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For N.C. Information:

NOTES ON CURRENT TASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

by

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In the Organization Report to the recent Plenum it was stated that although the party is more homogeneous than in the past period, that it is in better financial shape, that sales of literature and circulation of the press and periodicals has increased, and that activity is greater, membership has declined.

The reason adduced is that those of the older generation have been leaving at a greater rate than new recruits have been coming in, during a generally unfavorable objective situation. This disposes of the quantitative side of the question; now we should look at the qualitative side.

No one at the Plenum discussed the problem of how we look to those among whom we are doing our main work in the present period, what image we present specifically to the people who make up the milieu of the antiwar movement, largely the students. Since our growth in the next period can be expected to come out of work in this field, through the youth in the main, this question has some importance. In fact, since the Plenum, reports indicate good growth in a few youth branches. Our problem is to achieve the maximum possible growth in those situations where we can take advantage of favorable circumstances.

At any rate, we should periodically look at ourselves from the standpoint of what has been built so far and how we can make improvements. This is done, of course, in an automatic way, more or less day by day, as we seek to become more effective. What is needed at this time is a deeper look.

The outstanding new feature of our movement in this period, as we have noted previously, is that we have a viable and effective youth organization. This is something that was missing from the scene for a number of years. In addition, the youth organization is the chief field of recruitment to the party.

However, a close look would show that what has been built, consciously or not, is not a revolutionary socialist youth organization. It is rather a junior edition of the party organized for people up to a certain age. If we look at the youth organization's political program, its form of organization, its method of functioning, its plenums and conventions and virtually all its other features, we cannot help but come to the conclusion that in almost every respect it duplicates the party. The only real point of difference is the age limit on membership.

The youth group has functioned largely among student youth who are questioning many fundamental aspects of life in America and the world. That we have built a modest sized organization out of this youth is an achievement that must be noted. However, it remains a fact that many thousands of youth, who are rebellious to one extent or another, do not find the organization attractive enough to join.

One of the reasons for this is that the so-called new left writers who have influence among students lump us with the Stalinists in the formula "Old Left." This is a convenient way for them to avoid dealing with our program and organization concretely. At the same time it succeeds in tarring us with the Stalinist brush. To one extent or another, we get the blame, or part of it, for the crimes of Stalinism. In the 1930's, we should recall, we had thrown at us the idea that if Trotsky had won out over Stalin, nothing would have been any different. In the 1960's, the formula is the "old left."

In both cases the real differences between Trotskyism and Stalinism, that is, between revolution and counter-revolution, are avoided. Also, the "new left" writers are busy trying to prove that the working class is not the vehicle for fundamental social change in this epoch and that even Marx and Engels left the question open as to who would play this role.

These questions have to be taken up by us and answered with our point of view. We should show some aggressiveness in bringing these and related questions up for discussion.

Another difficulty in recruitment to the youth is the image that our group presents. It is widely known that our group is organized in accordance with Leninist principles, that is, democratic centralism. This does not mean the same thing to the youth in the radical milieu as it does to us. It is identified with the dictatorial and monolithic methods of the Stalinists and not with what it really is. This question needs to be explored and brought up for discussion among the youth.

The organizational principle of democratic centralism leaves a considerable amount of room for flexibility. That is, the movement in some periods places a heavy emphasis on one side of the formula and in other periods on the other. Everything depends upon what the concrete conditions are at any particular time and what our aims are in any given period. The leadership of our movement must use its judgement in accordance with the needs and utilize the advantages that are inherent in the flexibility of the formula.

For example, a few years ago, when we had five or six opposition factions in the party and youth, who were making it very difficult to function normally, the emphasis had to be put heavily on the side of centralism. The situation today is quite different. The worst of the factions, those whose avowed

aims were to destroy our movement, are gone. The remaining ones do not present the same problems for a variety of reasons. This different situation requires a shift from centralism to democracy, a shift of emphasis.

This should take the form of encouraging a greater amount of discussion both internally and externally on fundamental questions. We should include the questions mentioned above as well as current political questions such as the events in China. The fundamental reasons for U.S. intervention in Vietnam and its attitude toward China should be part of this. One of our tasks should be to explain that the war in Vietnam is not just morally wrong from the standpoint of the U.S. but that it flows from the imperialist nature of the American system.

We should not hesitate to open discussion on the events in China internally. In the early years of our movement the Russian Question was on the agenda of every convention. As soon as it was settled, or it was thought that it was settled, new events intervened and the whole question had to be re-opened again. At the present time the same kind of thing is taking place in regard to the Chinese Revolution. The branches need not wait for the formal pre-convention period to discuss events that are taking place day by day and that have enormous importance. Internal discussion will best prepare the party for more effective external work.

At the recent Plenum, Jack Barnes noted that the single issue argument in the antiwar movement is less effective now than it used to be. That is a recognition of the fact that a considerable element is looking for other ways to struggle against the war. Barnes stated that we cannot only say to the antiwar movement that they should keep politics out, that is, that our argument that converting the antiwar movement into a political movement would destroy it. While this is, of course, correct, it is an argument that is less effective to people who are looking for political answers to the problems. Barnes's proposal that we act more as a socialist tendency in the antiwar movement is correct for this period but it must be supplemented by some changes in the way we present ourselves.

How can we do this most effectively? We must first take up the youth organization from another side. The youth group looks upon itself as a training ground for cadres, people who are 100 percent committed to the revolution. This has its positive side since it is far better to have a 100 percent committed revolutionist than a 50 percent or 75 percent one. However the organization appears to those who come into contact with it as: (1) An organization with a finished program; (2) That has very strict discipline governed by Leninist organizational principles (democratic centralism); (3) Where one must first become a "candidate" and go through a period of probation before becoming a member with full rights. In other words, it must appear to many that they have to start out as 100 percent committed cadres

before they can even become members.

Certainly many youth who come into contact with our youth and develop some sympathy with their ideas are not ready to start at the 100 percent level. In addition, the idea of being a candidate and on probation to determine the extent of their seriousness must be discouraging to some. Sarah Lovell of Detroit reported to the Plenum that the youth there had 2 young Negro candidates. Why is this necessary? Doesn't it just put an obstacle in the way? I heard recently that this candidate category has been introduced into the Oakland-Berkeley branch of the party. I hope this is not true since all it will produce is two obstacles where only one existed before.

This is the first thing the youth (and now the party) should get rid of, the candidate category. It should accept into membership all applicants who are known, who express agreement with us as they understand what we are and who want to be members. It is far easier to educate and integrate new people inside the movement than outside it. The process of making cadres and getting 100 percent commitment can and should go on after recruitment rather than before. It should be the policy of our movement in this period to accept into membership those who agree with us and want to join.

This is not, however, a prescription good for all times and circumstances. There can be conditions under which it would be necessary to have harder conditions for membership. But at the present time, when we are still so small compared to what we have to become, we should ease the recruitment process and not put any obstacles in the way of it. This will bring a somewhat larger turnover of membership but this will more than compensate us by giving the movement a chance to reach and influence greater numbers.

In closing I want to say that specific critical remarks made above which cite the Detroit and Oakland-Berkeley areas were made with the full knowledge that these two places have recently shown the most gratifying growth in recruitment. The practices I have criticized are not confined to these areas but from what I know are general throughout the movement. The growth that has been experienced should be looked upon as just a down payment on what is possible in this period and under present circumstances.

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