

March 8, 1966  
Seattle, Wash.

To: Comrade Ed Shaw and the National Committee, SWP

From: Seattle Branch, SWP and the national Kirk-Kaye Tendency

Dear Comrades:

The censure of Comrade Kirk by the February Plenum of the N.C. for the crime of criticizing party policy in the anti-war movement demonstrates anew the majority's habit of prejudicing every serious internal discussion by an organizational diversion. In this case, the disciplinary smokescreen is based on completely ludicrous grounds and constitutes a cynical frame-up.

Without previously notifying Comrade Kirk of the precise charge against him (and he still does not have it in writing, as required by the SWP Constitution), the P.C. accused him at the Plenum of circulating his criticism of party policy in the anti-war movement outside the party, namely, to some leading co-thinkers. Deliberately ignoring what is the specific and concrete nature of the normal and long-established relationship between Seattle and the co-thinkers, and neglecting to mention that the recipients of the criticism were leading spokesmen for the SWP's majority faction among the co-thinkers, the P.C. pretended that Kirk had done something new, ominous and illegal. The Plenum gave itself no chance to hear a real explanation; instead, within fifteen minutes, it accused, censured and authorized an investigation to be undertaken AFTER the censure.

This hysterical assault against Comrade Kirk, a veteran of 32 years in the movement, was a direct reflex to his attempt, in consultation with his tendency, to bring about a critical consideration of policy in the anti-war movement. We were critical of the strategy and tactics employed at the Thanksgiving NCC conference in Washington, D.C., where the youth and the party, by insisting on a "single-issue" oriented movement, served to arrest the radicalization of the 'new' left, and effectively isolated themselves from the revolutionary wing of the southern Negro struggle. We also opposed their sectarian insistence on forcing all conference activity to focus around a purely organizational struggle to isolate the independents in a new organization, when the burning responsibility for the youth and the party was to conduct a clear political struggle against a SANE-liberal-C.P. conspiracy to disorient the anti-war movement.

It is now clear that the central party regime considers it their right to prevent all objective discussion of policy within

the party. "Sir", they say, "We will not consider what you have to say, but will fight to the death your right to say it." Instead of political investigation into the ramifications of policy in the anti-war movement, the P.C. initiated an organizational investigation into the ramifications of Comrade Kirk's audacity in expressing his views within and to the party. The P.C.'s completely bureaucratic reflex strikes a mortal blow at the right of the rank and file to a democratic and orderly method of correcting wrong policy.

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We accuse the P.C. of behaving illegally on the following grounds:

1. The tortuous and artificial fabrication of grounds for "charges", the breathtaking speed of the swift censure, the investigation after the decision etc., are all unconstitutional, and can be explained only by political panic and disorientation.

2. The P.C.'s charge that normal practice of providing leading northern majority spokesmen with internal SWP material constitutes an "unwarranted interference" in a fraternal body, is absurd. It is the P.C. that is guilty of such interference by virtue of their conspiracy with the co-thinkers to undertake direct organizational interference into the life of the SWP.

Only those utterly ignorant of the extant relationship between Seattle and our neighbors can believe that the charges against Comrade Kirk originated in a sincere and spontaneous protest from northern co-thinkers. There has been an exchange of internal material between our two West Coast Trotskyist branches for over 20 years, developed at the behest of leading co-thinkers and with the full knowledge of New York. Since 1945, the two branches have cooperated in activities, discussions and public meetings, and the N.C. members from Seattle (Roberts, Kaye and Kirk) not only helped draft resolutions for our co-thinkers, but participated directly in internal factional struggles, usually as mediators but often as partisans.

When Comrades Dobbs and a leading co-thinker suddenly discover that traditional activities are now "violations of fraternal autonomy", or whatever, they are guilty of sheer charlatanism.

When they claim, further, that the two recipients of the Kirk letter were young 'rank and file' innocents, they compound the distortion. A.E. is a co-thinker Branch Organizer and openly functions as spokesman for the SWP majority, having represented

it in Seattle in the pre-convention discussion. P.C, is a branch leader of many years standing. Both have always had access to SWP internal documents.

Over the years, we have sought to arrange speaking engagements with the co-thinkers for all touring SWP speakers and representatives of related organizations on national tour. During the past year, this has not been necessary -- since such speakers generally go directly to the co-thinkers first on behalf of the majority faction. As a result of this unrelenting majority pressure, A.E. has introduced a new factional atmosphere in the relationship between the two branches; Seattle speakers, who formerly spoke and taught publically and regularly for the co-thinkers, are now prohibited from this public activity and are invited to speak only at closed meetings to debate internal SWP differences!

In the context of this outrageous and upside-down situation, and paying official respect to it, Comrade Kirk's letter was given to these comrades as a fraternal courtesy to acquaint them with the opposition, since they had projected a joint debate on the issues involved. The letter had been mimeographed locally after the N.O. announced it would not immediately circulate the letter because of a "lack of technical resources."

So now the SWP majority, having poisoned the atmosphere by playing heavy factional politics across the border, accuses us of unwarranted interference as we proceed calmly to carry out a normal political discussion. It is not we, but the majority, that needs to explain its actions to the membership.

3. The "security" obsession revealed by the P.C. in its charges against Comrade Kirk is absolutely ludicrous. It is based on the spurious grounds that Kirk's letter "connected" the party and youth and thereby "endangered" the youth in a defense case (!) This is a patent device to forestall criticism and render self-defense impossible. If the needs of legal defense in the case justify a blanket of automatic intimidation smothering the party's activities and discussions, we have already lost the Case.

In any event, Comrade Kirk is hardly responsible for the extant and publically known relationship between the youth and the party. On the contrary, our tendency has been identified for years with the struggle for an organizationally independent youth. We cannot imagine how references to their joint political activity -- a normal relationship even between opposing organizations -- can jeopardize party "security", when the majority flaunts joint disciplining and joint expulsions, and has clearly interlocking

directorates in both organizations.

The real security danger for the party is the peculiar organizational factionalism of the majority approach. Just as political discussion within the party is distorted and squelched by organizational threats and repercussions, so political discussions with co-thinkers are frowned upon and organizational collusion substituted -- a collusion which does indeed endanger the party. Likewise, political collaboration between youth and the party is replaced by organizational collusion, and organizational autonomy for the youth is transformed into a farce. This is how the majority "guards" security, by endangering everybody and everything. Such is the logic of factionalism gone wild.

4. Individual members of the Kirk-Kaye tendency are now being harassed to "explain" their accessory roles in The Crime. The P.C. has no constitutional or moral right to transform accepted past practices into violations. It has no grounds whatsoever to profer charges, no right to censure a non-crime, and no authority to investigate a nothing.

What should be investigated is the arrogance of a regime which chooses a victim, invents his crime, and promptly demands confessions all around.

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The Seattle Branch and the national supporters of the Kirk-Kaye tendency reject the charges, condemn the censure, and will not cooperate in the current post-censure witch-hunt. We will not be voluntary individual accomplices in the ongoing inquisition, for we cannot accept its validity and refuse to bear responsibility for this unprecedented onslaught against the last vestiges of party democracy.

Furthermore, we are well aware that you can fabricate charges faster than we can answer them, and we are not about to exhaust ourselves further in such a self-defeating and puerile contest. We cannot in good political conscience play this sadistic game of cat and mouse; we just happen to be all tied up these days with a few little matters of Marxist education and Trotskyist politics for the scores of new young people coming to us for guidance and organization.

In your best interests, as well as ours, we demand that this ridiculous campaign of persecution against us be immediately stopped.

Comradely,  
Seattle Branch &  
National Supporters of K-K  
Tendency