

TONE!

Dec. 13, 1965  
Seattle, Wash.

To the Political Committee

Dear Comrades,

The Policy of the P.C. in the anti-war movement had its final result at the Thanksgiving Conference in Washington. Here the party and youth carried on an unprincipled, disruptive and politically reformist struggle against the entire leftwing of the anti-war movement. They disrupted the conference around tertiary organizational demands and ended in isolation and national disgrace. They established an indelible and deserved record for political conservatism and dead-end factionalism. They also emerged as the only tendency present able to ignore and snub the civil rights movement.

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This episode constitutes a political catastrophe for the SWP of a magnitude never before experienced by American Trotskyism. If immediate steps are not taken to counteract the effect of this performance, the reaction to it will render the party and youth as contemptible among honest militants as was the CP during its worst days. This can be prevented only by an abrupt change of policy and a public repudiation of the course followed by the party and youth in the anti-war movement during the past three months.

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The party and youth entered the conference armed with two "principles":

1. To imprison the anti-war movement in the U.S. in the single issue of peace in Vietnam.
2. To manufacture a centralized national membership organization of the independent committees on a Peace Only program, to supercede the present united front arrangement.

I contend that such "principles" are alien to revolutionary program and tactically impossible to implement given the actual composition and mood of the living anti-war movement.

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1. The Programmatic Problem

1. Can the Peace Movement Stop the War?

The policy of the P.C. is based upon an unproved and unfounded assumption that the war can be stopped by mass peace pressure on the government. This is an illusion unworthy of revolutionists.

The Militant has been saturated with this line for many weeks. Comrade Halstead's articles constantly refer to the "millions of lives" which are at stake in the decision of the peace movement on the "single" versus the "multi-issue" question.

The Nov. 29 Militant editorial of "The anti-war Conference" gives the line fairly clearly. "The war in Vietnam cannot be ended solely by the activities of local committees. A powerful national movement will have to be built."

This concept is even more emphatically stated in a fantasy called "A Draft Perspective for the Anti-War Movement." After advocating the single-issue-national-membership-organization policy, the Draft concludes: "We are convinced that an organization can be built in this country on the basis of the program outlined above, that can be the decisive factor in bringing an end to the genocidal war in Vietnam."

Comrade Britton, in a youth communication, describes this Draft as one "passed by the Washington Heights CEWV, an upper Manhattan community-based committee in collaboration with individuals, mainly our comrades, in the other New York committees listed. It has been circulated in the New York anti-war movement to serve primarily an education function in preparation for the Washington convention. . . . Hopefully, the representatives at the November 18 meeting will approve this statement or a modified version of it. . . ."

The P.C., having utterly failed to make a general analysis of the politico-economic conjuncture for the SWP convention, has the totally false impression that the capitalist class has no fundamental stake in this war, and would pull out of it in response to a little more pressure.

While it is true that some of the lackey-columnists close to the administration are assigned to give that impression, it is only a ruse. The ruling class is desperately attempting to create large new investment opportunities and views South Vietnam as a key to the exploitation of East Asia and India. Furthermore, it regards Vietnam as essential to its preparations for an eventual war with China.

This war is fundamental to the economic and political interest of U.S. capitalism. NO powerful national "Withdraw the Troops" movement ALONE can stop this war.

## 2. How Can The War Be Ended?

The Militant says "Bring the GIs Home." But this only raises another question -- How? The party and youth line is that an enlarged peace movement can do it by nationally directed pressure and agitation.

In reality, a more tangible and quicker possibility for the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces from Vietnam could be accomplished if the National Liberation Front can drive them into the China Sea! This is the active revolutionary solution to the question. But there is no hint of recognition in our literature that this is the most favorable alternative.

The party and youth leave it to others who are bolder to be partisans of the NLF, others who may lack something in program, theory or experience, but make up for it in the revolutionary spirit of solidarity so dismally absent from the pages of The Militant.

It is doubtful that this war can be ended on domestic initiative by anything else than the proletarian revolution. However, short of such a basic explosion, the only force on U.S. soil capable of pressuring the capitalist government out of Vietnam is the proletariat, in the course of its prosecution of the class struggle. To promise and advocate anything else is to sow an opportunist illusion.

The Negro movement represents that section of the proletariat which is presently in motion and has the initiative. The virile youth movement linking up with the Negro movement would together comprise a formidable force, agitating sections of the proletariat into action.

Out of this process will emerge a new fused and regrouped revolutionary party composed of radicals from the socialist, anti-war, and civil rights vanguard organizations. The appearance and maturing of this development -- the process of a fused vanguard stimulating the working class into struggle at the point of production -- are the only political realities that Johnson & Co. can respect.

No matter how radical the slogans and broad the composition of the peace movement, it will be politically ineffective until it links with the Negro radicals and the working class. To a Trotskyist, under capitalism, "There Is No Peace!"

### 3. Towards Coalition Politics

If a "properly organized" peace movement CAN stop a war, then we have been erroneously fighting Stalinism and pacifism on this issue for 30 years. And if we were correct then, and are still correct now with the new "tactical" line because times have changed, then the P.C. is indeed guilty of the old revisionist habit of reversing a principle because of supposed tactical necessity.

This "tactical" excitement is a new shocker in SWP practices. Has the party forgotten that the tenacity with which previous peace movements clung to reformism was rooted in part in the liberal-Stalinist compulsion to isolate war and peace from the other great social problems? And don't they similarly isolate civil rights from the questions of war and peace, poverty, imperialism?

The upshot of this traditional limitation of the anti-war movement to peace only and the civil rights movement to civil rights only has been the incarceration of both movements inside the Democratic party, for only the interrelation of all the great social problems makes it possible to identify capitalism as the cause of any of them and lay the groundwork for independent anti-capitalist political action.

Now that for the first time in the modern era, militant anti-war youth and militant southern Negroes are seeking to broaden the concept and scope of both the anti-war and civil rights movements by integrating their aims and directing an appeal to the proletariat, the party and youth claim that such youth are sectarian splitters of the united peace front!

The capitalist class is profoundly fearful of the possibility of the Negro movement identifying itself with the colonial revolution and linking up with the anti-war movement around the issue of Vietnam. Every time a Negro leader opens his mouth on Vietnam or colonialism, the entire capitalist press rakes him over the coals with a line quite similar to that of the party and youth: "It's all right for Negroes to build their own movement on their own grievances, but you only injure the cause of civil rights by taking positions on other social problems, because that will alienate your supporters."

What they mean is that a break from the Democratic or Republican parties would be the next logical step and this must be prevented at all costs.

Larry Laughlin, one of the prominent co-chairmen of the militant Berkeley VDC, said in his speech to the Seattle committee three weeks ago: "We are disillusioned with protest. We are going to enter politics. We are going to run radical candidates on the twin issues of War and Civil Rights. We plan a frontal attack on the Democratic Party which is calculated to break it up. We consider it our duty to shake-up the labor movement to a realization of labor's responsibilities."

It is quite true that this is not the whole story, that there is a lot of confusion about what a "frontal attack on the Democratic Party" means, and that for many it includes running candidates in the Democratic primaries. And, to be sure, danger of coalition politics exists. However, the proposed treatment prescribed by the party and youth does nothing to counteract coalition politics.

The party and youth claim that if we permit issues other than peace to enter into the present movement the Stalinists will utilize the circumstances to take the movement into the Democratic Party. This argument not only stands the thing on its head, but fails to grapple with the reality.

In the first place, the anti-war movement is going into politics whether we like it or not, and its only chance to avoid the trap of Peoples Frontism is not to avoid politics, but precisely to relate the war question to the other social problems and create an over-all anti-capitalists political philosophy.

The newly radicalized elements, many of them politically naive, are still people moving rapidly leftward who desperately require the intervention of revolutionary socialists on the big political questions to aid their development.

In so far as the youth movement is successful in confining the movement to peace only, it will insure a strong development of Peoples Frontism, because a movement which is orientated exclusively to the peace issue will inevitably wind up supporting "peace" Democrats.

## II Tactics and Organization Forms

### 1. A Radical Peace Movement and a Conservative Youth Movement

The "single" vs "multi-issue" position of the party and youth is not only wrong politically, but tactically blind, revealing a complete lack of knowledge of the actual political condition of the movement, which is far more sophisticated and advanced than the party and youth comprehend.

The party and youth have now been active in this movement for a few months, and in some cases a few weeks. Yet they presume to dictate to the movement a scheme for stopping the war which has no plausible chance for success and which the anti-war militants had two years ago, but have now discarded, realizing that they must integrate the anti-war movement with the colonial revolution, the Negro struggle, economic problems of the working class -- in short, make a class-struggle internationalist movement of it. The party and youth demand that they return to their political infancy of two years ago and wait for the masses to catch up.

Those who have led the anti-war movement during the past two years in protest marches and demonstrations are now coming to the realization that the White House and Pentagon are impervious to any amount of protest or public opinion, intend to stay in Vietnam until every square foot of soil has been skurned by bombs, every leaf of foliage laid to waste and every man, woman and child murdered, if necessary. The ruling class is clearly prepared to go to any lengths of domestic policing and terror to prevent obstruction of the war. The anti-war militants now understand that something more basic than even powerful single-issue protest routine protest must be organized.

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The Washington Conference represented objectively an attempt by newly radicalized youth to begin reaching general anti-capitalist conclusions derived from the past two years of protest. Even the newest CEWVs are ripe for revolutionary conclusions. The rapid leftward development of large sections of this movement clearly opened up the perspective for the creation of a mass revolutionary youth movement in this country.

The main and only responsibility of the revolutionary socialists at this conference was to attempt to broaden and deepen and generalize the anti-capitalist sentiments -- to raise the political level of the movement. ) read

This task was undertaken by the left wing of SDS, PL, the May 2nd Movement and other non-Trotskyist currents, but especially by the Spartacist and Bulletin forces. The youth movement resisted and disrupted the attempts to draw general radical, socialist conclusions, and became in fact the right wing of the conference, in objective programmatic alliance with the established peace addicts on the "Peace Only" issue, and no amount of compensatory righteousness over the "withdrawal" versus "negotiate" issue can obscure this fact. ||

The party and youth are thoroughly isolated in their irrational resistance to the universal desire among militant sectors of the anti-war movement to reach out to the civil rights movement. A high point of the convention was the powerful and militant plea of the delegation from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party for a recognition of the unity of purpose between the Anti-war movement and the Civil Rights movement. Ignoring this plea the SWP rejected this alliance for supposed "tactical" considerations, but it is clear that the chief reason is the party position on Black Nationalism, i.e., Negroes should keep their movement separate from whites, and Negro goals are not yet the business of the peace movement.

## 2. The Unity Splitters

The party and youth under the hypo-critical slogan of "unity" of the peace movement, raised the demand for a single membership organization as the central vehicle for the struggle against the war in Vietnam. This demand proved to be the vehicle to amaze, appall, demoralize and disrupt the Conference. ] read

Irrespective of the merits of the proposal, the experience of the previous week-end at the Bay Area Conference demonstrated conclusively that this demand was a divisive rather than a unifying issue, and that the main militant tendencies in the Anti-War movement would not go along with it under any circumstances. To continue to press this issue at the Washington Conference indicated a preconceived plan on the part of the Party and youth to divide and splinter the movement while shouting "unity."

This organizational demand cannot find acceptance. It is an organizational gimmick which would tend to freeze part of the movement at the present stage and force other sections back to a previous stage of development. The tactical stupidity of this proposal for a centralized national organization stems from its unreality; it is totally out of tune with the mood of the newly radicalized youth who have a healthy mistrust of centralized organizations and of becoming over-concerned with problems of organizational structure, except to maintain some local autonomy -- until they have found out for sure where they are going politically.

To make matters worse, the proposal itself is entirely without objective political merit because it is maneuveristic and violates the principle of the United Front, the cornerstone of our mass work.

### 3. The United Front

As against Stalinist attempts to subject independent organizations to a single minimum issue or program, or all embracing organization, Trotsky enunciated over and over again the principle of the United Front of different organizations, which were free to maintain their autonomy and independence. To subordinate independent organizations to a single minimum program and permanent organization is Peoples Frontism.

A stated motivation of the policy of a new peace-only national membership organization is the aim of cutting off the development of SDS in a socialist direction.

The reality of anti-war politics is that it has pushed the leftwing of the SDS into the forefront of socialist politics. The leftwing of SDS today represents the most important, largest and most militant radical youth movement in the U.S. rapidly moving toward an open socialist program.

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The youth movement, an essentially conservative organization, instead of welcoming this development and encouraging it, views it competitively with alarm and hostility. They fear it and are jealous of it. Feeling that they do not have the ideological or political equipment to compete with it, they want to maneuver it out of existence. The youth movement says, in effect, to the SDS, "Socialism is not your business -- you are only rightwing peacenicks. Dissolve yourselves in a single issue peace movement. You can be useful there. But leave socialism to our movement, which is ordained to be the only Young Socialist organization in the country."

The approach of the youth and party leaders to the SDS and other leftward developing currents has a childish-sectarian nature not seen in the radical movement for decades, but returning now with a vengeance.

*Read  
comparing  
us to C.P.*

At the Washington Conference, the National Coordinating Committee issued proposals which contained the essence of the principle of the United Front. As opposed to this, the party and youth exploded a frantic 4-day factional assault around the Stalinistic demand for a National Membership Organization, on the spurious grounds that they represented the "masses" or the "independents."

The NCC, understandably indignant but anxious to prevent a split, revised its proposals closely in accordance with the specific demands of the youth movement, retaining only the basic Unity Front structure rather than the totally unacceptable National Membership organization for independents.

However, the party and youth forces were arrogantly deaf to the concessions of the NCC and blindly pressed on towards virtual split. A new policy of attack, raid and the hell-with-everyone else has replaced Trotsky's United Front for action.

#### 4. Defeat

The party and youth went into the conference with very little real knowledge of the composition, political character or mood of the anti-war movement. They were steeped in fanciful pre-conceptions and errors, but they had the opportunity to learn something about the real movement. They rejected the chance. They didn't even attend the

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*from  
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Conference proper, except when and where their petty organizational proposal could be pushed. The great moments, the political discussions and mood, the discussions in the various workshops, the evidence of leftward trends, all this they missed, as they raced around organizing essentially a counter-conference which in the end turned out to encompass only themselves and a few bewildered followers.

All that the party and youth participants can report about the Washington Conference is what was done and said in their various sectarian caucuses.

When one after another of their previous allies publicly dissociated themselves from the youth movement and denounced it, the party and youth forces were soundly defeated. Refusing to abide by majority decision they convoked a pre-planned dismal rump convention which set a goal of creating the new organization they had been unable to sell at the conference. Like the Stalinists of by-gone days, our troops incurred the wrath of an originally friendly mass movement and managed only to capture themselves. The disgrace is now part of the SWP's public record.

### III Significance

#### 1. Intervention and the "Holding Operation"

The young activists pledged at the last SWP convention that they would cease their sectarian, do-nothing, abstentionist policy. The various minorities urged them to intervene in the living movement--to intervene ideologically and politically.

The present disruptive organizational "intervention" is the diametric opposite of the political intervention needed, and merely constitutes another form of the "holding operation" wherein all non-trade-unionistic areas of struggle are regarded as historically unimportant and thereby fair game for contemptuous raids and any old policy.

#### 2. The Political Direction of the Present Current

What is revealed in this episode is a rapid movement towards reformism by the youth leadership. The youth movement is an essentially petty-bourgeois formation without serious connection with the working class either theoretically through Marxism or directly through contact or organization. It has now broken out of its precarious condition of total isolation and insulation from the mass movements of

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on youth

its time, and come into contact with the essentially middle class anti-war movement. Its conservatism on the draft question, its reluctance to become the champions of the NLF, its refusal to face programmatic questions all demonstrate an affinity with the more conservative layers of the peace movement.

Sensitivity to the conservative elements of a middle class movement has apparently impelled the youth movement itself in a rightward direction with great speed, at the very time that the major sectors of the movement are moving rapidly leftward.

Inasmuch as the youth nationally represents the principle base of the movement, the velocity of this petty-bourgeois-essentially reformist-current tends to sweep the party along with it.

### 3. What is the Source of Policy?

The policies which led to the Thanksgiving disaster were the subject neither of SWP convention debates nor documents, and discussion cannot be summarily refused because the issues were "decided by the convention." Furthermore, the peace movement policy has not been recorded in any comprehensive form in any P.C. minutes. The source of policy in this matter is not precisely clear.

On the contrary, during Comrade Dobbs' tour stop in Seattle, we reported our local activity and line in the anti-war movement (which have, incidentally, met with considerable success), in both public and closed branch discussions. We stated that our emphasis has been the broad politicalization of the movement toward revolutionary socialism, connecting it with the civil rights movement, the colonial revolution, and seeking a relationship with the proletariat.

Comrade Dobbs indicated no point of disagreement with this policy whatsoever, and it appeared that our local approach corresponded to the majority decision of the Convention: to politicalize and radicalize the anti-war movement. Yet two days after Comrade Dobbs' visit, the youth organizer received a letter from the youth national office that included a criticism of local work for being against the "national policy" of peace only.

What evidently happened in the party was that some branches were actually mobilized as factions in the local peace organizations before the rest of the party -- or Seattle alone! -- was informed of the line.

Who is responsible for our ~~single-issue-national membership-organization~~ program? The N.C. as a whole has a right to know.

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The present crisis of policy is sufficiently acute to warrant an immediate special plenum of the N.C. to begin to extricate the party, and if possible the youth movement from a dangerous drift in both organizations.

I request an immediate poll of the N.C. on the holding of a special January plenum.

If the P.C. has any inclination to begin undoing the momentous harm that has been done both to the party and youth and to the anti-war movement, I believe it should adopt the following emergency propositions:

1. To require the national leaders of the youth to disband their National Caucus of Independent Vietnam Committees to set up a New National Organization.

2. To issue directives to all SWP branches to do everything in their power to prevent the youth from carrying out its threat to begin to promote its National Organization in the local Vietnam Committees, a threat, which if carried out, will plunge these committees into turmoil on subordinate organizational questions and result only in the deeper isolation and disgrace of the youth, the weakening of the Committees, and an open door for the DuBois clubs to leadership of the anti-war movement.

3. To instruct all branches contemplating or executing disciplinary measures against comrades as a result of this situation, to hold such actions in abeyance until the whole situation has been reviewed by the party.

I am sending under separate cover, the minutes of an all night meeting of the delegates from the South to the Washington Conference which are essential reading material for all N.C. members. The occasion

for the meeting was as follows: the delegates from the South were bewildered by the political chaos created largely by the party and youth organizational program. Many wanted to leave for home. An all night meeting was held at which Staughton Lynd was assigned by the NCC to attempt to get them to stay on.

Although some N.C. members may have had access to this document, I think it should be sent out to all members.

Comradely,

R. Kirk  
Seattle