimed to be an atheist before, but I don't believe I really understood atheism. My atheism was only skin-deep. Atheism has to be a thorough-going, radical ("going to the roots") critique of religion. In this current situation I've been forced to deal with all the pros and cons. I've had to wage a struggle resulting in a restructuring of my whole spiritual and practical existence.

This experience of the last two and a half years has been one of extreme importance in my personal evolution. I was fairly well-read in Marxist philosophy, but the social origins and social function of religion could never have been made more clear to me than they were by attempting the escapist road myself. Life indeed is the best teacher. I am fortunate to have learned my lesson.

I want to rejoin the party. I can say in all honesty "I am an irreconcilable atheist." I would like to be able to add "and revolutionary socialist activist."

Comradely,

  
Mohammed Oliver