

Agostini

EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS

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THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

**Resolution Adopted by the 21st National Convention
of the Socialist Workers Party, September 1965**

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THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE SWP

I. Preamble

Differences over our organizational principles and practices have arisen periodically in the development of our party. It has been our experience that in periods of sharp internal political dispute there often arises, as a corollary, a conflict over our basic concepts of democratic centralism, expressed either implicitly or explicitly. In such cases it becomes the responsibility of the party leadership to restate and reaffirm the concepts which govern our organizational forms and procedures.

At the founding convention of the SWP in 1938, after the split from the "all-inclusive" Socialist Party, cognizance was first taken of the need to codify the basic Leninist concepts of democratic centralism. This was done in the form of a resolution adopted by the convention. The action was intended to serve a double purpose: (1) To effect a codification of our organizational concepts to bring them into line with the revolutionary principles embodied in the program of the founding convention. (2) To cement the fusion of the left wing split-off from the SP with the Trotskyist cadres who comprised the most homogeneous Marxist tendency in the newly formed party by making available to the ranks a clarifying statement of our Leninist views on party organization.

The Leninist concept of democratic centralism was subsequently challenged, most notably in the struggle with the Burnham-Schachtman opposition in 1939-40 and in the Cochranite split of 1953. On each occasion, the party reaffirmed its basic organizational principles and amplified them to ward off and defeat the specific challenges to our concepts of democratic centralism.

In the recent political dispute which culminated in the expulsion by the National Committee plenum of the leaders of the Robertson faction for disloyalty we noted: (1) The existence of a considerable number of younger comrades who, because they joined our ranks after 1953, were relatively unfamiliar with the past disputes in the party over the "organization" question, did not have available the documents of those disputes and were only vaguely acquainted with our basic concept of democratic centralism. (This category does not include the disloyal Robertsonite leaders who consider themselves "experts" on this score.) (2) The existence of various individuals and tendencies who spoke as defenders of the Robertsonites against the disciplinary action taken by the plenary session of the party leadership for their blatant disloyalty to the party. It is contended that such disciplinary action constituted a "violation" of our concepts of democratic centralism. In the course of the discussion representatives and defenders of the Robertson

group advanced views which the party leadership, in its overwhelming majority, consider at variance with our basic concepts of party organization and procedure. It thus becomes imperative to clarify, once again, the Leninist concept of democratic centralism to remove whatever confusion has arisen on this score and to amplify, in the light of the current controversy, our basic ideas on party organization.

To this end, the December 1963 plenum of the National Committee designated a drafting commission composed of comrades Cannon, Warde and Dobbs, to submit a draft codifying our fundamental views on democratic centralism as they have evolved out of past controversies and introducing such amplifications as are indicated by the conflicting views manifested in the current discussion.

II. Record of Party Struggle for Its Organizational Principles.

The organizational structure and practices of a Marxist party are not immutable. They are derived from the major tasks to be accomplished at a given stage of the class struggle. The need for an ideologically homogeneous and democratically centralized organization flows from the perspective and actuality of deepening social crisis and sharpening class conflict which makes imperative the revolutionary solution of basic social problems. The anticipation and active preparation of such revolutionary developments in the United States has determined the kind of party our movement has set out to build from its birth.

Its organization form is intended to serve the central aims set forth in our program of abolishing capitalism and reorganizing America on a socialist basis. Only a combat party of the Leninist type is capable of organizing and leading the working class and its allies to the conquest of power in the main fortress of world imperialism. Confronted as the people are by the most powerful and ruthless ruling class in the world, the party of the American revolution must be conceived and constructed as a cohesive and disciplined combat organization. That is why our party has sought to base itself on the tested and proven Leninist rules of organization, summed up in the concept of democratic centralism.

Democratic centralism is a dialectical concept which does not lend itself to rigid definition and application regardless of time, place and circumstances. Our party has forged its own specific form of the Leninist concept in the heat of struggle under concrete American conditions. The party's organizational principles are an integral part of its living history. These clearly-defined and well-established principles are ready to be taught to young revolutionaries coming into our ranks and to be defended against attempts to water them down and thereby corrode the revolutionary fabric of the party.

As a combat organization the party strives for political homogeneity in the sense that admission to its ranks requires fundamental agreement with its program and principles. For similar

reasons unconditional loyalty and disciplined conduct are required as a condition of membership. To safeguard party unity in debating and deciding policy, a conscious effort is made to teach comrades to argue out problems on the basis of principles and to act always from the standpoint of principle. Along these lines the party has developed in a free and democratic internal atmosphere. All individuals and tendencies have a full chance to contribute to the development of the party and to the shaping of its leading cadres.

The party is guided by the concept of democratic centralism in regulating both its public activity and its internal affairs. Full rights are accorded to minorities as conditioned by the democratic principle of majority rule. Minority views may be presented in internal discussion at the proper time and in an appropriate manner as determined by the party. Once a decision has been made on disputed issues the minority is subordinated to the majority. Between conventions authority becomes centralized and the party confronts the outside world with a single policy, that of the majority. All members are required to subordinate themselves to the policies and decisions of the party. Official party bodies determine what is correct procedure, and no individual or group can arrogate that right.

Through these democratic-centralist practices the party maintains its role as a revolutionary vanguard. Its character as a combat organization is safeguarded. Unity in action is preserved. Firmness of political line is assured and the party is enabled to maintain its principles unadulterated.

Relation of Organization to Politics

Building a Leninist-type party entails uncommon difficulties because of this country's position as the powerhouse of world capitalist reaction. Alien class pressures bear down upon the party with enormous force in a hostile political environment. At times these pressures generate centrifugal currents in our ranks. Ideas, moods and motivations at odds with our program and traditions penetrate the party's internal life. Those affected tend to translate their own nervousness into exaggerated criticism of the party and begin to develop basic differences with the party line.

The seemingly abstract relation of organization to politics then becomes very real, because those who develop basic political differences also develop an urge to throw off restrictions imposed upon them by the party's organizational concepts. They become antagonistic to democratic centralism. Attempts are made to undermine the party's homogeneity and make it amorphous; to render it diffuse in class composition, identity and outlook; to revise its principles; to weaken its discipline and unity in action; and to debase the meaning of party membership.

Party building therefore involves a continuous process of cadre selection. While striving constantly to attract new forces, we also find it necessary from time to time to part company with those in our ranks who become disoriented. In the struggle for our principles the party creates stable cadres educated against both opportunism and sectarianism. Through long experience the party has learned to be on the alert for signs of opportunist tendencies toward capitulation to alien class pressures and to mobilize for struggle against them. Similarly the party is schooled to oppose sectarian abstentionism and ultra-left adventures designed to leap over objective difficulties. While combating both opportunism and sectarianism, the party educates its cadres to shape their course along the basic lines of the Transitional Program adopted by the Trotskyist movement in 1938.

Transitional Program

Central to the Transitional Program is recognition that mankind's crisis in the struggle for socialism is primarily a crisis of revolutionary leadership. It is the aim of the Trotskyist movement to build a combat organization capable of filling the leadership void. To do so the party can countenance neither opportunist adaptation to the status quo nor sectarian abstention from living struggle at its prevailing level of development. The party intervenes in the daily struggle with transitional demands stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness within sections of the mass movement. All these demands are aimed toward leading the masses to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the working class.

Only a tightly-knit combat party can meet these revolutionary tasks. In the struggle to build such a party cadre selection goes on as a constant molecular process. New individuals are attracted to the movement and some already in our ranks drop away. The proportions between these two categories vary with the ups and downs of external political trends. At given conjunctures the process may pass beyond individual selection and involve organized groups. In a political upturn a leap in party growth may be accomplished through a principled unification with other forces who are moving toward Trotskyist positions. Or at another stage an organized group may split away from the party from either sectarian or opportunist motives. Thus unifications and splits are alike methods of building the party, each representing a concentrated form of expression of the continuous process of cadre selection.

The SWP had its origins in the break of the Trotskyist Left Opposition from the Communist Party when the latter succumbed to Stalinist degeneration in the Twenties. Starting with such cadres as could be salvaged from the CP, the pioneer Trotskyists reached out for new forces turning revolutionary in the labor radicalization of the Thirties. Some reinforcements were secured through individual recruitment, but the main gains were registered through unifications

with the American Workers Party in 1934 and soon thereafter with the left wing of the Socialist Party. No less decisive in shaping the viable Trotskyist cadres of the Thirties was the 1935 split of the sectarians in our ranks who opposed the unifications.

Petty-bourgeois Opposition

The founding of the SWP in 1938 marked the completion of such unifications as were possible under the given conditions. Adverse political trends were already developing as the labor radicalization subsided; and when World War II began in 1939 the party was plunged into a deep internal crisis. The petty-bourgeois wing of the party quickly capitulated to the pressures of bourgeois public opinion which bore down heavily upon the movement as the ruling class prepared for American entry into the war. An organized opposition, led by Burnham, Shachtman, and Abern, began a vicious fight to overthrow the party's program and principles.

Their first panicky impulse was to rush to the mimeograph machines and issue a call for the masses to rise in spontaneous opposition to war. Their next step was to renounce the Trotskyist position of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack. Through Burnham they questioned many of the principles of Marxism. Through Shachtman they began to replace Trotsky's definition of the Soviet Union under Stalin as a degenerated workers' state with the false theory of bureaucratic collectivism.

In a frenzy to free themselves from party discipline the petty-bourgeois opposition opened an all-out attack on democratic centralism. They demanded the "right" to publish their own public organ. To grant their demand would have destroyed the centralist character of the party; it would have meant the creation of dual party structures and a complete breakdown of discipline. That, of course, was precisely what the petty-bourgeois opposition wanted, as they demonstrated when they split from the party upon being defeated at the 1940 convention.

The same convention reaffirmed the Leninist character of the party in its resolution on "The Organizational Conclusions of the Present Discussion." Dealing specifically with the opposition's demands, the resolution reaffirmed and made more explicit the party's unconditional right to control the public activity of all its members. After the split the party published a book by Comrade Cannon, "The Struggle for a Proletarian Party," in which the organizational lessons of the 1939-40 internal struggle are documented and analyzed. The book constitutes a valuable guide to young revolutionists eager to learn the Leninist principles of organization.

American Theses

Cleansed of the petty-bourgeois defectors from Trotskyism

the party stood firm throughout the war. In the 1944-46 labor upsurge it was able to win many new rebels to its ranks, thereby recouping the losses experienced in the 1940 split. With a confidence tempered in the fires of adversity, the party charted its post-war perspectives through the American Theses adopted at the 1946 convention.

With revolutionary advances abroad confronted by the military interventions of U.S. imperialism, the Theses assert, the role of America in the world is decisive. The showdown battles for the communist future of mankind will be fought in this country. A socialist victory here, merging with the world revolutionary forces, will put an end to the outlived capitalist system as a whole.

As against all petty-bourgeois skeptics, the Theses affirm the capacity of the American working class to fulfill its historic role as an organic part of the world revolutionary process. U.S. capitalism is heading toward a deep social and political crisis that will precipitate an unparalleled mass radicalization. The working class will acquire political class consciousness and organization in a sweeping movement similar to the rise of the CIO. Given the decisive leadership of a revolutionary vanguard party, labor and its allies will move toward the conquest of political power.

It is to fill precisely that vanguard leadership role that the SWP has shaped its political course and organizational structure, following the example of the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky. The SWP has hammered out its revolutionary program in ideological battles and it defends that program against every kind of revisionist assault upon it. The party has assembled a strong core of professional leadership which it strives to expand in order to strengthen party work and maintain leadership continuity. It aims to train its cadres in the irreconcilable spirit of a combat party of revolution, a party aspiring to lead the workers to victory in a struggle for political power.

Pessimism and Impressionism

The party's capacity to uphold the perspectives of the American Theses was soon to be put to the test under worsening objective conditions. A reactionary atmosphere of cold war and witch-hunt replaced the favorable climate of the labor upsurge in the mid-Forties. A new minority opposition, born of petty-bourgeois pessimism and impressionism, developed within the party under the leadership of Cochran. It was an unprincipled combination, divided as to whether political hope should be placed in self-reform of the Soviet bureaucracy, or in the miracle of an American union bureaucracy turned militant. What held the combination together, until they split from the SWP, was their common loss of faith in the revolutionary capacity of the working class. They denied that anybody could build a party capable of smashing the bureaucratic obstacles within the labor movement and leading the masses toward the conquest of power.

As always happens when basic political differences arise, the Cochranites began a campaign to undermine the party's democratic-centralist principles. Their attack centered on an attempt to subvert the principle of majority rule by imposing a minority veto of majority decisions. At the May 1953 plenum, in the middle of the internal struggle, the National Committee responded with a resolution reaffirming the organizational principles laid down by the 1938 and 1940 party conventions. The resolution also contained a third section rejecting the Cochranite attempt to set up "dual power" in the leadership and specifically affirming the application of majority rule through official party bodies. Soon thereafter the Cochranites went on a sit-down strike against the party which led to their suspension in November 1953 and later to their formal expulsion. In the political conflict a big majority of the membership rebuffed the Cochranite attack on the Transitional Program and American Theses.

Leaving aside similar experiences of lesser degree, such are the landmarks of internal struggle through which the party has worked out and maintained its organizational cohesion. Despite extremely-prolonged objective adversities, all revisionist attacks have been fought off. The party remains firmly committed to its vanguard aim of leading the American workers and their allies to the conquest of political power. Battle-tested cadres have been developed and a vital core of professional leadership created. The party's basic principles as a combat organization have been clearly established: firmness in political line; unity in action; disciplined conduct in all internal party affairs; unconditional loyalty to the party.

New Attack on Principles

Today the party faces yet another attack on its organizational principles which comes as a reflex to the appearance of new political differences. Toward the end of the Fifties an unusually protracted internal discussion began, centered on the Chinese question, Negro Struggle, Cuban question and reunification of the world movement. Minority groupings took form around one and another issue. A factional atmosphere was soon generated inside the party, especially by a minority combination made up of the Robertson-Mage-White and Wohlforth-Philips groups.

It was plain from the outset that the Robertson-Wohlforth combination had the idea that middle class intellectuals must take over American Trotskyism and set it straight. They began with factional sorties in the youth around several issues. Later they linked themselves with the Healy faction of the Socialist Labor League in a declaration of war on the SWP policies and leadership. They opposed party policy on such key issues as world unification, Cuba, Algeria, the Negro Struggle. In the name of "proletarian" intervention in the mass movement they advanced a hodgepodge of sectarian abstentionism and harebrained adventurism. In general they showed the usual traits of the rootless petty-bourgeois radical caught up in frenzied self-delusion.

In the fall of 1962 the combination split into the Robertson-Mage-White and Wohlforth-Philips components, apparently in a dispute over tactics in their factional attempt to overturn the party's program and principles. They entered the 1963 pre-convention discussion as rival factions but without any significant differences in political line. As the discussion proceeded they took pot-shots at one another that helped to reveal the depth of their hostility toward the party majority; an outstanding example was the Wohlforth faction's revelations about anti-party documents secretly circulated by the Robertsonites. At the party convention both factions were defeated politically by an overwhelming majority, and both were excluded from representation on the incoming National Committee because their loyalty to the party was in question.

Expulsion of Robertsonites

After the convention the Political Committee requested a Control Commission investigation into the Wohlforthite charges concerning the anti-party attitude of the Robertson faction. The Commission obtained copies of documents by Robertson, Ireland and Harper that had been circulated behind the back of the party. Its findings were reported to the Political Committee for action as provided by the party constitution.

These Robertsonite documents constituted a declaration of unending war on the party which was characterized as "right-centrist." Policies were outlined for what amounted to a factional raid on the party. In practice it meant double recruitment, first to the tight faction, then formally to the party, on the basis of the faction's own program and methods; indoctrination of contacts against the party program, convention decisions and organizational principles before they applied for party membership. They ridiculed the idea of party patriotism and sneered at the concept of party loyalty as a "religion." Faction discipline was put before the party discipline in their party-wrecking expedition.

Because of their disloyalty, in word and deed, the Political Committee suspended from membership Robertson, Mage and White as leaders responsible for the factional disloyalty; also Harper and Ireland for their complicity in the secret documents. Further disciplinary action was referred to the National Committee. The December 1963 plenum approved the PC action and expelled the five from the party.

The disciplinary action against the Robertsonites has been assailed by all organized minorities within the party and by some individual members. It has been contended from one and another quarter that party loyalty is only an idea; that disciplinary measures can be taken only upon specific proof of overt acts of indiscipline; that the party leadership has introduced new organizational concepts in an effort to settle political differences by suppressing the right of organized dissent; that the leadership

is trying to make the party monolithic in the Stalinist manner.

Party Loyalty

Not one of those assertions and accusations contains an iota of truth. To begin with, loyalty is far more than an abstract idea; it is a standard of political conduct. The party's whole democratic-centralist structure is founded on the rock of organizational loyalty. Without loyal members the party, as a voluntary organization, would have no basis upon which to maintain the necessary discipline in carrying out its revolutionary tasks. Disloyal people don't believe in the party, they won't pitch in selflessly to help build it, and they will resist and evade discipline. That is why the organizational resolution adopted at the SWP's founding convention specified that unconditional loyalty to the party is required of every member.

Brushing aside that specific provision of party law, an attempt is made to brand unconstitutional the disciplinary procedure against the Robertsonites which hinges on the issue of party loyalty. It is charged that the trial procedures under Article VIII of the party constitution have been violated. The charge is unfounded as it ignores the fact that Article VIII covers procedures in handling disciplinary matters originating at the branch level. When the National Control Commission acts, however, its procedures are governed entirely by Article VI of the party constitution, and the provisions of the latter article were followed to the letter in the Robertson case.

Another charge is directed at the Control Commission itself, which is alleged to have exceeded its authority in demanding and "presuming to evaluate" the Robertsonite secret documents. Again the charge is utterly without foundation. Article VI authorizes the Control Commission to investigate "any individual or circumstance," and it obligates party members "to furnish the Control Commission or its authorized representatives with any information they may require." As to its alleged "presumption" in evaluating the Robertsonite documents, Article VI provides that the Control Commission "shall present its findings and recommendations to the Political Committee for action." (Emphasis added.)

Acting strictly within its constitutional authority, the Control Commission obtained the documents in question. Upon examination it found that they manifested a hostile and disloyal attitude toward the party, and it said so in its report to the Political Committee. Taking the same view, the Political Committee suspended from membership those held primarily responsible for the documents. The plenum approved the Political Committee action, and it expelled from the party those the Political Committee had suspended.

An Anti-Party Faction

Although the action against the Robertsonites was unique in one respect: the form of the evidence involved, it had its precedent and justification in the loyalty issue over which they were expelled. Usually an anti-party faction tries to conceal its divisive aims until it is ready to split, and its disruptive course must be exposed through its disloyal acts. The Robertsonites seemed to think, however, that they could get away with their secret circulation of anti-party documents, using them in their factional raid on the party, until they themselves decided the time had come for an open split. Although given every opportunity to repudiate the documents and affirm their loyalty to the party, not one of them did so. They seemed to believe the party would have to submit to their wrecking operation until and unless specific acts of disloyalty could be proved against them.

The plenum transcript on the subject shows that disloyal acts were indeed committed by the Robertsonites, but that is beside the point. With or without proof of specific acts, the party had the right, and its leadership the duty, to stop the self-indicted factional raiders who were out to wreck our movement. Any doubts on that score should have been definitively resolved by their attitude and actions since the expulsions in peddling malicious gossip to the capitalist press as part of their attempt to smear the SWP publicly.

Some opponents of the disciplinary action have argued, however, that in principle anyone can advocate anything he pleases within the party; and the policy followed in the Robertsonite case has been likened to capitalist use of thought-control measures. The argument is false on both counts. The SWP is a voluntary organization which individuals or groups are free to join or leave as they agree or disagree with its program, aims and activities. But they are not free to accept or reject the imposition of governmental authority. If they resist the regulations governing society as laid down by the state power, they are not simply told they will have to depart and organize a rival party of their own; they are threatened with jail. That is why governmental attempts to proscribe views are anti-democratic; and it is idiotic to accuse the SWP of aping the capitalist government in the Robertson case.

Basis of Party's Existence

As a voluntary and revolutionary organization the SWP has the right to define the basis for its existence. The party exercises that prerogative by putting distinct limits on the right of advocacy within its ranks, as determined by majority decision through the official bodies, acting in compliance with the party's program, principles and convention decisions. Disloyal people not only cannot advocate anything they please within the party; they cannot be allowed to carry on their advocacy behind the back of the party. Those who don't want to comply with the party's democratically-

decided definition of the basis for its existence have the right to withdraw from the organization and form one of their own.

It has also been claimed that the leadership, while acting in the name of striving for relative internal homogeneity, is actually trying to make the party monolithic. To lightly make so grave a charge is irresponsible, because it infers a Stalinist form of degeneration within the SWP; and the charge is baseless. Monolithism means the suppression of all political dissent and the imposition of rigid political conformity by a dictatorial bureaucracy. It is a Stalinist corruption of Leninism which our Trotskyist party rejects and combats. We are guided by the Leninist concept of relative internal homogeneity based on loyal adherence to the party's program and principles and voluntary acceptance of its discipline. These qualities enable the party to maintain internal stability and to function dynamically in its public activity, even though conjunctural political differences arise. Ample room is provided for the expression of dissident views, even major ones of serious import. The right to organize tendencies and factions is safeguarded. All the leadership demands is that every member be loyal to the party's program and principles and be disciplined.

Factionalism and Party Unity

A properly conducted discussion of internal political differences contributes to the good and welfare of the party. It facilitates the hammering out of a correct political line and it helps to educate the membership. These benefits derive from the discussion provided that every comrade hears all points of view and the whole party is drawn into the thinking about the questions in dispute. In that way the membership as a whole can intervene in disputes, settle them in an orderly way by majority decision and get on with the party work. This method has been followed by American Trotskyism throughout its history and has resulted in an effective clarification of all controversial issues.

Concentration on private discussions of disputed issues, on the other hand, tends to give the comrades involved a one-sided view and warps their capacity for objective political judgment. Inexperienced comrades especially are made the target of such lopsided discussion methods. The aim is to line them up quickly in a closed caucus, and prejudice their thinking before they have heard an open party debate. When dissident views are introduced into the party in that manner groupings tend to form and harden, and the dissenting views tend to assert themselves in disruptive fashion, before the party as a whole has had a chance to face and act on the issues in dispute.

A relatively homogeneous party should be able to resolve episodic differences without resort to factionalism. Even when comrades have differences of a serious nature over one or another particular aspect of party policy it does not follow that they

should rush to form a faction. Objectivity requires that they do no more than form an ideological tendency which confines its activities to a principled collective effort to argue for a change in the given policy; and the tendency should present its views openly before the whole party in a responsible and disciplined manner.

A tight-knit faction, however, is qualitatively different from an ideological tendency. It tends to become in effect a party within the party, with its own program and its own discipline. Such a formation cannot be justified politically unless its organizers consider their differences so fundamental that they must conduct a showdown fight for control of the party. Factionalism means war inside the party, and it entails the possibility and danger of a split.

For these reasons internal party disputes should be conducted in an objective way, both to safeguard party unity and to educate the membership in principled politics. Comrades should not be hasty to organize internal groupings. When the party has made its decision on the issues in dispute, groupings formed during the polemical struggle should dissolve into the party as a whole.

Regulation of Internal Affairs

Temporary groupings that arise out of conjunctural political differences should not be perpetuated regardless of principled considerations indicating the need for their dissolution. If they are, it indicates that narrow group interests have been put ahead of basic party interests. A danger arises that such permanent formations may degenerate into unprincipled cliques bound together by personal associations; and their existence may drive others into counter-formations. An atmosphere of aimless, endless internal conflict is generated that could tear the party to pieces.

It is precisely to safeguard itself from such harmful consequences of factional anarchy that the party exercises the right to regulate its internal affairs. While a decision is being reached, comrades holding dissident views receive all normal minority rights, including the right of organized dissent. After a party decision has been made the democratic rights of the majority take precedence. All members are required to accept the majority decision and help to carry it out. Comrades holding minority opinions are not disqualified from serving the party in any capacity; nor are they asked to give up their dissident views. They must simply await a new opportunity to present their views when internal discussion is again formally authorized.

Comrades opposed to expulsion of the Robertsonites disregarded the significance of the expression of party opinion at the July 1963 convention. An exceedingly long preparatory discussion had been held. Minorities received most of the space in an unprecedented volume of internal bulletins. During pre-convention dis-

cussion in the branches, and at the convention itself, minority reporters got generous time allotments. Democracy in action, as represented by the convention vote, showed a very strong majority, while the dissenting groups taken as a whole constituted only a weak minority. Through that decisive test of the relation of forces, the convention firmly decided the issues in dispute. The discussion was terminated for the time being; and all comrades were expected to pitch into party activity on the basis of the convention decisions.

Thought and Action

It shows disrespect for the opinions of the party membership when dissident comrades seek to proceed as though the convention vote meant nothing. To contend that differences have arisen in new forms, as has been said, is simply a pretext for continuing discussion of issues decided by the convention. Equally deceptive are the arguments that party comrades are thinking people who don't want to be reduced to simply doing organizational chores, and that polemical discussions will liven up an otherwise dull branch meeting.

Without critical political thinking and rethinking one could not be a revolutionist. But there must be alternative periods for emphasis upon thought and action. The party is not a perpetual discussion circle whose chief function is to provide a forum where free-thinkers can express themselves whenever and however they please. Ours is a disciplined party of action. We discuss in order to arrive at a policy to serve as a guide for collective action and we decide in order to act as a united body with a single purpose. Those who say they find it impossible to function in such a party really mean they don't want to do much except talk. They are not serious militants worthy of a workers' party.

Considering all the facts, it is ridiculous to charge the leadership with introducing new organizational concepts intended to suppress organized dissent. If new concepts have been introduced within the party, and they have, they don't come from the leadership; they come from those who challenge the elementary obligation of the party leadership to defend the integrity of the party against a wrecking operation. Although the present minorities have varying political differences with the majority and between themselves, they appear to hold a common wrong view on the question of internal party discipline.

The disloyal Robertsonites are defended on the grounds of alleged minority rights. It is claimed that an organized minority has the unconditional right to determine its own conduct inside the party. Discipline is held to apply only to public activity. Official party bodies are allegedly without right or power to regulate a minority's activities in organizing itself and presenting its political views.

To grant such demands for special license to organized minorities would strip the party of the right to regulate its internal affairs and would undermine its whole democratic-centralist structure. The democratic principle of majority rule would be overturned; discipline in public activity would be confounded; and all semblance of political homogeneity would be lost. The party would become converted into an all-inclusive federation of autonomous factions; it would degenerate into a political jungle where perpetual factional warfare prevailed.

Party of American Revolution

It is foolish to imagine that the coming American revolution can be led by a party honeycombed with political kibbitzers, professional "democrats" who disdain the rights of the majority, and factional hooligans. In this country the masses and their socialist spokesmen face the most vicious ruling class. At home its government deals with social protest through legal and extra-legal thugs armed with clubs, tear gas, fire hoses, cattle prods, dogs, guns and bayonets. The ruling class made America the shame of the world as the first and only nation to use atomic weapons against other human beings. The rulers of this country unleash brutal military interventions against anti-capitalist rebels abroad; and they repeatedly go to the brink of nuclear war in their efforts to turn back the world revolutionary tide.

To go up against such a ruling class labor and its allies need the leadership of a cohesive and disciplined combat party. If our party is to meet that need it must once again beat back disintegrating factors which threaten and undermine its revolutionary vitality. The membership must be educated and reeducated in principled Trotskyist politics and the Leninist principles of democratic centralism. The party must tighten up against internal disruption, demand responsible conduct from every member, enforce discipline and require unconditional loyalty to the organization. While scrupulously protecting the normal democratic rights of minorities, the democratic principle of majority rule must be no less rigorously enforced. Only in that way can we approach our revolutionary tasks as one party with one program.

Again, and once again, comrades must be taught that party patriotism is part of revolutionary consciousness. Disloyalty and indiscipline must be looked upon as crimes that bring punishment. A party that aims to lead the most decisive revolution of our time must have members who believe in it, who want to help build it, and who are quick to defend it. People of that calibre must in turn have the kind of a party to which they can confidently dedicate their life and their hope for the socialist future.

III. Codification of Organizational Principles

From the whole experience of more than a century of working class struggle throughout the world we have derived the Leninist

principles of organization, namely, democratic centralism. The same body of experience has demonstrated that there are no absolute guarantees for the preservation of the principle of democratic centralism, and no rigid formula that can be set down in advance, a priori, for its application under any and all circumstances. Proceeding from certain fundamental conceptions, the problem of applying the principle of democratic centralism correctly under different conditions and stages of development of the struggle can be solved only in relation to the concrete situation, in the course of the tests and experience through which the movement passes, and on the basis of the most fruitful and healthy inter-relationship of the leading bodies of the party and its rank and file.

Basing itself on the specific experiences and needs of American Trotskyism up to that time, the 1938 founding convention of the Socialist Workers Party defined our organizational principles in a resolution "On the Internal Situation and the Character of the Party."

Soon thereafter a minority faction, led by Burnham, Shachtman and Abern, demanded the right to publish a dual public organ which would have amounted to freeing them from party control over their public activities. In rejecting the minority demand the 1940 party convention reaffirmed the 1938 resolution and extended the definition of principles in a resolution on "The Organizational Conclusions of the Present Discussion." Later on a minority faction headed by Cochran demanded a dual leadership authority in the form of veto powers within official party bodies intended to obstruct the carrying out of majority decisions. The Cochranite demand was rejected by the May 1953 plenum of the National Committee. The plenum adopted a resolution, "On the Organizational Principles of the Party," which reaffirmed the 1938 and 1940 resolutions and further extended the definition of our democratic-centralist norms.

At present our organizational principles are again under attack, this time in the form of a demand for dual disciplinary standards under which organized minorities would have the unconditional right to set their own norms of conduct inside the party. The demand is rejected as in violation of the Leninist principles defined in the 1938, 1940, and 1953 resolutions. In accordance with those resolutions which are hereby reaffirmed, and in view of the new problems that have arisen, the party's organizational principles are further defined and codified as follows:

Character of the Party

The Socialist Workers Party, as a revolutionary workers' party, is based on the doctrines of scientific socialism as embodied in the principle works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and incorporated in the basic documents and resolutions of the first four congresses of the Communist International; and as embodied in the Transitional Program, the American Theses and other programmatic

documents of the Trotskyist movement. The party's aim is the organization of the working class in the struggle for power and the transformation of the existing social order. All of its activities, its methods and its internal regime are subordinated to this aim and are designed to serve it.

The Bolshevik party of Lenin set an unparalleled example for the building of the vanguard party capable of leading the working class to the conquest of power. The SWP, as a combat organization, which aims at achieving power in this country, models its organization forms and methods after those of Russian Bolshevism, adapting them, naturally, to the experience of recent years and to concrete American conditions.

We reject the contention of social democrats, skeptics and capitulators disillusioned in the Russian revolution and its aftermath, that there is an inevitable and organic connection between Bolshevism and Stalinism. This reactionary revision of Marxism is a capitulation to democratic imperialism. It is capable of producing only demoralization and defeat in the critical times of war and revolution. Tendencies which advance skeptical criticisms of Bolshevism express their petty-bourgeois composition and their dependence on bourgeois public opinion. The petty-bourgeois is a natural transmission belt carrying the theories of reaction into the organizations of the working class.

Those who seek to identify Bolshevism with Stalinism concern themselves with a search for absolute guarantees against the Stalinist degeneration of the party and the future socialist power. We reject this demand for iron-clad insurance as completely undialectical and unrealistic. Our party, in the first instance, is concerned with the struggle for state power, and therefore with creating a party organization capable of leading the proletarian struggle to this goal. There are no constitutional guarantees which can prevent degeneration. Only the victorious revolution can provide the necessary preconditions for preventing the degeneration of the party and the future state power of the working people. If the party fails to carry through and extend the revolution the degeneration of the party is inevitable.

Insofar as any guarantees are possible against the degeneration of the proletarian party, these can be obtained only by educating the party in firm adherence to principles and by a merciless struggle against any personal and unprincipled clique combinations within the party. The history of the movement in this country amply reveals that such a clique, with its utter disregard for principles, can become the repository for alien class influences and agents of enemy organizations seeking to disrupt the movement from within. The SWP condemns cliquism as hostile to the spirit and methods of Bolshevik organizations.

Revolutionary Centralism

From the foregoing it follows that the party seeks to include in its ranks all revolutionary and class conscious militants from the labor, civil rights and student movements -- all opponents of capitalism -- who are prepared to stand on the Trotskyist program and to be active in building the movement in a disciplined manner. The revolutionary Marxian party rejects, not only the arbitrariness and bureaucratism of the Communist Party, but also the spurious and deceptive "all-inclusiveness" of the social-democratic variety, which is a sham and a fraud. Experience has proved conclusively that this "all-inclusiveness" paralyzes the party in general and the revolutionary left wing in particular, suppressing and bureaucratically hounding the latter while giving free rein to the right wing to commit the greatest crimes in the name of socialism and the party. The SWP seeks to be inclusive only in this sense: that it accepts into its ranks those who accept its program and principles; and that it denies admission to those who reject its program and principles.

To overthrow the most powerful capitalist ruling class in the world, the SWP must be organized as a combat party on strong centralist lines. The resolution adopted at the founding convention gave a correct interpretation of the principles of democratic centralism. Its emphasis was placed on the democratic aspects of this principle. The party leadership has faithfully preserved the democratic rights of the membership since the founding convention. It has granted the widest latitude of discussion to all dissenting groups and individuals. The duty of the National Committee is to execute the decisions of the convention, arrived at after the most thorough and democratic discussion, and to permit no infringement upon them.

Conditions, both external and in the internal development of the party, demand that steps now be taken towards knitting the party together, towards tightening up its activities and centralizing its organization structure. For the work of penetrating into the mass movement, for the heavy struggles to come against capitalism, it is imperative that a maximum of loyalty be required of every leader and every member; that a maximum of activity be required commensurate with the given situation of each comrade; that a strict adherence to discipline be demanded and enforced.

The struggle for power organized and led by the revolutionary party is the most ruthless and irreconcilable struggle in all history. A loosely-knit, heterogeneous, undisciplined, untrained organization is utterly incapable of accomplishing such world-historical tasks as the proletariat and the revolutionary party are confronted with in the present era. This is all the more emphatically true in the light of the singularly difficult position of our party and the extraordinary persecution to which it is subject. From this follows

the party's unconditional demand upon all its members for complete discipline in all public activities and actions of the organization.

Leadership and centralized direction are indispensable prerequisites for any sustained and disciplined action, especially in the party that sets itself the aim of leading the collective efforts of the proletariat in its struggle against capitalism. Without a strong and firm National Committee and its subordinate bodies, having the power to act promptly and effectively in the name of the party and to supervise, coordinate and direct all its activities without exception, the very idea of a revolutionary party is a meaningless jest.

Membership Rights and Obligations

Only a self-acting and critical-minded membership is capable of forging and consolidating such a party and of solving its problems by collective thought, discussion and experience. From this follows the need of assuring the widest party democracy in the ranks of the organization. Party membership confers the fullest freedom of discussion, debate and criticism inside the ranks of the party limited only by such decisions and provisions as are made by the party itself or by bodies to which it assigns this function. Affiliation to the party confers upon each member the right of being democratically represented at all policy-making assemblies of the party (from branch to national convention), and the right of the final and decisive vote in determining the program, policies and leadership of the party.

With party rights, the membership also has certain definite obligations. The theoretical and political character of the party is determined by its program which demarcates the revolutionary Marxist party from all other parties, groups and tendencies in the working class. The first obligation of party membership is loyal acceptance of the program of the party and regular affiliation to one of the basic units of the party. The party requires of every member the acceptance of its discipline and the carrying on of his activity in accordance with the program of the party, with the decisions adopted by its conventions, and with the policies formulated and directed by the party leadership.

Party membership implies the obligation of one hundred percent loyalty to the organization, the rejection of all agents of other, hostile groups in its ranks and intolerance of divided loyalties in general. Membership in the party necessitates responsible activity in the organization, as established by the proper unit, and under the direction of the party; it necessitates the fulfillment of all the tasks which the party assigns to each member. Party membership implies the obligation upon every member to contribute materially to the support of the organization in accordance with his means.

Rights of Party as a Whole

The rights of each individual member, as set forth above, do not imply that the membership as a whole, namely, the party itself, does not possess rights of its own. The party as a whole has the right to demand that its work be not disrupted and disorganized, and has the right to take all the measures which it finds necessary to assure its regular and normal functioning. The rights of any individual member are distinctly secondary to the rights of the party membership as a whole. Party democracy means not only the most scrupulous protection of the rights of a given minority, but also the protection of the majority. A dissenting minority has the right to organize itself, but the conduct of organized minorities, just as that of every individual member, must be subject to regulation by official party bodies.

The party is therefore entitled to organize its internal discussion and to determine the forms and limits. All inner-party discussion must be organized from the point of view that the party is not a discussion club, which debates interminably on any and all questions at any and all times without arriving at a binding decision enabling the organization to act, but from the point of view that we are a disciplined party of revolutionary action.

The party must be cleansed of the discussion club atmosphere, of an irresponsible attitude toward assignments, of a cynical, smart-aleck disrespect for the organization. To maintain party unity and make common political work possible, the majority must have the unconditional right to decide all issues in dispute; every member must accept the decisions unconditionally and help carry them out. Official party bodies must determine correct procedure, both in public activity and in the regulation of internal affairs, on the basis of the party's principles and statutes.

Discipline

The party in general not only has the right, therefore, to organize the discussion in accordance with the requirements of the situation, but the lower units of the party must be given the right in the interests of the struggle against the disruption and disorganization of the party's work, to call irresponsible individuals to order, and, if need be, to eject them from the ranks.

The decisions of the national party convention are binding on all party members without exception and they conclude the discussion on all disputed questions upon which a decision has been taken. Any party member violating the decisions of the convention, or attempting to revive discussion in regard to them without formal authorization of the party, puts himself thereby in opposition to the party and forfeits his right to membership. All party organizations are authorized and instructed to take any measures necessary to enforce this rule.

Press

The party press is the decisive public agitational and propagandist expression of the organization. The policies of the press are formulated on the basis of the resolutions of the conventions of the party, and decisions of the National Committee not in conflict with such resolutions. Control of the press is lodged directly in the hands of the National Committee by the convention of the party. The duty of the editors is loyally to interpret the decisions of the convention in the press.

The opening of the party press to discussion of a point of view contrary to that of the official leadership of the party or of its programmatic convention decisions must be controlled by the National Committee which is obligated to regulate discussion of this character in such a way as to give decisive emphasis to the party line. It is the right and duty of the National Committee to veto any demand for public discussion if it deems such discussion harmful to the best interests of the party.

Proletarianizing the Party

The working class is the only class in modern society that is progressive and truly revolutionary. Only the working class is capable of saving humanity from barbarism. Only a revolutionary party can lead the proletariat to the realization of this historic mission. To achieve power, the revolutionary party must be deeply rooted among the workers, it must be composed predominantly of workers and enjoy the respect and confidence of the workers.

Without such a composition it is impossible to build a programmatically firm and disciplined organization which can accomplish these grandiose tasks. A party of non-workers is necessarily subject to all the reactionary influences of skepticism, cynicism, soul-sickness and capitulatory despair transmitted to it through its petty-bourgeois environment.

To transform the SWP into a proletarian party of action, particularly in the present period of reaction, it is not enough to continue propagandistic activities in the hope that by an automatic process workers will flock to the banner of the party. It is necessary, on the contrary, to make a concerted, determined and systematic effort, consciously directed by the leading committees of the party, to spread out into all sectors of the mass movement -- civil rights organizations which are becoming radicalized and in which workers predominate; labor organizations within industry and among the unemployed; campuses where an increasing number of students are turning toward socialist ideas.

Central to all mass work must be the sinking of party roots into mass organizations and the recruitment of workers and students, black and white, into the party. At the same time students must

be taught that they can transform the Trotskyist program from the pages of books and pamphlets into living reality for themselves and for the party only by integrating themselves in the workers' movement and breaking irrevocably from alien class influences. They must wholly and selflessly identify themselves with the working class through its vanguard party. Unless they follow this road they are in constant danger of slipping back into apathy and pessimism and thus being lost for the revolutionary movement.

Party activity must be organized on the basis of campaigns which are realistically adjusted to the demands and direction of the mass movement. These campaigns must not be sucked out of the thumb of some functionary in a party office, but must arise as a result of the connections of the party with the mass movement and the indicated direction of the masses in specific situations.

All party agitation campaigns, especially in the next period, must be directed primarily at those mass organizations in which we are attempting to gain a foothold and attract members. General agitation addressed to the working class as a whole or the public in general must be related to those specific aims.

The press must gear its agitation into the activity conducted among specific sectors of the mass movement so as to transform the party paper from a literary organ into a political organizer. The integration of the party into the mass movement, and the transformation of the party into a proletarian organization, are indispensable for the progress of the party.

Responsibilities of Leadership

To build the combat organization capable of leading the masses to power, the party must have as its general staff a corps of professional revolutionists who devote their entire life to the direction and the building of the party and its influence in the mass movement. Membership in the leading staff of the party, the National Committee, must be made contingent on a complete subordination of the life of the candidate to the party. All members of the National Committee must be prepared to devote full-time activities to party work at the demand of the National Committee.

The party demands the greatest sacrifices of its members. Only a leadership selected from among those who demonstrate in the struggle the qualities of singleness of purpose, unconditional loyalty to the party and revolutionary firmness of character, can inspire the membership with the spirit of unswerving devotion required for victory.

The party leadership must, from time to time, be infused with new blood, primarily from among the younger party activists. Comrades who show promise and ability through activity in the mass movement should be elevated to the leading committees of the party

in order to establish a more direct connection between the leading committee and the mass movement, and in order to train those engaged in mass work for the tasks of party direction itself.

The leadership of the party must be under the control of the membership, its policies must always be open to criticism, discussion and rectification by the rank and file within properly established forms and limits, and the leading bodies themselves subject to formal recall or alteration. The membership of the party has the right to demand and expect the greatest responsibility from the leaders precisely because of the position they occupy in the movement. The selection of comrades to the positions of leadership means the conferring of an extraordinary responsibility. The warrant for this position must be proved, not once, but continuously by the leadership itself. It is under obligation to set the highest example of responsibility, devotion, sacrifice and complete identification with the party itself and its daily life and action. It must display the ability to defend its policies before the membership of the party, and to defend the line of the party and the party as a whole before the working class in general.

Sustained party activity, not broken or disrupted by abrupt and disorienting changes, presupposes not only a continuity of tradition and a systematic development of party policy, but also the continuity of leadership. It is an important sign of a serious and firmly constituted party, of a party really engaged in productive work in the class struggle, that it raises from its ranks cadres of more or less able leading comrades, tested for their qualities of endurance and trustworthiness, and that it thus insures a certain stability and continuity of leadership by such a cadre.

Continuity of leadership does not, however, signify the automatic self-perpetuation of leadership. Constant renewal of its ranks by means of additions and, when necessary, replacements, is the only assurance the party has that its leadership will not succumb to the effects of dry-rot, that it will not be burdened with dead-wood, that it will avoid the corrosion of conservatism and dilettantism, that it will not be the object of conflict between the older elements and the younger, that the old and basic cadre will be refreshed by new blood, that the leadership as a whole will not become purely bureaucratic "committee men" remote from the real life of the party and the activities of the rank and file.

Role of Official Bodies

As provided by the party constitution, the National Committee directs all the work of the party, decides all questions of policy in accord with the decisions of the national convention, appoints subordinate officers and sub-committees, including the Political Committee, and in general constitutes, between national conventions, the functioning central authority of the party.

The Political Committee, appointed by the plenum, functions as the central authority of the party between plenums of the National Committee and is authorized to speak and act in its name. It shall be optional with the Political Committee whether or not it will conduct a poll of the National Committee before acting on any question before it, except that such a poll shall be taken upon the request of any National Committee member for a plenary meeting of the National Committee. The Political Committee is obliged to comply with the decision of the majority of the full National Committee in such a poll.

All party organs, institutions and bodies, including the party locals and branches, shall be under the supervision of the Political Committee, acting for the National Committee. All party units and individual party members are required to comply with any directives of the Political Committee between plenums of the National Committee, pending appeal to the plenum.

As provided by the party constitution, Local Executive Committees shall direct the activities of the Locals and act with full power for the Locals between city conventions. Branch Executive Committees, on the other hand, as provided by the party constitution, shall be subordinate to the Branch membership.

In accordance with the principle of democratic centralism, minorities shall have the right to present their views in all internal party discussions. The plenum, and between its sessions, the Political Committee, has the right and duty to lay down rules for the regulation of the discussion, to see that it is fairly conducted as has invariably been the case in the past, and to see that it does not disrupt the orderly functioning of the party in all its activities.

The principle of majority rule shall apply with full force and effect in all party bodies and in all party activities.