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MAIN REPORT FROM THE HARLEM REGIONAL COMMITTEE  
TO THE HARLEM REGIONAL CONVENTION  
ADOPTED DECEMBER, 1956

Comrades:

209 W 125 - Louis & Pyle -

We now finally have an opportunity to speak our minds, to discuss what we the Party membership want and to decide upon it. For months now we have been discussing and debating many issues - some of us too much, some of us too little, and some of us just not wanting to bother discussing at all. Well - here at our Convention we must collectively settle the basic issues which have been involved in our discussion.

I wish to deal briefly with what the Regional Committee believes to be the central task of this Convention - and indeed of the entire Party - the maintenance and building of a Communist Party based upon Marxism-Leninism. As we all know, the discussion now going on in our Party is part of an inner-Party struggle that reflects the pressures of the class struggle both in the world and specifically in our country. We must conduct this struggle around ideological principles, and we must fight for the unity of the Party on the basis of these principles. My report will attempt to pose what the Regional Committee considers to be fundamental principles against the background of the present Party discussion around the Draft Resolution and against the background of events in the Harlem Region.

The fundamental weakness of the Draft Resolution is that it does not take a clear-cut stand on issues of principle; it tries to compromise on them. Thus it could not give real leadership to the discussion - it opened the door to confusion, demoralization and liquidation.

The basic principle upon which there can be no compromise is just this: we must be a COMMUNIST Party. What distinguishes a COMMUNIST Party from all other organizations? It is nothing formal such as name or organizational form that distinguishes a Communist Party; what distinguishes it is its principles and outlook - the theory and practice of the working class movement. This is what we call Marxism-Leninism.

There are some who advocate the dissolution of the CP on the grounds that it is compromised by the errors of the Soviet Union and by its own errors, that it is ideologically and politically bankrupt, and that it has outlived its usefulness. These comrades are doctors



TODAY refutes this. Take Clinton, Tennessee. State militia prevented drastic violence and outright lynchings. Integration in the high school was finally enforced by the Federal Gov't only after white people had been subjected to violence and after the local authorities had requested aid from the Federal Gov't. In nearby Kentucky the local authorities acted to stop integration and integration was temporarily defeated. What is going to happen in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana with White Citizen's Councils and the Klan openly inciting and committing violence, and with local officials belonging to these organizations? I can just see the Communist Party telling the Negro people of Alabama, Mississippi and the other Deep South states: "Brethren, just put your trust in evolutionary struggle and by and by there will be a revolutionary transformation". The struggle of the Negro people in the deep South, in Montgomery and elsewhere IS RIGHT NOW a revolutionary struggle. And the resurgent Klan and the White Citizens Councils are anything but peaceful.

2) Comrade Weiss in his "Notes of the Month" in the November issue of Political Affairs says: (p.4,5)

"The cold war is coming to an end. Much of its super-structure has already been dismantled.....

The ending of the cold war is beginning to re-cast the outlook of the American people."

Well, Egypt and Hungary - imperialist aggression and counter-revolution show that peace is something that still has to be fought for and is by no means guaranteed. The very month that these words were written, events proved them to be wrong. If someone is going to substitute something for Marxism-Leninism, they should propose something that lasts for more than a couple of weeks.

Now let's take a look at the program which emerges from this type of faulty theory, because people's ideas can be most clearly seen in the light of what they propose to DO. Let us examine the position of the New York State Committee as expressed in a definitive document now being circulated in the Party. This position is in all its essentials the same as the Gates position, so I will deal with these two views as one.

These comrades propose that the Party be changed to a Political Action Association and that its name be changed from "Communist".

The reasons for such a change are given as the following: 1) that the CP is not necessarily the vanguard of the working class, and that a vanguard will grow out of the "New Mass Party of Socialism"; 2) the movement for Socialism in this country does not necessarily have to be based upon Marxism-Leninism; 3) that such an outlook is basic to making us legal. The following quotes from the document illustrate this outlook:

(p6) " Furthermore, in the evolution of a new socialist movement in the USA it is possible that the Communist Party may become absorbed in this movement, or it may develop cooperative ties with it while maintaining its distinct Marxist-Leninist position...."

(p7) "The contribution we will make in the next period in the mass movement will depend in large measure on the efforts we make and the success of these efforts to achieve a greater measure of legality for the organization and its members..."

This is clearly wrong and is the quickest way to liquidate our Party. This program has no basis in history, and things are not happening that way anywhere in the world today. Legality can only be bought by removing the class content of our theory and by ceasing to struggle against the ruling class. The whole history of our country from Jefferson through today proves this. The Committee to Defend the First Amendment is on the subversive list and the NAACP is outlawed in the deep South. Since there is no mass party of Socialism today, it is absurd to sit and wait for some vanguard to arise from somewhere in the future (and a vanguard not based upon Marxism-Leninism at that).

Therefore the Draft Resolution must state unequivocally that only a party based upon Marxism-Leninism can lead the working class to Socialism in our country, and our Party must be built to do so.

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There has been much preoccupation lately with the so-called "Mass Party of Socialism". What about the other existing Socialist organizations in our country? Their record in the struggles of the Negro People and in the struggles of the working class is posted on the scoreboard of the last twenty years in a woeful string of goose-eggs-- no runs, no hits, and a lot more errors than our Party ever thought of. The Negro People just look at the outlook



Are we to sit on the sidelines and say that we are not concerned how our government props up the exploitation of other peoples? And are we to look the other way when US Imperialism exploits the Latin-American countries? How can our Party play a real role among the Puerto-Rican People in our city and overcome our consistent lack of attention to their problems if we have such an ideological approach? No, such an attitude is not in the best interests of the American People.

What does such a line as that advocated by our State leadership mean to the Negro People, to the people of Harlem? If we are not to be a Marxist-Leninist party, if we are to be based on evolutionary struggle, if we are to be super-critical of the Soviet Union and at the same time are not to fight against Imperialism, then what do the Negro People need us for? (On top of that, presumably in an effort to be more "broad-minded", the new Draft Party Constitution has removed the section which makes the practice or advocacy of racism and discrimination grounds for expulsion from the Party.) We would in effect be telling the Negro People that if they are not satisfied with their present progress, they ought to be. The clincher is supposed to be: "well, after all, you're still better~~XXX~~ off here than you would be in the Soviet Union". The answer to that is just plain "NUTS".

There is a great preoccupation with the events in Hungary among some comrades. They say that we just MUST take a stand on this issue and condemn the Soviet action, or we are compromised. I think the Soviet Union was duty-bound to intervene in Hungary, but is Hungary the crucial issue in Harlem? Negroes are asking why all the government apparatus is turned upside-down and why Nixon must go to Vienna to help out refugees, when that same government can't seem to do a thing about guaranteeing Negro rights in the South. Refugees from Hungary can get good jobs, a free education and a nice place to live--one-two-three--but plenty of people right here in Harlem can't. A lot of people (including quite a few comrades) were not so concerned when Egyptians were being killed, or Algerians, or the people of Kenya. No, such a line cannot broaden us among the Negro People.

The Draft Resolution must be amended to speak forthrightly on these issues-- it must be amended to reaffirm the principle of international working-class solidarity while exposing American Imperialism as the enemy.

Lastly, a word should be said concerning the section of the Draft Resolution that says our present problems are basically due to Left-sectarian errors. Such a statement is inadequate, because a big drive against Left errors alone has not and will not solve our problems. The question is: "what do these errors stem from?" Liquidating the independent role of the Party is not the proper way to correct Left errors. We are isolated from our class, and for all the big campaign against Left errors we have not developed mass work, we have not carried out the practices which would root us in the working class and we have not developed a concrete program that would enable us to accomplish these things. In fact, we are now in a struggle against liquidation--that's the main danger right now. The outlook developed in the 1954 Draft Program envisioned a basic political re-alignment based upon a new coalition led by labor; this coalition was to effect basic changes in the Democratic Party in the "54" and "56" elections. The Democratic Party was to be the base of a new democratic political upsurge within the two-party system. This just did not happen. The outlook did not hit the target. The fact that we did little or nothing to help the ALP get 50000 in the "54" elections produced a situation in which there was no independent platform from which to bring the issues to the people in the "56" elections.

The question is: how must we correct our Left errors-- and they are many, serious, and protracted. The only way to correct them is with a class outlook-- by applying Marxism-Leninism, by developing the shop clubs and making their experiences the property of the whole Party. The Draft Program must tackle this problem in a positive and creative way-- it must become a ringing call to turn our whole Party toward the American working class. Unless the Draft Program is amended in the basic respects I have mentioned-- in a nutshell, unless it uncompromisingly calls for the maintenance and building of a COMMUNIST PARTY -- the Regional Committee recommends that it be rejected.

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What are the changes we must make?

First we must democratize the Party and end Bureaucracy. To do so we must practice Democratic Centralism properly, not throw it overboard because we haven't practiced it. Let us not get hung up on words here-- let us define both parts of the term.

a) We think the democratic part means four things:

1) The membership must elect all of its leadership by secret ballot.

2) The membership must be guaranteed the right to participate in making policy, reviewing policy and changing policy.

3) The right to express dissenting opinion must be guaranteed.

4) Local leadership must be elected by local membership, and the application of general policy in local areas must be determined by the local membership.

b) The centralism part means two things--unity of ideology and unity of action. One ideology--Marxism-Leninism, and once policy is decided everyone carries it out.

Second, we must have a constructive cadre policy. We must work consistently with people and help them to develop. We must advance our working-class cadre, learn from them and utilize their experiences. We must strive for the best from every comrade. Leadership must be judged by performance, and we have to find the best person for a particular job.

Third, we have to develop a class approach-- in theory and in practice. We must have a firm belief and confidence in the American working class and in our theory. We must apply our creatively and consistently. These are the changes that will make us a real Communist Party.

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Finally, what has happened to the Harlem Party in this past period. It must be said that tremendous opportunities for mass work and for the fulfillment of the Party's vanguard role exist in Harlem. Our Party has a unique history of struggle here, and Harlem is an ideological center of the Negro People's movement. The main criticism we must make of ourselves is that we have not yet seized hold of mass work on a continuing and coordinated basis. Some individual comrades have done excellent work, mostly if not entirely on their own, and this is a great credit to them. However our clubs must become reactivated, and it is the participation of the comrades in the clubs, making their experiences the property of the Region as a whole, developing a cohesive program of mass work, helping to organize for carrying out such a program, that is the key to our future work. We must begin modestly but doggedly, almost from scratch, concentrating on the two main issues in our community--housing and education.

Why has Party work in our Region deteriorated so drastically in the past period? Here it must be said squarely that the main responsibility for this lies with the State and County leadership. These comrades have negated the importance of Party work in Harlem by their neglect of the Region and by their extremely bureaucratic practices with respect to the Harlem membership. Under the slogan of "against left centers and for mass work" the State removed the Regional leadership and arbitrarily installed comrade Herb as Regional leader. For almost two years now the State has prevented the Harlem membership from electing its own leadership. No review of concrete work in Harlem was ever held with the participation of the Harlem comrades. Comrade Herb shunted the Regional Committee aside and proceeded to function on the basis of bureaucratic one-man rule. The result was that the existing program of work and the existing organizational set-up were both scuttled--but they were not replaced. What happened was that both left centers and mass work were systematically liquidated. In fact, at an open Regional Committee meeting and at various club meetings comrade Herb openly advocated the outright dissolution of the Party.

When the Harlem membership decided to re-establish a collective leadership, a leadership which specifically included comrade Herb as Regional Organizer, this comrade deserted his post without in any way informing the Regional Committee. This was a political desertion which was a blow at the Harlem Party. The State subsequently released comrade Herb from Harlem with no discussion or evaluation and without even informing the Region. The State has proposed and the County Committee has subsequently elected comrade Herb as County Organizer. We sharply criticize those in the State leadership who are responsible for this action. We feel that this is the height of bureaucracy, and that it expresses contempt for the Harlem membership. We state that it is not in the interests of our Party for a liquidator in theory and practice to be our County Organizer.

Comrades, in spite of all difficulties and problems we are confident that our Party can be built in our Region and throughout our country. We know that we can make it the instrument with which a mass Socialist upsurge will be unleashed. Let us turn our Party outward to the people of Harlem; let us weld unity in the struggle for the people's needs; let us be confident that our Party will fulfil its historic role and will lead the American working class to victory in the struggle for Socialism.

MAJORITY RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE HARLEM REGIONAL  
CONVENTION , DEC, 1956

BE IT RESOLVED:

- 1) That we must maintain and build a Communist Party based upon the working class and guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism..
- 2) That the Party organization must be based upon the proper application of Democratic Centralism.....
- 3) That the Party must fulfil its vanguard role in the struggles of the working class and its allies...
- 4) That we must struggle for the unity of the Party around the principles of Marxism-leninism.....
- 5) That we reject the statement by the New York State Committee, which calls for a Political Action Association.....
- 6) That we criticize the Draft Resolution as being inadequate because it does not take a clear-cut stand in support of basic Marxist Leninist principles.....
- 7) That we call for a Draft Resolution that unequivocally supports the principle of international working-class solidarity and exposes American Imperialism as the enemy of the American People.....