

POLITICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON THE KIRK-KAYE SPLIT

Since its formation a number of years ago, the Kirk-Kaye group has been free to present its views to the ranks of the Socialist Workers Party in accordance with all the democratic rights traditionally granted to minorities under our Leninist organizational principles. As time went by, however, the group became less and less willing to abide by those principles. Then, on April 4, 1966, it made formal its split from the party which, to a large extent, had already been carried out in practice.

Deserters involved in the split include twenty-two former members of the Seattle branch and three former members-at-large in Connecticut. A few of them had been in the party since the Thirties. These latter defections reflect the extreme demoralization experienced by some within our ranks under pressures generated by the prolonged period of objective adversity the party has undergone.

In addition to its special ideas, the Kirk-Kaye group shares the characteristics typical of various minority formations that have appeared within the party in recent times. Each of these groupings tended to come forward with a gimmick guaranteed to work miracles for the party despite adverse objective conditions. In every case these minority viewpoints have been democratically discussed within the party and then rejected by an overwhelming majority of the membership.

Without exception, minorities of the Kirk-Kaye type have reacted to the rejection of their views by predicting disaster for the party. New developments, which contravened rather than confirmed their views, have been seized upon as a pretext for reintroducing their past notions. Old arguments have been repeatedly rehashed and demands for "new" discussion raised on the specious ground that the party is committing "new" errors. Behind all this has lain an obsessive desire to overturn the party's program and principles and a tendency, born of ingrown factional blindness, to look upon the party as a political prison.

As usually happens in such cases, those who nurse basic political differences with the party also tend to develop an urge to throw off the normal restrictions imposed upon them by the party's organizational concepts. Out of their frustration the diverse minorities evolved a common front on one special point: their opposition to the principle of majority rule. This resulted in brazen claims that an organized minority has the unconditional right to determine its own conduct inside the party, along with contentions that the majority has no right to require a minority to carry out official party policy.

Enforcement of the basic democratic principle of majority rule has been portrayed as a violation of minority rights. Refusal to let minorities turn the party into a perpetual talk shop has met with charges that there is not adequate discussion,

that there is no democratic procedure for correcting party policy. When called to order for indiscipline and disloyalty, an outcry has arisen about bureaucratic persecution. The party leadership has been accused of trying to solve political questions by organizational measures. Statements and insinuations have been heard that organized minorities are no longer tolerated in the party and that party democracy is being undermined by a bureaucratic and apolitical leadership.

These slanderous and unfounded charges have been intended to divert attention from the realities of the internal party situation. Behind a smokescreen of double-talk, minorities have actually attempted to set themselves up as a party within the party, with their own program and their own discipline. More accurately, they have tended to degenerate into unprincipled cliques bound together by personal associations. As such, they find the normal restrictions imposed by the party's program and principles increasingly intolerable. They exhibit a strong urge to break loose from all party restraint.

If the party did not stand firm, if it conceded to the demands for special license to organized minorities, it would negate the Leninist concept of a disciplined party composed of loyal members. Organizationally, the party would become converted into an all-inclusive federation of autonomous factions. Politically, it would be rendered impotent by perpetual internal warfare.

The party met this latest challenge to its Leninist concepts by adopting, after a democratic internal discussion, its 1965 convention resolution on "The Organizational Character of the SWP." That resolution reaffirmed our basic concepts of democratic centralism, restating them in face of the current specific challenge.

As the resolution states, our movement aims to train its cadres in the irreconcilable spirit of a combat party. That aim requires firmness in political line, unity in action, disciplined conduct in all internal party affairs and unconditional loyalty to the party. These are indispensable requirements for a party that aspires to lead the workers to victory in a struggle for political power. To go up against the ruling class in the United States, it is imperative that we approach our revolutionary tasks as one party with one program.

Our democratic-centralist norms enable the party to shape such a course in a free and democratic internal atmosphere. All individuals and tendencies have a full chance to contribute to the development of the party and to the shaping of its leading cadres. Minority views may be presented in internal discussion at the proper time and in an appropriate manner as determined by the party. Once a decision has been made on disputed issues a minority may retain its views but must subordinate itself in action to the majority. Between conventions authority becomes

centralized and the party confronts the outside world with a single policy, that of the majority. In that way the party maintains its role as a revolutionary vanguard. Its character as a combat organization is safeguarded. Unity in action is preserved. Firmness of political line is assured and the party is enabled to maintain its principles unadulterated.

As a brief sketch of the Kirk-Kaye group's history will show, it had long been evolving toward its break with these well-established organizational principles which have guided our work for more than three decades. The break resulted from deep-going opposition to party theory, program and practice on a series of questions. As against the party's views, the group put forward its own particular line stemming from an incorrect theory about the Negro struggle which Kirk first began to expound some fifteen years ago.

Kirk maintains it is a fundamental error for the party to advocate self-determination for American Negroes and to recognize progressive features in black nationalism. He calls this a separatist line and an adaptation to the Communist Party's now abandoned black-nation program. Kirk mechanically equates self-determination as a people with separatism, which he excludes as a Negro right, and then extends the fallacy by identifying separatism and black nationalism as one and the same thing. From these false premises he comes to the fallacious conclusion that black nationalism is reactionary. He then indicts the party for alleged capitulation to ultra-black nationalism which, in his terms, means that the party is anti-integrationist. If this strange logic seems hard to grasp, it is no more fantastic than the gyrations through which the would-be theoretician projects his own line for the Negro struggle.

According to Kirk, a battle for revolutionary integration will soon get under way in the South. This impending revolutionary uprising will break out before the rest of the country has reached a comparable stage of radicalization. The Southern movement will undertake to overthrow what Kirk terms the fascist-type state regimes in that region. Johnson, who in some unexplained manner has introduced Bonapartist rule over the country, will seek to crush the impending Southern revolution. Therefore, we are told, the party must call forth a movement outside the South to stay Johnson's hand. It must also launch a campaign to encourage comrades of all ages to go to Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. (Provided, it would seem, that they are not involved in a national mobilization to support Dick Gregory if he runs for mayor of Chicago, as Kirk demanded at the recent plenum of the National Committee.)

Kirk's line on the Negro question, which would have the party rushing simultaneously in all directions, has long been discussed in our ranks. As far back as the 1957 party convention it was put forward in resolution form, thoroughly discussed and overwhelmingly rejected. During the next six years of

almost continuous internal party discussion of the Negro question, Kirk's contributions were, of course, made fully available to the membership along with those of other participants. At the 1963 party convention, he again came forward with his own resolution on the Negro question. As in 1957, his line was overwhelmingly rejected by the convention. This was repeated at the 1965 party convention when he once more introduced his views within the framework of a general political resolution.

Despite all this, the Kirk-Kaye group now allege that none of their documents on the Negro question were discussed objectively. That, too, is typical Kirkian logic. Rejection of his revelations is considered tantamount to refusal to discuss them objectively and conclusive proof that the party is bankrupt in both theory and practice.

By 1963 the Kirk-Kaye group also began to attack party policy on the Chinese question. Their tactics on this subject had the earmarks of an unprincipled maneuver to build a bloc with the Swabeck-Boulton group. Whatever their motivation, Kirk and company declared untenable the Trotskyist program of political revolution against the Maoist bureaucracy in China. They upbraided the party for defining the Mao regime as a Stalinist-type formation. At the same time they began to echo the Swabeck-Boulton demand that the party seek a fusion with the Maoist group in this country known as the Progressive Labor party.

This latter demand reflects their adamant refusal to accept the 1959 party conclusion that the possibilities of regroupment, which had opened after the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, had been exhausted. That was the Congress at which Khrushchev denounced Stalin and precipitated an internal crisis in the Stalinist world movement. We intervened in the deepening crisis of Stalinism and sought to win over receptive ex-Stalinists to our movement. When this phase ended, we turned to other fields.

Rejecting the 1959 convention decision, the Kirk-Kaye group persistently maneuvered to continue the regroupment tactic in the party's Seattle branch which they controlled. As time went by they took an increasingly soft approach to political opponents of the party. In fact, they seemed to become politically friendly toward every other radical grouping to the degree that they developed political hostility toward their own comrades of the party majority.

Then at the 1965 party convention Kirk-Kaye introduced an omnibus resolution containing sweeping differentiations from the party's program and principles. In effect, they called upon the party to dissolve itself and enter upon a quest to form what they called "a new, fused and regrouped revolutionary party." As in all previous cases, their whole line was overwhelmingly rejected by the party convention.

Not long thereafter the group entered the final political phase of their split from the party by centering their attack on party policy in the antiwar movement. They denounced our antiwar program as reformist. Party comrades were accused of acting as right wingers in an alliance with "established peace addicts." Our effective fight against the false policies and unprincipled maneuvers of the Stalinists and other political opponents was branded sectarian disruption of the antiwar united front. Meanwhile the ultraleftist adventurers of Progressive Labor, along with renegades from our party, were praised for allegedly raising the political level of the antiwar movement. Our young comrades, who carry the main burden of the antiwar campaign, were denounced as sectarians, reformists, conservatives and any other harsh thing that Kirk-Kaye happened to think of.

As against present party tactics, Kirk-Kaye advanced an impatient, presently unrealizable, demand that the antiwar and civil-rights movements be combined forthwith in one united struggle. They denigrated and dismissed as pacifist the present stage of the struggle against war, through which increasing numbers of young people are becoming radicalized around the demand to Bring the Troops Home Now. In its place they projected fantasies about creating a "revolutionary" antiwar movement which would call upon the National Liberation Front in Vietnam to drive the GIs into the China Sea. Toward that end they acted in close political-organizational collusion with whatever screwballs were around.

The appalling results of the Kirk-Kaye course in Seattle have been eloquently summarized by loyal comrades present when the group split from the party. Wherever they probed, the loyal comrades found evidence that the whole line of the Kirk-Kaye group leads to abstention from the living struggle at its present stage of development; that the group is characterized by pessimism and defeatism about the prospects for mass radicalization in the United States; that their verbal flights into super-militancy serve to cover a policy of non-participation in the actual processes of mass action. This, it was found, has caused them to fall more and more out of touch with political realities and to degenerate into a small, sectarian formation with many characteristics of a political cult.

Such, in general, are the political features of the Kirk-Kaye group, who have split from the party which they denounce as bankrupt in program and principles, and who have set themselves up in Seattle as the "center of revolutionary-socialism" in the United States.

In their organizational evolution, the ex-comrades of the Kirk-Kaye group have abandoned Leninist principles. While still in the party they sought unconditional autonomy as an organized minority in opposition to the basic democratic principle of majority rule. On one and another pretext, they injected their

political line into the public activity of the Seattle branch. In the 1964 election campaign they even went so far as to create a changed public organizational form, a so-called Freedom Socialist Party. This was done on the pretense that a non-SWP designation was needed in order to mobilize the necessary support to get the candidates on the election ballot. Actually it was a ruse designed to implement the Kirk-Kaye concept of a "new, fused and regrouped revolutionary party."

Contacts were first recruited into the Kirk-Kaye group and then, formally, brought into the party after they had been lined up on the basis of the group's own program and methods. Before they entered the party, the recruits had already been indoctrinated against its program, convention decisions and organizational principles. When the group split, a loyal comrade tried to impress upon one of them the seriousness of leaving the party. She replied that she would never have joined the party if it hadn't been for the Kirk-Kaye tendency. In fact she had joined the tendency and not the party.

During internal party discussions Kirk-Kaye put their line to vote in the Seattle branch at the start of the discussion, aiming to commit the party branch in advance to their views and to close everybody's minds to any contrary opinions. Kirk-Kaye documents were submitted for party discussion in the name of the branch, an undemocratic action that is contrary to party discussion procedure. This was done behind a smokescreen of slanderous charges that the party has become "undemocratic" and "bureaucratic." It was a case of factionalism gone mad.

This was evident in all spheres of party work. Even before the Kirk-Kaye split, the Seattle branch had made only token distribution of our press. There were few individual subscriptions in the area, bundle orders were very small, and payment for what was ordered lagged far behind. The branch did not take out a single subscription to World Outlook. Little general literature was ordered and not all of that was paid for. The small branch pledge to the party's monthly sustaining fund had fallen more than a year in arrears. No dues payments whatever had been sent to the party's national office since last year. These defaults signified that the branch had developed a deadly internal sickness, causing it to degenerate.

Still another violation of loyal organizational conduct was committed by Kirk-Kaye in their attack on party policy in the antiwar movement. Kirk opened the attack last December through a letter to the Political Committee. Copies of the letter were immediately distributed from Seattle to a select list of people inside and outside the party. A member of the group went to a neighboring branch of a co-thinkers' organization where he gave copies of the letter to some individuals. Carried out behind the backs of the officially-elected leadership of that organization, this was a flat violation of party policy concerning fraternal relations with co-thinkers. As far back as

1953 such practices had been specifically denounced by the party, and the reasons for the party's views on the subject were explained at the time in a speech by Comrade Cannon on "Internationalism and the SWP."

The co-thinkers' national leadership sent our party a formal protest, taking the strongest exception to the way in which the Kirk letter had been injected into their organization. Attention was called to the co-thinkers' right to decide for themselves what material is to be circulated in their movement and when it will be circulated. Our party was asked to take appropriate action to see that such a violation of their rights does not happen again.

Kirk was notified by the PC that the whole matter would be placed on the agenda of the February, 1956, plenum of the National Committee. At the plenum he was given full opportunity to explain why he had allowed his letter to be used in the manner described, and after listening to him the National Committee made its decision. Kirk was censured for his violation of party rules and procedures and warned that any repetition would lead to more drastic disciplinary action. If the plenum had done any less, it would have defaulted on its obligations to the party.

Even this mild disciplinary action was too much for the thoroughly disloyal Kirk-Kaye group. It soon became apparent, from evidence that chanced to fall into the hands of loyal comrades, that they had set out to organize the biggest possible split from the party. The decision was made at a Seattle caucus meeting, but the open break was delayed for tactical reasons. Through surreptitious letters and personal visits, in which false claims were made that the party was driving them away, efforts were made to broaden the split beyond the Kirk-Kaye group. While trying to keep loyal party comrades in the dark about their scheme, they made others, including the Progressive Labor Maoists, aware of the split perspective. In fact, Kirk-Kaye acted in collusion with such types in a parallel scheme to split the revolutionary-socialist youth movement and set up a rival youth organization. Finally, their real aims came out into the open when the group formally resigned from what they termed "the stifling, narrow and mechanistic confines of the party."

These splitters, who long ago ceased to be loyal party builders, can no longer be regarded as part of our movement. They are free to apply their program and methods as they choose, but not in the name of the Socialist Workers Party. Kirk and company are now functioning as avowed opponents of our movement and they are to be treated as such by all party members. We will grant them no territorial franchises, in Seattle or elsewhere.

The PC has already assigned loyal reinforcements to rebuild the party's Seattle branch. For the first time in a long while,

political work there will be conducted in accord with the party's program and organizational principles. The way is again open to create a viable revolutionary-socialist movement in the Pacific Northwest. We may be confident that progress toward that end will now be made, just as our movement is making progress elsewhere in the country.

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