

Weinstein Remarks on the Political Report at the convention

First let me take up the question of nationalization and the amendment that I made. Let me explain the genesis of this amendment. ~~At the~~, prior to the last plenum, there was a draft resolution that was presented in which I noticed this point about elected boards and the absence, as I remember, of any reference to linking this up to the question of expropriation. I didn't think too much of it at the time and I raised it at the plenum. I didn't even speak on it. I just mentioned that I wasn't satisfied by the arguments in favor, which weren't very many, in favor of what I considered to be a departure from the transitional program. I'll come back to the question of method in a minute or two. I raised my objections there and subsequently on a number of occasions raised my objections.

Now I think the transitional program is very clear. And that the question of elected boards goes in the opposite direction from the idea of workers control. The idea of elected boards, you see, I think can lead to mistakes. I think it already did. In the contribution written by Steve, I forget his last name, in his contribution he explained that I may have gotten my misapprehensions about the proposal from the draft that was presented to the National Committee prior to the plenum and the subsequent revision in the light of the discussion at the plenum of that draft resolution which you have in your kits.

He explains in his article that a number of errors were made in the course of the application of this slogan in the Militant over several weeks, over some time, he didn't specify

the time. He said that these could be corrected.

Now I want to point to that fact as an indication of where this concept leads. It leads away from the idea of workers control, the simple fact that the error included the lack of mentioning the conception of workers control in our proposal for nationalization and elected boards. That did not appear in the Militant for several issues. It was subsequently, one of the corrections, I presume, was the addition of a conception of workers control. It originally apparently was understood by the writers who work on the Militant and carry out our line, ^{which is} as an expression of the problem, it was originally understood by them to mean something in substitution for the conception of workers control. I think that that's evidence that the formulation and the concept is tricky and can lead to problems at the ~~very~~ ^{very} minimum.

The second idea that I raised is, and it took the form of advocating nationalization, that is, a request that we reaffirm our advocacy of nationalizations with no indemnification. Now I chose the term no indemnifications because that's the way it appears in the transitional program. And I thought that simply referring to it in that manner would solve the problem. It's not necessary to justify the transitional program. I don't think the transitional program is holy writ, and I think that the method is very important. But it's not necessary, on questions like this in my opinion, to justify, or to argue against, ^{to} provide arguments when a proposal is made that ~~moves~~ ^{moves} away from one of the important concepts in the transitional program.

Now in the article written by Steve and subsequently restated by Jack in his presentation, which is one of the reasons I asked for the extra time, an equal sign is placed between the concept of compensation and indemnification. Now I chose indemnification very carefully because I don't care what the dictionary definition is, I know what it is, in my opinion it means, no compensation to the full value of the property, but that's the words that were carefully and deliberately selected by Trotsky to get across the idea that we're not rejecting compensation, but we're rejecting indemnification, that is, the restitution for full value in the form of a stock or some other form to the capitalist who has been nationalized.

And low and behold, in the contributions to the discussion an amalgam is made between no compensation, and quoting Trotsky as an authority who explained that we're not against no compensation, that's why we reject the concept of confiscation and instead substitute the idea, the words, expropriation. And an amalgamation is made in the article and in Jack's remarks, between the idea of no compensation and no indemnification. And even if the comrades are right that this is a good slogan to try out, it's a good application of the method of the transitional program, it doesn't help to obfuscate the meaning of the transitional program and that is what is being done.

I can't understand, well maybe that's part of the problem. Maybe I don't understand. But I can't understand why the comrades are so firm on holding on to a case I don't think is ~~the principle~~ defensible.

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I don't understand it. I only repeat. I don't think that the transitional program is holy writ. That every word, every jot and tittle in the transitional program must be applied mechanically. The transitional program is a flexible document reflecting a living, organic and flexible approach to the problems of the working class and we cannot think of every thing in advance.

My time is up. I have the same proposal.

(aye vote for 19-minute extension)

Perhaps the confusion comes in in how we think about the transitional method. Now if the movement raises the slogan of directly elected boards, we will want to be, I don't say in advance that we could support it. But I would leave it open. If it's raised, we'd have to see what's its meaning is, what its significance is, in the context of the living struggle. How it's raised, where it's going, and how it allows us to

?? explain our point of view, what we need. You know Trotsky was very emphatic on the question of raising the slogan of nationalization abstracted from the question of expropriation. He was very reluctant to use that terminology. He only uses it because the comrades explain that in the context of American experience, that the term has a useful meaning and we could use it. But he says that you've got to be very careful. You've got to always put forward in the forefront the idea of expropriation. Otherwise we cannot distinguish ourselves from the opportunists, the fakers, the pho^gneys and so on.

Now another fact that the comrades should keep in mind and I would like to hear it explained to me, I can understand not using the term in each and every issue of the Militant, the term expropriation when we raise the idea of nationalization. But it seems to me that in this whole period since the plenum it should have been used once. Now I wasn't sure of that so I asked Steve and he said no. And the concept apparently, the comrades don't think that it's appropriate to make the connection between the two ideas, that is, nationalization and expropriation at the same time. And it has something to do with the conception of nationalization and the elected boards as an expression of the idea of "Open the books." I don't see the connection, maybe I'm dense, but I don't see the connection.

I don't think that's correct. Trotsky is very explicit. Because it gets across the wrong idea. And we're going to be confronted with this problem over and over again of what we mean by nationalization.

If the comrades think that explaining the idea of expropriation is premature at this time, then it's not necessary to raise the slogan of nationalization. There's nothing obligating us to raise the slogan of nationalization. We don't have to do that. We could talk about opening the books. It's not necessary to say nationalization and try to give that an interpretation that concretizes opening the books. It's not necessary. In my opinion my judgment, ^{In short,} what I'm saying, is that I don't think there's a serious difference of opinion. It's a question of comrades trying to grapple with solving problems in a flexible, Marxist

dialectical, if you will, way. And that's good, I'm all for it. So in the framework of this attempt to apply Marxism ~~in~~ ~~an~~ ~~inflexible~~ ^{and} ~~and~~ our transitional program in a living way, fine. But let's have a good discussion. OK? And then let's not confuse the question. If you can convince me, I'll vote for it. I'll change my mind, as other comrades have done. I've done it before and I'll do it again.

Now on the question of another thing that I think is along the same lines of...that is the question of the labor party and what we do in the unions. I don't think there's any fundamental differences. I think it's a mistake to do one of two things. It's a mistake to obscure differences. If there are differences let's try to keep them in the framework of where they belong and not extend them too far. Not try to read into what comrades say unless you have a case. And if you have a case, you should do it.

I don't think you should obscure differences. I think it's good that if the majority of the comrades on the Political Committee think it's very important to take a very sharp, critical stance on some of the ideas that I've raised. I'm not objecting to that at all. That's good. I think it would be wrong for them to keep it submerged if there's differences. I don't think the differences are greater than what they appear to be on the surface, which is a question of how we should tactically relate given what the real situation in the working class is, what the real objective situation is. And that's the framework that my remarks are constrained within. I'm tempted in these discussions, I've done it,

and in a way I'm doing it I know, I'm tempted to say, please listen to what I say. And don't interpret and think about what I'm really saying. That sometimes is justified. If you've ever been through a discussion where comrades then say, well that isn't what I said, you're twisting what I said. That always happens, and I do it to you and you do it to me. That always happens. But we should try for the sake of an intelligent, clarifying discussion to try to limit what we say, our polemics, to what is actually said, and not an interpretation of what is said. I think my credentials for being in favor of, for example, Frank Lovell's contribution which was a reprint of a letter which he wrote to a branch organizer, my credentials for saying that I agree wholeheartedly with that, are without possible challenge. My whole life in the party has been trained by Frank and others along these lines. And the reprint is, I think, a valuable service. I think it conforms to and confirms the contributions that I made on the proper approach that we should take, the best approach that we should take in the unions.

Now I preface my remarks along these lines because I think some misunderstandings can come and have come from the way in which we use the labor party slogan and the way in which we have promoted the idea of talking socialism in the unions. Some comrades have interpreted that to mean, what I know most ~~of~~^{of} us don't mean. Some comrades have interpreted that to mean some kind of a moral obligation to as soon as possible, as soon as feasible, identify yourself as a socialist. And the question

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of when to do it and how to do it is a tactical question that must be decided in each concrete circumstance, I believe. Now I know that opposition to this idea can take the form of the arguments that I'm presenting right now. I know that people who are really against us coming out as socialists can use the same arguments that I'm using. Believe me comrades, that isn't what I mean. My whole experience in the party has been to talk socialism in the unions and wherever I am. You can't stop me from talking socialism. And I don't think you should stop any of our comrades. We should encourage them to talk socialism.

But what I'm afraid of, I'm not afraid in the abstract, I'm afraid because of some concrete things that have happened where comrades have argued against relating to problems that exist in the union on the basis of, no that's not what we ought to do in the union, what we ought to do in the unions is talk socialism. We have some bizarre discussions. Comrades don't know what I'm talking about.

When they say, we're going to organize a fraction. I say ok for what purpose. We're going to organize a fraction. I don't want to be too mechanical about it. But they say we're going to organize a fraction to talk socialism, to sell the Militant, do recruiting and so on. Well, I say that's not sufficient in my opinion. That doesn't orient the comrades properly to say we're organizing a fraction for that purpose. We organize a fraction for the purpose of intervening, which

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includes the idea of recruiting people to the SWP, to winning people over to the body of our ideas, because in the long run we're lost if we can't recruit cadre to the Socialist Workers Party. I'm against us going underground in the unions and functioning as good trade union militants for an indefinite period of time. I'm against that concept. And anybody that ascribes such a view to me, as my ^{real} point of view, it just doesn't have any foundation. They'll have to come up with some concrete, substantial evidence of that. In the meantime, it doesn't help the discussion. We cannot discuss these problems in an intelligent way. If a cloud is cast over what people say, whether they really mean what they say or not. If you've got a case, make your case; if you don't, shut up.

I said that I had some reason to wonder as to how the labor party slogan was being utilized. I know that they said ~~that it~~ ^{at the plenum} was a propaganda campaign. But I also heard them say, one comrade on the political committee who said, or not on the political committee, one comrade on the national committee who said that it was a propaganda campaign with zip, and another comrade who was on the political committee who said that it was something more than just a propaganda campaign, that is, the idea of the labor party.

Then I watched the Militant. And I observed for a period of time, maybe that was a mistake that was corrected too, where most articles that had anything to do with the labor movement, and even the major article on the women's movement, ended with the editorial tale, for a labor party.

In addition to that we had a big dispute in the Bay Area over what tactical approach to take to the National Organization for Women. I know it doesn't properly belong in this discussion, but I must refer to it. Because the discussion took the form of, and it was reflected in the pages of the Militant, was reflected in the pages of the resolution in contradictory ways, that was proposed as our major tactic for intervening in the women's movement where we have a real presence, and are called upon to make practical proposals, given what the real situation is today, where a propagandistic approach was counterposed, to the requirement on our comrades who are active in the leadership on the National Organization for Women to come up with practical, approvable, concrete tasks. Just like in a union, it would be just as wrong in a union to say that instead of ~~na?~~ we were going to propose mass action as one of the main thrusts in getting across the idea that the road, that class collaboration is the wrong road, the comrades wanting to counterpose to that to pose as an alternative the idea of a labor party. That's a propagandistic approach. That's sectarian. I don't say that comrades were sectarian who did it, but it's slipping in the direction of a sectarian error. We are all capable of that. Including me. We are all capable of that. I just wanted to qualify that. I'm not accusing anybody of being sectarian.

That's the danger if we don't understand where we're at at the moment in connection with the labor party slogan, which I've always used. I said at the plenum that you don't want to become a pest. I've come on the borderline of being a pest on the

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question of the labor party. It's very possible. The minute you get up people say, oh, here comes labor party Nat again. I don't think I went that far. I tried to use common sense and utilize the slogan in an intelligent way.

But if we make the mistake, if there is a strike decision that has to be made by a union and we counterpose that strike decision, even though we think the strike is wrong, we want to argue against the strike, but say that the thing is not to have a strike, but to say, we need a labor party, we need the unity of the labor movement, and so on. Where it's not necessary to say labor party or we'll come across as artificial and unreal and it will be artificial and unreal. It would not only look that way, it will be artificial and unreal.

I know that the misunderstanding is on this very narrow plane that I tried to illustrate at the outset, because I can see that the party is carrying out a line of action that I agree with. And it's mostly ~~rightist~~ words. And it's mostly ^{advice of} comrade who get in with a lot of authority behind them^m really which is what compells me to write an article and to speak on the question.

I know there's the Milwaukeegate and the intervention in the rail industry in the Midwest. I think that's great. I know comrades are involved in organizing. The whole thing, the Virginia thing, the Newport News thing. Had we been in there, and we couldn't be, we didn't know, we couldn't be everywhere, but had we been there, we would have been involved in that struggle. Which is exactly what I'm saying we should do,

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nothing more, nothing less. That's what's important. Just that we use our heads. Use the labor party slogan 'thinkingly' and not as some kind of a panacea, as an answer to all questions, or as an easy way out. Our comrades are going to have to grapple with applying the transitional program in it's creative, living way. They can't simply take the transitional program and apply it to each union. Each union has a special form of the general problems, you have to suit and address, and adapt the transitional program to that special form or problem. That's what we should do. That's what I think comrades are really doing anyway. I don't know why they get upset because I say that's what we should do.

It's very easy, you see the danger of all this, is I could begin to say, well, I could do the same thing. I could say, well since they're making such a fuss, because when I get up and talk like this, comrades say that what I'm saying is that I'm against the labor party. It's been said. Comrades say that to me. I could make the same mistake. I could say, there's something wrong. You're against intervening in the unions. In union struggles. But I would be wrong. I know it's not true and I'm not going to say it. I'm just saying it to illustrate that let's grapple with the real issues, let's not bring false issues into the discussion. Because I don't care how the vote comes out. We are a democratic party. We've got a party which is the best educated or any political organization, probably anywhere in history. And even if the results of this discussion don't go in the direction that I want it to go, I know that in the course of experience the comrades are going to remember the things that are said at

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this convention and be in a better position to evaluate the experience. Correct mistakes, and so on. Everybody makes mistakes. I know that I criticize and I'm not on the Militant staff. I know it's hard. It's easy, not to be on the Militant, not to have to write the articles, not to have to do it in a living way, it's easy, unless you just do it mechanically, just copy from the transitional program and adopted resolutions. I know it's hard. And so, I'm not criticizing from that point of view. I'm criticizing from the point of view of us learning together from our experiences in the struggle. That's the way we should look at it. That's the way, I think, the party will get stronger. That's our tradition, that's our method.

Without that method of sharp discussions, I'm not against sharp discussions, but discussions that are as clear as possible, without those sharp, clear discussions, and no fuzzifying of questions, keep the questions as clear as possible; defend what you have to ~~DEFEND~~ say, if you're wrong, you're wrong. If you're right you're right. And even if you're right you're doing a service to the party. I feel I'm doing a service even if I turn out to be wrong. Because I'm sharpening your wits. You're going to get the sharpest criticism from the members of the Socialist Workers Party. to any idea that we project. That's why we need discussion, we need a comradely discussion. It is a comradely discussion. I hope it continues to be so. I think it will be.