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DEFINITION OF THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS AND THE DISCIPLINE QUESTION

L. Landy

GENERAL CONCEPTS

A caucus, in a socialist organization, may be formed around anything, absolutely anything, this is a democratic right - for example a caucus could be started around the question of starting the meetings earlier - an "earlybirds caucus." The organization, however, reserves the right to expel or suspend or otherwise discipline any caucus which is clearly counterposed to the socialist principles of the organization; for example, if a "back to the home" caucus was started which had as a principled position the exclusion of women from the political life of the organization. A faction claims to encompass a distinct methodological basis from which flow similarities on a whole host of questions. What starts as a caucus (agreement on one or several questions) can indeed turn into a faction once the basis of agreement is crystallized. Whether the organization can hold several distinct methodologies within its scope depends upon the objective circumstances of the period (this question is really outside the realm of this paper). The purpose of both caucuses and factions are to organize support, and to act as a unit in order to get certain ideas or a single idea adopted by the entire organization. There is absolutely nothing implicit in the notion of a caucus which implies discipline and there is no reason why a caucus must decide to have any discipline at all.

The formation and existence of a caucus per se, does not mean that discipline automatically flows, this is a conscious decision which is directly based upon what the caucus was founded upon. Clearly the "early birds" caucus would have no basis for discipline on the question of independent political action but may decide that all its members must get to the meetings on time. Whereas a faction which is about to leave an organization could choose to impose on itself a discipline which prevents its members from discussing faction documents or strategy outside of the faction. Discipline is not a constant, but rather must flow and be commensurate with the basis of the caucus or faction, or even the organization, relative to the outside world. It is therefore incumbent upon the participants to have a clear conception of what their caucus represents before any motion on discipline is passed.

THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS AND DISCIPLINE

A year ago January we formed in NYC an IS Women's Caucus around the proposition that women, taken as a group, had been excluded from the political life of the organization and the reason for this lay in the nature of women's role in society at large, in other words, women's oppression. The second part of this agreement was that only by women organizing against their 'position' would their potential be realized. Finally, we felt that it was important to integrate the question of women and their oppression by capitalist society into the total politics of the I.S. This was the political basis of the caucus and the definition of the caucus. On a whole series of other questions confronting the organization at that time there was wide divergence within the caucus - independent political action, SDS and the student movement, the role of the exec, etc. This agreement was a limited one agreement, which does not mean that it was unimportant - quantity does not imply quality. For example, I could be in another caucus which agreed on a whole series of questions, the meetings should begin earlier, the chairs should be arranged in a circle - and obviously the single question of my oppression and thus humiliation as a woman is vastly more important.

We must be clear on exactly what is our agreement and not attempt to graft on areas where in fact agreement does not exist. For example, there is the notion that women can speak easier in the Women's Caucus and feel less intimidated. Yes, that is true on those questions which form the basis of our agreement and our caucus, the fact that we are all oppressed. Every Women's Caucus in the I.S. I assume, has had the absolutely beautiful and solidarizing discussion around our feelings of insecurity, stupidity, being appendages to men and the like. We found in these discussions, that women who seemingly talked easily at political meetings were just as scared as women who didn't say a thing. The realization that there was a political explanation for our feelings instead our previous individual psychological explanation in terms of neurosis and personal inadequacy had a tremendous impact upon our consciousness and these were discussions we could never have developed with men

present. Although new members have similar feelings of inadequacy in the I.S., it is only similar, there is a dimension in terms of being a woman in a capitalist society which cannot be denied.

Once we took our discussions into areas where the limited basis of agreement of the caucus did not exist however, it was absolutely untrue that it was necessarily easier to talk with women. Let refresh NYC women caucus members about the discussions in the women's caucus in May 1969 on the question of the role of the exec and leadership. At least two women who had minority positions expressed discomfort concerning the women's caucus. Also it is not true that women cannot be intimidating. Last year in the NYC caucus I can think of several incidents when women told they (as opposed to their ideas) were stupid. I don't know about other women but, it didn't do wonders for my self-image. In Berkeley, when I was there last August, several women wouldn't participate in the women's caucus because they were afraid to open their mouth on questions where political disagreement entered because they would be shot down by certain "heavies". The exception, in Berkeley, was a marvelous discussion on why women don't speak in the I.S., where virtually everyone participated and felt very good about the meeting. This is a clear example of the point I'm trying to get across. In those areas which define the caucus it is absolutely true that it is easier for a woman to speak and learn, however, once we get beyond this common agreement about the fact we are oppressed as women, and must organize to fight it -the minute differences arise -it is not true.

Flowing from this conception of the basis of the Women's Caucus certain forms of discipline have been adopted. For example, men were excluded from the caucus because we found they inhibited our discussions. The implication of such an act is that women in the caucus were not free to invite men to caucus meetings unless it was first approved by the caucus. This discipline is logical because it flows out of the conception of the caucus that women are oppressed and will defer in the presence of men.

Furthermore, the women's caucus made the request of its members that women bring their ideas and documents concerning the woman's question to the caucus before they were discussed by the membership at large. (There was never any "gentlemen's agreement" that this precluded showing the documents of the women's caucus to men) This request was never explicitly a discipline question because it was quite obvious to all the members of our caucus that it was necessary to the life of the caucus to do so. It flows out of the second part of the basic definition of the women's caucus that the only way women can change their position within the IS was to organize and wage a collective struggle (as well as participate and build an independent women's movement) If this is going to have any meaning then the caucus must be able to develop attitudes on the woman's question. This does not mean a consensus, we have to be very clear; past the basic definition and agreement on the need to have a caucus and the questions which flow directly from that, there is no consensus. Rather it means that the Women's Caucus must be prepared with majority and minority opinions (even if the minority is a minority of one) on questions which concern women. Otherwise women will again be atomized and splintered as individuals and the caucus will have no meaning.

There is one other area, given the basic conception of the caucus, where discipline would apply, which has never been really dealt with by the women's caucus. For example, if a male member of the organization treated a member of the Women's Caucus with disrespect in let's say arena work (although there are thousands of other examples) by treating her as a flunkie or sex object then this is something that it is incumbent upon the caucus to deal with. If the injured woman felt she wanted the discussion and any write-up kept within the confines of the women's caucus until the caucus was able to arrive at a definitive course of action, then this form of discipline, which again flows from a basic conception of the caucus, is legitimate. This doesn't mean that discipline would automatically be adopted but, it is a tactic to be considered in the context of the specific situation. The caucus has every right to protect its members in those areas where the question pertains to the basic conception of the caucus.

FIGHTING GEORGIE

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION IN 1976

by Charlie Leinenweber

Chances are our strength in the working class and that of the Left overall will be put to the test in 1976. Clearly a New Depression is possible. And almost certainly the major political courters of the working class, particularly among white workers, will come from the Right: Henry Jackson for the Democratic party and AFL bureaucracy, George Wallace as an Independent.

There is a traditional but very good socialist logic that says if Wallace runs as an Independent, his campaign will set the tone for the major parties. The entire political spectrum will shift in pursuit to the Right--unless there develops a counteracting force from the Left. Thus the existence of the Progressive Party in 1948 forced Harry Truman to run a fairly left-wing campaign (for socialized medicine, full employment, fair employment; against Taft-Hartley) despite the presence of the Dixiecrats and of course, Republicans. If there is no Left force in 1976, we may see an awesome shift to the Right, inflicting lasting damage on the working class.

Running against Wallace

Practically speaking, what do we tell someone, a white worker let us say (WW for short), who supports George Wallace?

WW: The one I like is ole George Wallace. He really "tells it like it is."

IS: Yeah, but you know, it's really all the same. It says here in this paper called Workers Power, that Wallace etc etc... and besides, Black workers, who get it worse than us etc...

WW: (later) Well, I guess you're right. I guess I'll just vote Democrat like I usually do. You know, there's always hard times with the Republicans in.

IS: Well no, you see etc...

WW: Well just who are you for?

IS: I think workers should have their own party.

WW: Where is it?

IS: Well, it doesn't exist now...

Counterposing a set of principles to Wallace is a hard job. Much better is a real party that we can help to build starting now, much as we helped to build the Peace and Freedom party; a party with a program to fight the New Depression, imperialism, racism, male supremacy.

A Wallace candidacy would make such a party necessary and possible--possible because it would make "third party" tickets legitimate, and a genuine "anti-Wallace" party natural. It would also be distinguished from the Wallace party in its active participation as opposed to the Wallace spectacles. And certainly it should be appealing to Black workers.

Peace and Freedom a Model?

What made Peace and Freedom something of a mass party in California was that it grew out of a movement, the anti-war movement. There is no movement now to give rise to an independent Left party, and there would be no merit in our creating a sect-party.

Yet there may be a movement. We are working now to set up unemployed Councils. What if they catch hold and become a movement? And what of the rank-and-file groups?

It seems to me that if we anticipate a movement among workers, we had better be ready with our ideas about independent political action, and be ready to translate these into immediate organizational action. If there is a movement we can help give it a party. We can help break the grip of the Democratic party over the working class; and Wallace and racism as well. We can't assail these forces just with ideas, although the ideas must come first.

A Labor Party?

There is a lot we should discuss and debate. Do we want to move toward independent political action in '76? Under what circumstances? What should the base for a party be? What should our role be?

Surely a party should be based on and oriented toward workers, but with a broader appeal. In some of our articles we "call for" a labor party. I do not like the labor party formulation. It is too narrow in appeal, sectarian and musty, and sounds like it means the trade union bureaucracy. It will never fly. Besides, I lived under a labor party for a year, and didn't care much for it.

We did not "call for" a Peace and Freedom party: we organized it. There is a big difference. If we decide we want to see independent political action in '76, and there is a movement to base a party in, we should once more take the responsibility of organizing it. To "call for" would be to abstain. Whatever we come up with, we would have to work to build it, and assume, probably rightly, that it would not be built without us--or not nearly so well.

TWO SONGS

Joe Felsenstein, Seattle

One of these is a sectarian song, the other a chant written for the old Nixon wage-freeze, but unfortunately about to become relevant again.

The Stalinist Linesman

(Tune: The Wichita Lineman)

I am a linesman for the Party
And I map out your course
Making damn sure you don't back another horse
I hear you whisper in the hallways
I saw you talkin' to that slob
But the Stalinist linesman is still on the job

I know you're sleeping with a Maoist
And your mailman's a Trot
I heard you said that Brezhnev really ain't so hot
And I need you more than want you
Only want you for a while
The Stalinist linesman is not out of style

The Twelve Phases of Freezemas

(tune: The Twelve Days of Christmas)

In the first phase of freezemas the White House gave to me
A long song and dance on T. V.

In the second phase of freezemas the White House gave to me
New bombers bombing
And a long song and dance on T. V.

(continued in this pattern, the new lines being:)

3. Free prices rising
4. More record profits
5. No right to strike
6. (the White House said to me) Blame the Japanese
7. Seven stupid reasons

(Alas, all the later lines, which included "Eight percent inflation" have become outdated. Write your own new lines.)

DEMYTHIFYING THE N L F.

This is extemporaneous. I have no source material for this thesis. Nonetheless I feel that this subject should be debated because I detect unease in the Bay Area branch about the NLF.

It is my opinion that the NLF is not a "liberating" force. It started out that way but was captured by Stalinism. It is my further belief that now it is an arm of Stalinism, and is bringing a new type of exploitation to the "liberated" areas, the now classic bureaucratic domination (for want of a better name) by the new exploiting class. In a way that is now typically Stalinist, they are taking over South Vietnam by a combination peasant army and North Vietnam regulars to impose "Socialism" from above.

No choice is given the people as to whether they want this type of "liberation". The probability is overwhelming that if elections were held in their areas, the NLF would win most if not all of them. Yet no elections are held because the Stalinists don't want the people to believe they are capable of thinking for themselves. All political, social and economic controls must be imposed from above. No participation by the ranks, implying that the great mass of people are children and must be told what to do.

Why aren't they calling for the workers to arm themselves (workers' militias), and to take over the factories to be run under workers' controls? Why don't they tell the workers to set up councils (soviets), peasants councils and armed forces' councils under democratically elected officers?

When the U S was massively supporting the Thieu gov't, it was okay for us to critically support the NLF; but now we should not support them in any way. We must urge the workers, soldiers and peasants to adopt and use the above slogans (which the Stalinists fear). We must get this message to the South Vietnamese however we can. Other slogans: "No confidence in the Thieu or any other South Vietnamese bourgeois gov't" and "No secret agreements; only open agreements openly arrived at" and "keep American troops and money out of South Vietnam"!

We must call for arming the workers just as the Bolsheviks did against Kornilov True, the NLF is not Kornilov nor is Thieu Kerensky, but the workers must get arms. Maybe from the soldiers. That way they can get rid of Thieu, and the Stalinists wont find it easy to trample an armed proletariat.

Perhaps I am wrong in my assumptions. If so, then let us debate it in the Convention and prove my wrongness democratically. I'll abide by such convention rule.

It makes no sense to attack world Stalinism, but support it in Indo-China where it's making it's greatest gains. If war is carrying on politics by military means, then military support is in effect political support.

to recapitulate: I propose that we adopt the following slogans and try in every way to make the South Vietnamese working class aware of them:

1. Workers take over the factories and industries, arm themselves (workers' militias) and set up workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils under worker's control.
2. No confidence in the Thieu or any other So. Vietnamese bourgeois gov't.
3. Keep American troops and money out of So. Vietnam.
4. No secret agreements. Only open agreements openly arrived at.

The unease in the Bay area branch is not lessened by the W.P.#117, where a long article on the victories of the NLF against U.S. imperialism contains only this small paragraph on the reactionary nature of the NLF: "They (the NLF) will not bring Socialism- far from it."

Perhaps it may be too late to intervene effectively in South Vietnam (only time will tell). However, if we don't do anything, we doom ourselves to tail-ending Stalinism, and not being a fully revolutionary organization.

I don't know of any revolutionary tendency in South Vietnam with ours or similar politics. This doesn't obviate the possibility of there being an underground movement of these tendencies, but until we can contact such groups (if they exist) we must try to influence events from the outside. Altho lack of a revolutionary ~~party~~ party presents a formidable block to the success of our campaign, we must try as best we can to do this.

Winnie. (San Francisco)

Since I've written this, I read an article in the Oakland Sunday Tribune of 4/6/75 which says that the NLF has differences with North Vietnam and internally with groups within itself (the same with the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia). There are probably honest revolutionary currents among them. These currents can be strengthened by an armed working class appealing to them to make a real revolution, and possibly facilitate their capturing control of the NLF.

Please xerox appende article and attach to document.

AGAINST PREFERENTIAL LAYOFFS

David E., Los Angeles

It is well known that the incomes of workers in the U.S. are then times higher than those of workers in Third World countries such as India. Chronic malnutrition and even starvation are the lot of many in these countries. Moreover, the advantages enjoyed by workers in the advanced countries are partly a product of past imperialism which U.S. workers have failed to fight.

This gap will be rapidly narrowed with a world socialist revolution, which we support. However, an immediate world socialist revolution is not in the cards. Hence, in order to persuade workers abroad of our serious commitment to international revolution and working class unity and win them to our banner, we call for American workers to take immediate and progressive cuts in pay, in order to provide a relief fund for the workers in Third World countries. When U.S. workers suffer privations equal to those of Indian workers, it will be easier to unite them in a common struggle for socialist revolution. Moreover, we reluctantly support efforts to win this demand through the World Court, since it will be difficult to win mass support for it in the unions.

Sound familiar? It should; the logic is the same as that of Trautman's position on "superseniority." The current official position of the I.S. reflects nervousness at the betrayal of socialist principle and the unworkability of the Trautman position in the real world--combined with a hesitancy to appear less than enthusiastic over any position that appears to have potential appeal to the movements of the oppressed. In other words the official position is a guilty and half-hearted adoption of the indefensible Trautman position.

Contrary to the Trautman and official positions, we should oppose preferential layoffs in any form, and fight for a united struggle against layoffs (e.g. through overtime bans, slowdowns, working to rule, sit-down strikes, 30 for 40, etc.) If we are clearly defeated and no struggle against layoffs can be initiated or won, it is permissible to propose rotating layoffs, hiring halls, etc. In any case we should have no truck with court suits whose effect is to substitute judicial rulings for union contract provisions. Our fight must be by mass action and within the unions.

If, as was claimed at the last N.C., working class consciousness is moving rapidly to the left, it should be practical as well as desirable to agitate for a united struggle against layoffs. If this change in consciousness is not occurring, a "turn to agitation" would seem unjustified and unwise at this time.

Traditional socialist principles call for evening out inequality within particular groups of workers at capitalist expense, not by

taking from one group of workers to give to another. For example, we do not call for cutting the pay of skilled workers who earn large differentials above the unskilled--we call for across-the-board wage increases or higher increases for the more poorly paid. We did not call for the elimination of legislation to protect women--we called for its extension to men. We would be wrong now to call for laying off one set of workers to prevent the laying off of others.

The issue of preferential firing is not the same as that of preferential hiring. In a period of economic expansion, when many jobs are available, a demand that certain firms with clear records of discrimination make up for that discrimination is defensible, and in most cases does not lead in practice to discrimination in reverse. Of course, if such demands are primarily part of a strategy by liberals to break the unions, we would not support them. And the demand for compensatory hiring should be linked propagandistically with demands for full employment. On the other hand, to demand the firing of specific workers, some of them also subject to discrimination, because of age, etc., in a period of economic decline, is both a violation of socialist principle and tactically likely to prove worse than useless.

The seniority system was won through struggle by the labor movement. Its purpose is to prevent bosses from playing favorites, and as protection for older workers who have given their lives to certain industries, and have families and local roots. This system is far from perfect and certainly not "sacred." But it was won by struggle and is the main protection workers have against arbitrariness. Anyone who calls for its elimination has a duty to propose a better alternative.

The official I.S. position on preferential layoffs, reflecting concern over the fact that the superseniority demand is directed against specific workers, attempts to disclaim responsibility for that fact, and in so doing, comes across as a muddled cop-out.

Furthermore, the preferential firing demand strongly propels its proponents to the bourgeois courts. There is virtually no chance that majority group members (or politically astute minorities, who believe in equality) will support the demand. Hence cleaving to preferential firing as a principle leads almost inexorably to court action, where a long history of anti-labor injunctions should convince us that disaster looms for the working-class movement. Do we want to end up with a system of labor courts, where judicial fiat substitutes for collective bargaining and other forms of class struggle?

Blacks and women are only the two largest oppressed groups. There are also Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, gays, Indians, people under 25 and over 40, the handicapped, ex-convicts--all of whom have legitimate claims of mistreatment and discrimination. Why not a Hindu caste system in reverse--so many years of added seniority for so much past discrimination? Why not let the whole burden fall on straight, white male workers from 25 to 40? Of course, most of these are married with children. So of course, we shouldn't call for them to be laid off, either.

Preferential Layoffs

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So we are either back to "No layoffs!" or we have attained a dialectical proof: adding several "stupidities" to an absurdity produces a change from quantity to quality by creating lunacy.

It is the job of revolutionary Marxists not merely to celebrate the sectional struggles of oppressed people, but to show the road to overcoming their limitations and errors through a class analysis of the roots of oppression and a class-struggle strategy for overcoming that oppression. Women, blacks or whatever are going to be less impressed by our enthusiasm or our "fairness" than by the effectiveness in theory and practice of our strategy for their liberation. Preferential firing is a disaster in theory, and if the I.S. seriously tries to carry it out, will prove to be a disaster in practice.

March 12, 1975