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for  
Socialist  
Feminism**

**Organizer's Report  
to the 1969  
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# **A Victory for Socialist Feminism**

**Organizer's Report to the 1969  
Freedom Socialist Party Conference**

**Introduction by Cindy Gipple**

**Second Edition**

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## INTRODUCTION

by Cindy Gipple

My first serious exposure to socialist politics convinced me of the necessity of social revolution for the liberation of myself and my sex. Most feminists have not been so quick to accept a Marxist analysis because of the sexism permeating the modern, male-led socialist movement. But it was a logical conclusion for me to draw, given the vivid analysis of a woman who radiated the power and integrity of truly socialist and feminist politics.

I was fortunate: I was living in Seattle and had the opportunity to observe, to learn from and to work with the founders of contemporary socialist-feminism, women revolutionaries with a long and rich background in the study of Marxist theory, in building a working class, Bolshevik type of party, and in promulgating the internationalist politics and democratic organizational principles of Leon Trotsky.

My sisters in other parts of the country have been less fortunate; their road to a revolutionary feminism, to delineating a clear and cohesive socialist-feminist theory and practice, has been fraught with inevitable hesitation and confusion.

What is the exact relationship between feminism and the class struggle?

How is feminism connected to the racial and sexual minority movements?

How do socialist-feminists work in the male-supremacist socialist movement without jeopardizing their feminism or becoming hostile to socialism?

Answers to these widespread problems of the women's movement are hardly self-evident.

Millions of women, and men, around the world are grappling with these apparently perplexing and frustrating problems, which are exacerbated by the astonishing lack of any objective, comprehensive and definitive history of socialist feminism. The written history of the socialist movement is prolific, vast and expanding daily, but one explosive component is still missing -- an authoritative account of the century-long struggle of women within the socialist movement for equal rights, equal opportunity and political recognition of the programmatic and organizational importance of the woman question.

The reason for this appalling omission from the annals of radical history is embarrassingly elementary and obvious -- the fact is that most socialist historians were men who were not



feminists, or women whose feminism was ruthlessly edited out of the manuscripts, or distorted beyond recognition.

Our history as women socialists, as revolutionary women who were simultaneously socialists and feminists, has been denied us. The roots of our identity, the course of our political evolution, and the story of our struggles remain hidden chapters in socialist literature.

The 1967-1969 Organizer's Report of the Freedom Socialist Party, the first socialist-feminist party in history, is an exciting exception to the historical blackout of women's role in the socialist movement. It is a carefully documented account of a victorious struggle by socialist women and their male allies against the reactionary politics of male-chauvinist radicalism. Proudly written in 1969 by the founders of socialist-feminism, this work was intended to inform, educate and reinforce other principled radicals in the Amazonian labor necessary to achieve the emancipation of women.

When I first read the Organizer's Report, in 1972, I was forcefully struck by the almost incredible phenomenon, to me, of a woman who was so objective and so political that she could employ sophisticated programmatic analysis of a personal episode filled with misery and outrage. What courage, I thought, and yet the Report seemed to me basically a matter of historical interest. I soon learned that other women, especially those who were wives and mothers, viewed the document as a manifesto, as a virtual declaration of independence from domestic-political servitude to male radicals; these women identified with Clara wholeheartedly, and in her insistence on the party as the tribunal -- the platform and the champion -- of their just rights, they finally found an organization worthy of their revolutionary energy and dedication.

Every radical, every socialist and every feminist should read this book; the profound lessons of the hard-fought victory recounted in its pages are inescapable for the reader, and indelible for the dedicated feminist.

### Feminism and Socialism in Theory

The theoretical foundation for the emancipation of women as an essential component of the struggle for socialism was established a century ago by Marx and Engels, and later by Bebel, Lenin, Clara Zetkin and Trotsky.

In Capital, published in 1867, Marx analyzes the relationship between women, labor and the family as follows:

...It was not, however, the misuse of parental authority that created the capitalistic exploitation, whether direct or indirect, of children's labour; but, on the contrary, it was the capitalistic mode of exploitation

which, by sweeping away the economical basis of parental authority, made its exercise degenerate into a mischievous misuse of power. However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, and the children of both sexes, creates a new economical foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes. It is, of course, just as absurd to hold the Teutonic-Christian form of the family to be absolute and final as it would be to apply that character to the ancient Roman, the ancient Greek, or the Eastern forms which, moreover, taken together form a series in historic development. Moreover, it is obvious that the fact of the collective working group being composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages, must necessarily, under suitable conditions, become a source of humane development; although in its spontaneously developed, brutal capitalistic form, where the labourer exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the labourer, that fact is a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery.

-- Volume I, Chapter 15, Machinery & Modern Industry; Section 9, The Factory Acts

To Marx, the concept of female equality was rooted firmly in the labor process, in the equality of labor. While he deplored the monstrous abuse of women and children in the capitalist factory system, his mastery of materialist dialectics enabled him to anticipate the shape of the future, where economically independent and psychologically confident women would remold the nature of sexual relationships and achieve a "higher form of the family."

For Marx, class struggle and women's rights were not contradictory or separated entities; the woman worker, "outside the domestic sphere", was not only an intrinsic part of the workers' struggle, but the architect and harbinger of the revolution in human relations which only socialism can engender. Only then will the process of production exist FOR the worker, and not vice-versa.

"The modern family", says Marx, "contains in germ not only slavery but also serfdom, since from the beginning it is related to agricultural services. It contains in miniature all the contradictions that later extend throughout society and its state." The modern family, then, based on the oppression of women, is the microcosm of everything in the larger capitalist society that must be swept away if humanity is to advance towards real civilization.



Engels' classic, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, published in 1884, is a brilliant and profound development of Marx's theme of essential interconnections and interrelationships among women, labor and socialism.

Around this theme, Engels weaves a panoramic tapestry composed of closely interwoven threads: women, the family, economics and the mode of production, class society, private property, state power, matriarchy and matrilineal descent, patriarchy, capitalism and monogamy, socialism and freedom. Engels explains and proves how women's ancient hegemony in the primitive collective was eroded and finally overthrown by the intervention of private property, and the brutal imposition of monogamy to insure the inheritance process and congeal the subjugation of women. Engels was outraged over the oppression of women:

Famulus means domestic slave, and familia is the total number of slaves belonging to one man... The term was invented by the Romans to denote a new social organization whose head ruled over wife and children and a number of slaves, and was invested under Roman paternal power with rights of life and death over them all... The overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glossed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form; in no sense has it been abolished...

Engels claimed that only socialism, the modern economic collective, can reinvest women, as a total sex, with dignity, respect and equality, and he identified strongly with the historic militancy and profound wretchedness of women.

...when monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history...it comes on the scene as the subjugation of one sex by the other; it announces a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole previous prehistoric period.

In an old unpublished manuscript written by Marx and myself in 1846, I find the words: "The first division of labor is that between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male... prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others. It is the cellular form of civilized society in which the nature of the oppositions and contradictions fully active in that society can be already studied.

Engels viewed woman's economic position as one of chattel slavery:

In the old communistic household, which comprised many couples and their children, the task entrusted to the women of managing the household was as much a public, a socially necessary industry, as the procuring of food by the men. With the patriarchal family and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service: the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production. Not until the coming of modern large-scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again-- and then only to the proletarian wife...the modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.

Liberation from antiquated domestic slavery and advancement to modern wage exploitation was indeed the only solution, according to Marx and Engels. And while utopian and middle-class Radical-Feminists\* may sneer, Engels understood what they do not--that the merger of the woman question with the class struggle is the highroad to a dual victory of the proletariat over the capitalist class, and women over the male supremacist system exemplified by capitalism.

In the great majority of cases today...within the family, the man is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat... The necessity of creating real social equality between them and the way to do it, will only be seen in the clear light of day when both possess legally complete equality of rights. Then it will be plain that the **FIRST CONDITION FOR THE**

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\* A petty bourgeois, anti-materialist trend in the feminist movement based on the theory that males are the cause of sexism because they are biologically programmed to be aggressors. Radical-Feminists turn the feminine mystique propaganda of the bourgeoisie into a principle and call upon all women to build a women's revolution by not associating with men and by negating all that is "male" inside of us, i.e., aggressiveness, strength, leadership, effective organization, power. Thus they condemn the feminist movement to failure by depriving us of the very tools necessary to wrest power from the male bourgeois oppressors. Under cover of their "real revolution" rhetoric they reject socialism, the labor movement, any confrontation with men who hold the power, and adapt readily to the system, to capitalist politics, and to a purely opportunist pursuit of personal careerism and comfort.



LIBERATION OF THE WIFE IS TO BRING THE WHOLE FEMALE SEX BACK INTO PUBLIC INDUSTRY, AND THAT THIS IN TURN DEMANDS THAT THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE MONOGAMOUS FAMILY AS THE ECONOMIC UNIT OF SOCIETY BE ABOLISHED...

to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time.

The depth of Engels' analysis and its relevance to current issues are the result of the care with which he approached all levels of human relationships, particularly in the area of sexuality and love. The right to sexuality and individual lifestyle, a major concern of both the feminist and sexual minority movements, was recognized by Engels as being connected to the position of women in the family and women's relationship to production:

What we can now conjecture about the way in which sexual relations will be ordered after the impending overthrow of capitalist production is mainly negative in character, limited for the most part to what will disappear. But what will there be new? That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual -- and that will be the end of it.

Bebel, Lenin, Trotsky, Zetkin, and innumerable woman revolutionists enlarged upon Marx and Engels' work, writing, organizing, and teaching on behalf of women workers and poor women fighting valiantly for survival and amelioration of their disastrous living and working conditions. Lenin held that without the mass involvement of Russian women, the revolution could not advance, and Trotsky, in The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, 1938, called for special emphasis on organizing women, the most exploited sector of the proletariat.

Opportunist organizations by their very nature concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignore both the youth and

the woman worker. The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage-earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class, consequently among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness and readiness to sacrifice.

Down with the bureaucracy and careerism! Open the road to the Youth! Turn to the woman worker!

### Feminism and Socialism in Practice

But most revolutionary socialists failed to heed Trotsky's call, and within the radical movement as a whole, the woman question continued to occupy, at best, a secondary place. In the Second International, in the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, and in the early Socialist Workers Party in the United States, a few women played leading roles in defining policy, writing, speaking and organizing. In studying the literature of this period, I found very little material written by women. Apart from titans of thought and practice like Luxemburg, and leaders like Zetkin, Kollontai, and Balabanoff, almost all women revolutionists and radicals who deal with the issue attest to a consistent disrespect and underestimation from most of their male counterparts. The socialist/communist movement in this century, according to women activists, has been marked by ambiguity, vacillation, confusion, contradiction, virulent anti-feminism, or demagogic rhetoric in lieu of a clear and firm policy on woman's emancipation. A pervading, if often unofficial, ideology prevailed to the effect that the issue was "disruptive", "secondary", "subjective", or, crowning insult! -- "it's a very important issue; why don't you WOMEN work on it?" This is what women survivors of the Old Left tell me, and yet very little has been written about it.

Theoretical development of the issue was discouraged, even while journalistic coverage was sometimes provided, in response to the demands and interests of leading-woman activists and radical press subscribers. Still, some theoretical development and updated political analysis did occur, although concern with the woman question tended to be a matter of individual specialized grouping, or regional propensity, rather than a national, organized and homogenous policy of the radical parties.

Only the SWP contained a committed group of leaders and activists who advocated a nationwide program for and orientation to women. The impact of this grouping, the Weiss tendency, led by Myra T. and Murray Weiss, was seriously undercut, however, when it was falsely denounced as an anti-leadership clique by the conservative Dobbs-Kerry regime of the SWP in the early sixties, at the same time that political differences over other questions were dividing the pro-feminist forces themselves. Myra and



Murray Weiss chose not to resist the SWP regime, and dropped out of politics, and the feminist banner was thereupon carried by the then Seattle branch virtually alone except for small groups of adherents around the country.

The stalinists displayed the most dismal, anti-woman record of any radical party. They capitulated to the Soviet Union's policy of bowing to economic pressure and perpetuating the exploitation of women as cheap domestic and reproductive labor. The Communist Party of the USA, like its fountainhead in the Kremlin, advocated the maintenance of the "nuclear, monogamous family as a revolutionary unit". Anyone who has read Marx or Engels could point out the impossibility of there being anything remotely revolutionary about monogamy or the nuclear family, but consistency and truth were never concerns of the stalinists. In the Soviet Union, this reactionary view resulted in limiting divorce; criminalization of abortion; abandonment of efforts to socialize housework, childcare, laundry, and cooking; resumption of prostitution on a mass basis; brutalization of sexual minorities; and the appearance of thousands of homeless children in the streets. The regression to vicious male chauvinism in the CP in the more industrially advanced US was less brutal in its physical forms, but just as counter-revolutionary in its effects. There were many women activists and organizers in the Communist Party, but few ever became acknowledged leaders. The few women who did achieve prominence learned to deny their concerns as women; they scoffed at feminism as "petty bourgeois reformism", and the party line decreed that women's rights had to await the Revolution. Sexual minorities who refused to be closeted in the revolutionary, monogamous nuclear family were purged from the party. The attitude of women in the CP today is much the same, despite the tremendous influence of the feminist movement on the rest of the nation.

In the early sixties, American radicalism as a whole was incapable of anticipating, understanding, defending or promoting the mass upsurge of women that actually materialized at the end of the decade, and no amount of after-the-fact posturing, pontificating and tail-ending can erase this dismal reality, this political scandal engendered by the blind and stupid male chauvinism of socialist men, at worst, or, at best, by a mixed, ambiguous approach of wholehearted encouragement of talented women individuals coinciding with a candid belief that the issue should be underplayed because of tactical and strategic "realities" and "priorities". Only a handful of male and female socialist activists in this country perceived, with dialectical vision, the coming upheavals in social reality triggered by the very changes in the material condition of women that Marx, Engels, and Lenin had foreseen.

Nevertheless, the status of women radicals from the twenties through the early sixties was infinitely superior to the attitudes women encountered with the advent of the New Left in the late sixties.

Fueled by their college-acquired Freudianism, by the Existentialism and anarchism of the literary Beatniks, and by the vaunted "Sexual Revolution" (the pill), the charismatic male leadership of the New Left, black and white, used women as supporters, clerical aides, domestics, assistants, administrative technicians and sex objects. Women were expected to be intelligent, competent, energetic and always available and supportive; women were expected to be activists, but not leaders. The sex stereotyping of roles and the anachronistic division of labor inside the movement was so flagrant and so shockingly conventional that women started to rebel, and ultimately large groups of women revolted against their second-class citizenship and left the male supremacist organizations completely.

The most rabid male chauvinists of the New Left, along with some remaining female diehards, have since bestowed theoretical validity to their sexism by joining the evangelical revival of unreconstructed stalinism found in mushrooming Maoist cult groups, such as Revolutionary Union and the October League.

The nuclear, monogamous family is again being paraded around as a holy, revolutionary unit. Sexual minorities and independent women are denounced by these "revolutionary" puritans, only recently emerged from SDS and the New Left, as petty bourgeois individualists indulging in perversions and diversions provided by decaying capitalism. Meanwhile, they have stripped women members who must defer to their husband-leaders, of all leadership and independence. Maoists are merely state echoers of an opportunistic, brutal and sexually repressive line on women.

The socialist movement today, whether Old Left or New Left in its origins and directions, is still getting by with the "active-women-but-not-quite-leaders" sidestep characteristic of the movement since the advent of stalinism and the feminine mystique culture that pervaded American society in the wake of the Second World War. It is now up to socialist-feminists to create a new socialist movement in which women will have truly equal opportunity for leadership and theoretical work.

### Poverty and Prejudice -- Obstacles to Women's Leadership

The first and greatest obstacle to the development of female leadership has been the sexism of male politicals, while the next greatest obstacle, a product of universal male chauvinism, has been the chronic ambivalence of conscious women themselves.

Initially, the relatively backward position of women in the socialist movement was a simple and direct reflection of their few numbers and unskilled status in the work force in basic industry. Economic independence is essential to women assuming an independent role in politics, but the starvation wages paid to women clericals, waitresses and garment workers,

The FSP was originally the Seattle Branch of the Socialist Workers Party. For over twenty years, the Branch was an adherent of a west-coast tendency within the SWP which espoused women's rights, a revolutionary approach to the Black struggle\*, and the need for connecting minorities and women with each other and with the class struggle and the Party. In 1957, the Branch spearheaded the organization of the Kirk-Kaye faction, which opposed the unprincipled adaptation of the SWP to the shifting reformist and pacifist leadership of the Black movement and called for an end to the nationalist-separatist analysis of the "Negro Question". Advocating revolutionary, as opposed to bourgeois, integration, the faction offered a Marxist analysis that traced the interconnections of the Black struggle with the class struggle and the socialist movement, showing the Black upsurge to be a unique and central component of the general class struggle, and Black leadership destined to furnish a dynamic leadership cadre for revolutionary socialism.

The SWP was becoming increasingly isolated from all struggles -- the Black movement, women's emancipation, the Chinese Revolution, the anti-war movement, and the youth. To guard this sectarianism, the party regime was imposing an increasingly monolithic structure on the party, bureaucratically violating the historic, democratic rights of factions and, in effect, outlawing criticism, new proposals for action, and, finally, debate itself. The National Committee of the SWP resorted to punitive organizational and administrative attacks against the Branch and its leadership, and against other factions around the country, and this classic prelude to expulsion was circumvented only by the mass resignation of the entire Branch from the national Party.

Why We Left the SWP was published soon afterwards, in 1966, incorporating the following unprecedented approach to women's emancipation which the newly-formed FSP was now presenting "publicly for the first time for the consideration of all revolutionary socialists and all mass movement militants and radicals":

We place the struggle for women's emancipation on the level of a first-class theoretical and programmatic question.

As the first tendency in the history of American radicalism to formally incorporate this question into our basic program, we proclaim our resistance to the

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\* For a more detailed account of the Seattle Branch's position on the Black question, see "Revolutionary Integration; the Dialectics of Black Liberation" in Revolutionary Age, vol 1, no. 1, 1968, available through the FSP bookstore.

creeping paralysis of male supremacy which by now has become an ingrained practice in the entire labor and socialist movement, and a growing danger in the civil rights movement.

The leading role of women in the fight for civil rights, in the anti-war movement, in civil liberties campaigns, etc., is not accidental, but results from the special dynamic developed by women as an oppressed sex, seeking liberation for themselves and for all other victims of discrimination.

The feminine mystique, along with racism, remains the Achilles Heel of the labor movement and a significant factor in the history of union degeneration. Women's equality must be raised as a transitional slogan whose dynamism flows from the pivotal location of the Woman Question in U.S. life, where the oppression and special exploitation of women is a burning injustice that intersects with every other political question and social movement.

In comparison to the FSP's rich integration of general social issues with the specifics of the class struggle, the SWP remained disdainfully aloof from any movement that was not directly tied to the labor movement, preferring not to muddy the waters of their trade union conservatism with such controversial issues as race, sex, sexuality or the war. However, the SWP was eventually pressured into a flip-flop intervention in all the major movements of the early 70's, and then not by the dynamism of the issues but simply because of the huge numbers of people involved in those movements. The SWP's approach was, and still is, to tail-end whatever movement seems to be activating the largest numbers, and to espouse single-issue, lowest-common-denominator politics that soothe the mass but sacrifice political development, growth of consciousness, and ultimately the effectiveness of that movement. Meanwhile, the SWP keeps its trade union work separate from the anti-war, feminist, racial minority movements, considering them awkward hindrances to establishing smooth working relationships with the trade union bureaucrats. The result is an unnatural and anti-Leninist division between general social issues and the class struggle which negates the impact of either.

#### A Test by Fire for Socialist Women

The 1966 split from the shameless opportunism and rigid bureaucracy of the SWP sparked a renaissance of study and work in the FSP. Beyond the immediate requirements of consolidation and defense against the raids perpetrated by the dishonest predatory socialist groups like the Spartacist League, FSP members were exploring entire new areas of study in women's history, economic role, culture, literature, and art, as well as the politics of feminism and conflicting theories of women's



emancipation. The entire party was caught up in the excitement of classes and discussion groups; a rebirth of feminism as a central theme of socialist politics was underway and flourishing -- except for one recurrent and deadly theme.

A few male leaders still found it more personally comfortable to talk about women's rights than to practice them.

It was the same old story. Women's liberation was beginning to hit home, to strike male leaders squarely in the solar plexus, to force them to translate platform oratory into everyday relations of equality and respect on the organizational plane. To their everlasting discredit and shame, the majority of the FSP men cynically and contemptuously refused to grow up to the level of their own self-proclaimed program, and the ensuing debacle was a classic demonstration of the contemptible lows to which minority and white socialist men can sink in the hysterical defense of their petty, wounded, male-supremacist egos.

The issue that proved to be such a stumbling block to these feminist men was a divorce and child custody dispute between two leading comrades. Contested divorce and child custody, while rare in the old left revolutionary movement, was always handled by a traditional, straightforward procedure. The problem was automatically referred to the Organizer or another party leader respected by both sides, who would help the couple negotiate an agreement so that the dispute would not be aired in the capitalist courts. Parties like the SWP compensated for their backwardness in feminist theory with unquestioned respect for individual woman comrades in marital and family matters.

Such arbitration proceedings were simply the A-B-C's of feminism which the FSP had apparently long since absorbed. Indeed, the FSP had been troubled by the SWP's failure to move beyond principled practice on an individual level and advance to a consistent and public socialist-feminist theory. The FSP had developed the socialist-feminist theory and this divorce case should have been handled with the ease and dispatch expected from an organization which had moved to the forefront of revolutionary feminist thought.

Instead, the disagreement erupted into a major test for the party. Except for three male comrades, all of the men, and one lone female, dismally failed the test, unable even to rise to the level of individual practice traditional in male-led, radical organizations.

Richard Kirk\*, the husband in the disputed divorce case,

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\* Due to the blacklisting and imprisonment of radicals carried out by the government, employers and unions during World War II, party members generally adopted pseudonyms for political work. Richard Kirk was the pen name of Richard Fraser.

was a 30 year veteran of Trotskyism and the party's most prominent leader and spokesman within the milieu of radical politics and in the ghetto. He was the originator of the theory of Revolutionary Integration, the FSP's position on the Black struggle, and was nationally recognized as a theoretician, organizer, writer, speaker and activist. He had a reputation as a staunch defender and proponent of women's rights. His political energy and personal conduct, however, had been rapidly deteriorating as a consequence of the devastating effect of decades of heavy drinking now resulting in acute alcoholism, complicated by terminal male chauvinism. By the second party conference in January, 1967, he had turned into his own opposite. All of his theoretical work had ground to a halt and he was becoming increasingly opportunistic and cavalier in his mass work. He was arrogant and abusive towards his comrades and subject to sporadic fits of violent rage. In an effort to reduce his increasingly destructive impact on party affairs, the January conference removed him from organizational leadership and placed him on the publications committee. This was part of a general reorganization of party leadership and it was hoped that he could still make a valuable contribution to the party through literary work. This hope, unfortunately, did not materialize.

Instead of confining himself to writing, Kirk unleashed a paranoid campaign of malicious slander against the newly elected leadership. The organizer for the party reported that "Explosive, undisciplined behavior in party meetings, veiled organizational charges and vitriolic personal attacks against comrades, drunken and violent scenes at internal meetings and public functions -- all became part of his regular modus operandi." (Organizer's Report) The usual focus for Kirk's abuse was Clara Kaye\*, the same woman who later introduced me to socialist-feminist politics. Although still legally married, they had been separated for over a year, during which time Kirk, the vaunted "supporter" of women's rights, had exerted every ounce of male privilege conferred on him by this society to harrass and intimidate Clara into returning to him. He refused to discuss the matter of custody of their child, threatened to file for bankruptcy which would result in the garnishment of her wages and the loss of her job; disrupted the entire party with insults and innuendos against her; and finally threatened to vent his ire publicly by going to court.

The sheer viciousness of his sexist-alcoholic syndrome comes through clearly in the Organizer's Report:

His male-supremacist attitude expressed itself most openly in his intense personal vendetta against Comrade Clara... By repeated demands on her for money and by continual personal harrassment to the point of public, physical violence, he in effect denied her

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\* Clara Kaye is Clara Fraser

right to a life of her own. He unilaterally assumed custody of their son and of possession of their jointly-owned house and refused to discuss either child custody or a financial property agreement with her. Thus he condemned the child to an upbringing by an irrational alcoholic... and blackmailed Clara into financially supporting him because she feared he would provoke a legal-political scandal if she refused.

The party majority remained aloof from Clara's predicament for quite a while, preferring to cling to the fantasy that Kirk, if indulged, would get better. It wasn't until his disruptions threatened to tear the party apart that any action was taken. Finally, in May of 1967, the executive committee formed a sub-committee to investigate Kirk's persistent charges that he was being "slandered and maligned", and to answer his repeated demand for "vindication". It was thought that a thorough investigation would clear the air and allow the party to get on with more important work. Instead, Kirk refused to meet with the committee on the grounds that he had not requested it! When another committee was formed, he again refused to cooperate. The second committee was outraged at this display of capriciousness, and submitted a report to the executive committee charging Kirk with "a flagrant violation of party discipline for his refusal to meet with an authoritative body, mandated to investigate the charges he was flinging". The committee recommended that, "since he was incapable of functioning in a rational and disciplined manner, he be either suspended or expelled from the party".

The executive committee accepted the recommendation and set up a Control Commission with the powers to investigate, bring charges, hold hearings and decide upon disciplinary measures if indicated. At Comrade Clara's request, the Control Commission was further directed to set up a facilitator to mediate an out-of-court divorce and custody settlement according to the humanitarian and egalitarian principles of the party instead of the male supremacist laws and practices of the bourgeois court. The Control Commission's membership was broadly based, including even one comrade who had strongly opposed its very formation. It was thought that a representative commission, carrying the full support of the party membership, could solve the "Kirk" problem short of expulsion or the crystallization of a permanent schism in the party.

Instead of fulfilling its task of clarification and reconciliation, the Commission turned into an arena for the emergence of two clearly defined, opposing factions in the party. The first strategy used by the embryonic opposition was obstruction through legalistic pettifogging over the jurisdiction of the Control Commission. When that failed to coalesce any strong support, a second strategy was adopted that proved successful in uniting all the disparate threads of opposition currently existing within the party. The opposition spokesperson on

the Control Commission leveled counter-charges against Clara, thus diverting the "Kirk Problem" into the "Clara Question". According to this group, Clara was responsible for Kirk's outrages because she had refused to provide him with a good home, and, furthermore, this whole issue was merely a smokescreen for a conspiracy to "wrest control of the party" by Clara and the current organizer. Kirk's bankrupt excuse for his personal condition had always been "hard-hearted Clara" and now this scapegoat logic was given political validity. A large vocal grouping of men followed by one female supporter scurried like scared rats to the defense of the fellow comrade against the evil woman. By the beginning of fall, this strategy had created an undeclared, but nevertheless well organized, faction that supported Kirk and viewed the party's position on the emancipation of women as irrelevant to how this faction actually behaved.

The party could not long withstand this internal assault on its integrity, in defense of the party and the Bolshevik tradition of discipline and principle it represents, Clara called for a counter-faction. It was openly organized to defend the principles and practices of feminism and democratic centralism. She declared her intent to "fight for the implementation of abstract ideological norms through the affirmation of practical standards of comradely conduct deriving from them to be used as guidelines in real-life situations" and to "win a majority in the party in order to gain the authority to enforce these standards and end the previous modus operandi which was arbitrary, capricious and eclectic". The way was now clear for an open, principled faction fight to be aired at the upcoming party conference in December, when the question of the nature of the party and its position on the emancipation of women could be settled once and for all.

Comrade Clara's organization of an open faction based on the principle of the correlation between theory and practice in organizational relations echoed the approach of both Lenin and Trotsky, and interestingly enough, anticipated the New Left concern with consistency, and hostility to empty rhetoric and phony leaders.

Meanwhile, the emergence of the two factions had rendered the Control Commission totally ineffective and its last official act was to recommend to Clara that she go to court, and fight for her divorce and custody of her child there because the Commission had been unable to control Kirk. She proceeded to file for a simple, conventional divorce on grounds of mental cruelty, and asked protection from garnishment. Kirk, in a knee-jerk reflex, responded with a countersuit. He accused Clara of being an "unfit mother" who "stayed out all night", failed to "make a real home", insisted on "working outside the home" and conversly "refused" to work during certain periods because "she preferred doing other things", i.e., full time party assignments. Kirk's sexist personal defense that



had become the political line of the opposition was now being submitted in the courts of the class enemy as legal argument!

This move constituted an open act of betrayal of the party and everything it stands for. The significance of the act is succinctly characterized in the Organizer's Report:

The whole thrust of Kirk's legal case was designed to deny Comrade Clara her right to live as a professional revolutionary, devoting her life to the movement, rather than to his care and feeding. By flinging Clara's intensely political lifestyle...into court for public scrutiny and arbitration by a bourgeois judge, Kirk was publicly finking on the Woman Question and on the party.

The party now faced the reality of a public court battle between two of its most prominent members, and the exposure of its inability to deal with the sexism of one of its own. For a party that distinguished itself from all other radical parties because of its advanced views on the social position of women, this could only mean disgrace and an inevitable loss of respect in the political milieu. The crisis, as stated in the Organizer's Report was clear: "did it (the party) in fact take itself seriously enough to intervene and stop overt scabbing -- yes or no?"

The answer to this question determined the final outcome of the faction fight. The executive committee answered in the affirmative and submitted two resolutions to the party membership. The first was that the Control Commission should be officially dissolved, as a failure, and the second resolution was that "Kirk either withdraw his case immediately and submit the issues to arbitration within the party or be expelled from the party as an open fink."

The first resolution was accepted by the total membership, but the second created a split along majority-minority lines. Although there was some hesitancy among the rank and file to push for immediate expulsion, the membership voted by a majority of one to put the matter squarely before Kirk -- he must either stop the court suit or be expelled.

The minority was infuriated at this vote. As far as they were concerned, the suit was a purely personal matter in which the party had no business intervening. Kirk refused to follow the mandate of the party. He attended the meeting with the Arbitrators and Clara, stayed two minutes, and walked out, yelling, "I'll see you in court."

He was expelled at the next general membership meeting.

The opposition, indignant at this defeat at the hands of women, resigned in a huff and walked out, instead of staying

and carrying out a principled faction fight for the leadership. They wanted nothing more to do with these uppity, horrible women or the consistent politics they represented.

The women comrades and the remaining men comrades of the Freedom Socialist Party had at last, through the most grueling political faction struggle imaginable, validated in practice the important advances they had made in revolutionary feminist theory. And it should be noted that they waged their historic factional struggle without slackening the pace of regular mass and community activity.

Here, in Seattle, in 1967, around the issues of divorce and child custody, on the battleground of the monogamous, nuclear family, socialist women, armed with the weapons of Marxist theory and Leninist organizational practice, fought and won the first significant victory for modern socialist-feminism. The victorious majority, while shaken and angry, emerged with its integrity and its political banner intact. Emboldened by its proven program of revolutionary feminism, it would soon recoup its forces and flourish as never before with the inevitable rise of militant, working class women and the feminist movement. But more immediately, the divorce suit and a prolonged court battle was in the offing. Kirk was eventually defeated in court as a result of his own excesses; his charges against Clara were so voluminous and ugly that even though they were quite legal (at the time) the Judge himself was revolted and decided that "Mrs. Fraser is a better person than Mr. Fraser!" Clara received custody of their child, a division of community property, and a minimal child support (which was paid only erratically). This was far more than her ex-comrades were willing to award her! Kirk dropped out of politics entirely, characteristically refusing to stay around and help out those who had deserted the party in his defense.

The opposition had been an unprincipled combination, composed of men and one female appendage whose only issue of political agreement was their anti-feminist stand. Unlike the Seattle Branch faction within the SWP, which had waged a 15-year battle over theory and program, the minority left the FSP before a full discussion of the issue could be conducted among the rank and file. Their abrupt move left them without any sense of direction, no basis for ongoing unity, and their credibility destroyed. In order to justify their exit tantrum, they desperately needed a high sounding theoretical or programmatic issue, and they promptly invented one. The FSP split, they trumpeted, was over the question of -- hang on, folks -- China! China?!! The male mentality is indeed remarkable. Actually, most of them, confused and demoralized, left politics immediately or soon afterwards. The core of the opposition, however, hasn't quite died yet; after absconding with the FSP publications fund, they perpetrated the fraud that they were the real FSP for several years, and half-heartedly played around in the women's movement. Then, dropping feminism as a crucial part of their

program and practice, they proceeded to lose interest in the Black struggle, and completed the process of degeneration by trying frantically to prove their concern with China by reconciling two irreconcilables -- Maoism and Trotskyism. Their latest unprincipled political maneuver was to join the Alliance of Revolutionary Workers, whose only agreement is to disagree. In eight short years, they have unerringly followed the path into irrelevancy that many other male-chauvinist socialist groups will take if they are unable to come to terms with the issue of revolutionary feminism.

### The First All-Female Party

The evolution of the FSP into a consistently feminist party was achieved at the cost of a bitter split, followed in the next few years by the shabby spectacle of the three remaining male comrades who had fought so valiantly against the Kirk-Krasnowsky cabal (including the man who wrote the Organizer's Report) proceeding to desert the party one by one as they found themselves in the unusual and embarrassing position of being a male minority in a revolutionary party led predominantly by women. It is interesting to note that two of them dropped out of politics completely while the ex-Organizer rushed to affiliate with a radical group that is virulently anti-feminist and insanely prone to violence and threats of violence against other radicals! The Kirk syndrome runs deep.

When I ran across the FSP in 1971, its entire membership was female! These intrepid, insurgent souls, steeled in the tradition and methodology of Bolshevism, were gut-sure that the new generation of male and female radicals would seek out real socialist-feminists. And this is exactly what happened. Today, eight years after the original split from the SWP, the Freedom Socialist Party is larger than was the Seattle Branch, SWP in 1966. And while the majority of new members are women, a growing number of men who have identified feminism as their issue have become activists and leaders within the party. They are not ashamed of or defensive about affiliation with a "woman's party." They are proud of their feminism, and their principled politics have served to enhance their self-respect and leadership potential. This is especially apparent as regards homosexual comrades, whose negative experiences in Gay organizations propelled them towards a revolutionary sociology that encompassed the needs of all the exploited and repressed. Their oppression as a sexual minority has given them a firm basis for identifying with and working with women, at the same time that their connection with feminism and Marxism is enabling them, along with lesbian FSP women, to provide strong leadership, in fact the only leadership to the gay community in the Northwest.

Such tenaciousness on the part of an isolated and oft-ridiculed female cadre was possible because of the titanic forces set in motion by the eruption of a mass women's liberation movement, accompanied by the wholesale entrance of women into

the labor force. FSP women not only took the lead in organizing mass feminist organizations (they organized Radical Women, the first socialist-feminist group in the country, in 1967), they were instrumental in pointing dozens of other women's groups toward all the basic issues involved in the intersection of class, race, sex and sexuality. FSP and Radical Women emphasized, from the outset, three major themes:

(1) The fundamental importance, to the revolutionary movement, of women workers, women in labor unions, and affirmative action programs within the skilled trades.

(2) The special emergence of minority women into social-leadership roles, and the urgent necessity of a rapprochement between minority and white women radicals, workers and feminists, on the basis of honest respect for, and a sensitive grasp of, the super-exploitation of minority women.

(3) The new self-discovery and rising of Lesbians assaulting centuries of enforced secrecy and shame, and thereby unleashing torrents of political insight and revolutionary energy.

The fact that recent events in the labor movement both nationally and locally have begun to dramatically reflect these three themes has vindicated and sustained FSP socialist-feminists. The hard work of the last 10 years is bearing fruit in a growing unity among working, lesbian and minority women.

Female militants today are increasingly interweaving the issues of women and labor. In the unions, shops and offices, they are assuming leadership in resisting the oppressive constraints of management and labor bureaucrats alike, and in Seattle, FSP women are by their side, providing support and resources as working women embark on the road that will end in their sweeping embrace of openly revolutionary politics.

In Seattle, this process of intensifying involvement by women workers is highly evident. At the University of Washington last year, women and minority staff members led the fight against a job reclassification system that was discriminatory against minorities and women, and, in December, 1973, led the first strike in the history of the University. The United Workers Union-Independent was formed out of that strike, built on the recognition by all its members of the necessity for unity of all oppressed people -- poor workers, oppressed races, sexual minorities, and women.

Similarly, in April 1974, local front pages exploded when 1400 City Light workers, civil service employees of the City of Seattle, embarked upon an 11-day unauthorized walkout in support of two lineworker crew chiefs, members of IBEW Local 77, who were unfairly penalized by management. The entrance of unorganized women clerical and professional workers into this situation resulted in an unparalleled leap to leadership by women militants



and an eventual decision by the entire body to embark upon a movement to recall the anti-labor Mayor, a decision that has had enormous repercussions in local politics and among employees of other city departments. (As this is being written, a recall election is in the offing.) Indeed, the most militant strikes across the country are breaking out among public employees, a majority of whom are women workers, with minorities occupying a very high percentage of the total jobs.

Nationally, an organization of women trade unionists, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), has been formed, with the professed purpose of challenging the sexism of union bureaucrats and achieving real labor solidarity. And although CLUW is currently paralyzed by the opportunistic leadership of female opportunists more interested in advancing their careers than the cause of working women, the fact that a formal organization of thousands of working women has actually emerged announces a significant new militancy on the part of women workers.

Minority women, whose oppression intersects with all other forms of injustice, and who, when they choose, are indefatigable fighters for social justice, abound in the forefront of their movements, espousing not only racial but sexual equality. A long heritage of slavery, poverty and subjugation have engendered in them an angry and embittered demand for freedom that is second to none, while their daily contest against triple oppression on account of race, sex and class has bred in them a vigilance and ferocity that can find mature political expression only in revolutionary politics.

The FSP has constantly impressed upon the feminist, labor, racial and radical milieus the need to recognize the potential and actual leadership of minority women, and the need to overcome racist and sexist blocks in order to achieve mutually respectful working relations with minority women activists. FSP women have collaborated closely and consistently with minority women on many levels of struggle -- in the anti-poverty programs and community mobilizations on such issues as police brutality, child care, job training, employment, welfare rights, prison reform, abortion, housing and the criminal justice system; in union organizing and processing of grievances on the job; in campaigns for affirmative action; and in educational programs designed to expand understanding of modern feminism and enhance the cohesion of minority women.

We recognize the tremendous burdens borne by minority women feminists as they confront the hostile culture of capitalism along with the macho sexism of their own race-ethnic culture. And while the male-chauvinism among Blacks, Chicanos, Asians and Native Americans differs in degree and origin, it exists today on a universal plane, and minority women are intervening heroically into this thicket. We are confident of their vindication as we see the slow and painful, but still evident, growth of their brothers and sisters on the explosive issue of sex discrimination.

We hail those minority women who act as catalysts of unity between the movements for race and sex emancipation; the two-edged sword they wield will ultimately forge a double victory!

Lesbians, creating a dynamic political counterpoint of women's rights and sexuality, comprise a decisive sector of FSP and Radical Women. They display political leadership, theoretical talent and organizational proficiency of the very highest caliber. Before discovering the FSP, Lesbian radicals experienced severe personal and political discomfort. Respectable feminism barely tolerated them and often found them an embarrassment. Gay groups feared their political radicalism, and the Left played games with them, ranging from demagogic welcomes to puritanical scorn. Revolutionary socialist-feminism alone offered a political home where they could be their total, many-sided selves, for socialism provided the only consistent analysis of their sexual repression, class exploitation and subjugation as women. Firm in the conviction that Lesbianism by itself is not a political program, but that Lesbianism plus Socialism engenders a volcanic revolutionary impact, they are instrumental in keeping the party on its Leninist course of representing all the oppressed and disinherited.

### Solidarity is Reciprocal

Women everywhere, especially women workers, are speaking out. They are organizing independently, or they are combining forces with men -- so long as the men adopt the affirmative-action principle of the women and so long as the men are just as willing to support women's grievances as women are prepared to support men in struggles against the common enemy. Labor solidarity is increasingly being seen as a two-way street, and where men are unwilling to extend themselves to support women and racial and sexual minorities, they are playing the bosses' game and they can forget about eliciting active support for themselves from the very minorities and women whom they scorn and fear.

Mutual support -- this is the new demand, the growing new reality, and the future relationship of forces. First minorities, and now women, have served notice on all movements that solidarity and unity must encompass all sectors of a coalition or no coalition can exist! And the onus for breaking solidarity is finally resting squarely on the shoulders of those who are patently responsible for it -- the privileged white males who view unity exclusively as one-way support from everybody else for them, the privileged elite of the class.

\* \* \* \* \*

The revolutionary feminists in the FSP were the first to think through the programmatic foundation for the changing role of women and feminism within the arena of radical politics.

- (1) They answered the major theoretical question regarding

the relationship between feminism, class, race and sexuality by squarely placing feminism as the integral connecting link with all the other issues. All struggles of exploited and oppressed people are individual parts of a larger, comprehensive socialist movement, and because feminism intersects with each, it is strategic in bringing them together on a revolutionary platform.

(2) FSP women demonstrated throughout the 1967 split that socialist women could work within the predominantly male socialist movement without losing their feminist integrity or sacrificing their revolutionary principles. They made demands on socialist men, demands for unity on the basis of support for the needs of women. They refused to accept pie-in-the-sky promises about women's freedom after the revolution, and sneers about societal sex discrimination being personal, not political, were countered with a battle. The FSP women did not escape the men who had sold them out, they FOUGHT them! Once women had vied for and won the leadership, the question was no longer, "how can women participate in the socialist movement?", but rather, "how can men participate in the socialist-feminist movement?!"

What began as an almost abstract principle in the course of the FSP split -- the principle of a living socialist-feminism -- has metamorphosed into an exciting reality today in the class struggle and in the general movement for social change. Men who are unwilling to defend and promulgate women's rights are in the process of becoming historically and politically extinct, while female fighters for feminist, labor, race freedom and revolutionary principles are catapulting into the vanguard in a dazzling display of historic justice working its way through. The events delineated in the FSP Organizer's Report marked the beginning of an entirely new historical epoch -- the epoch of revolutionary socialist-feminism. And in looking to our origins, to our modern rebirth in struggle and pain and determination, we will discover the guidelines of our present and the contours of our future.

-- Seattle, Washington  
May, 1975

ORGANIZER'S REPORT  
TO THE  
FSP CONFERENCE

"1967 - 1969: A CRUCIAL PHASE  
IN THE STRUGGLE FOR A  
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY"



## INTRODUCTION

In the two years since our last party conference, our organization has been through a rich and intense political experience, in the course of which we have clarified our basic political and organizational concepts and consolidated the core of a political cadre. This crystallization of our political identity has developed out of a conscious affirmation of Bolshevik principles, in the face of a complex external situation and very serious internal problems.

This document is a review of the political and ideological developments of the radical and revolutionary movement in Seattle over these past two years, and an evaluation of our role and our activities over the same period. It will be the basis for collective discussion and analysis during the conference, out of which will come our decisions as to our approach and priorities for the coming year.

"The strength and meaning of Bolshevism consists in the fact that it appeals to the oppressed masses and not to the upper strata of the working class... They feel in their innermost hearts that it is a teaching for the oppressed and exploited, for hundreds of millions to whom it is the only possible salvation. That is why Leninism meets with a passionate response among working women, who are the most oppressed section of society."

--Leon Trotsky

Prospects and Tasks in the Far East

"Fortune favors the godly. If you live right and conduct yourself properly, you get a lucky break now and then. And when an accident comes your way--a good one--you should grab it and make the most of it."

--James P. Cannon

The History of American Trotskyism

## I. HISTORY AND BACKDROP

### 1. The Background of the 1967 Conference

As the FSP entered into its January, 1967 conference, it had already passed its first major test: It had survived six months of independent political existence. This in itself was no small accomplishment.

The basic nucleus of the Freedom Socialist Party was the former Seattle Branch of the Socialist Workers Party. This group had existed as a barely-tolerated minority tendency in the SWP for nearly a decade, holding fundamental differences with the majority over Black Liberation, the Woman Question, Socialist Regroupment and the Chinese Revolution. Finally, when the SWP adopted its Peoples-Frontist "single-issue" strategy in the anti-war movement, and brought spurious charges against Comrade Kirk (the tendency's sole remaining representative on the SWP National Committee) for circulating a document sharply critical of this line inside the party, the branch decided that the conservatism and bureaucratism of the SWP were intolerable, and proceeded to separate from the parent organization.

The official break took place in May, 1966. A few weeks after this, the former SWP members, together with others who shared their political outlook met in convention and founded the FSP.

The new party immediately faced a serious external threat to its existence. This first took the form of a series of organizational attacks and maneuvers by the SWP; the Spartacist League followed up with an organizational raid within a few months.

Combined with this external threat was a challenge to the party's existence and integrity from within its own ranks. In the formation of the FSP, the old SWP cadre joined together with a number of people with varying political backgrounds, some of whom had no solid grounding in the traditions of revolutionary Marxism and no conception of the political difficulties the new organization faced. Most of these people proved unable to withstand the pressures bearing down on a small, local revolutionary grouping. Some developed political differences and went over to the Spartacists; others simply dropped out of politics, as did a few of the former SWP'ers.

By January of 1967, this initial differentiation within the party's ranks was substantially complete. The remaining cadre comprised the bulk of the former SWP members, plus a few of the newer recruits.

Despite organizational attrition, the FSP was in a stronger position at the time of the conference of 1967 than it had been at its founding. The objective situation was very promising. The anti-war movement demonstrated considerable vigor and both the Black struggle and the student movement were showing signs of increasing militancy and radicalization. Our party commanded considerable respect in the radical movement, had connections with most of the developing groupings, at least on the local scene, and functioned within a broad periphery. The FSP was established on the political scene. The cadre had been tested in the struggle for political survival. The very fact of survival was a tribute to our ideas, the main bulwark against pressures from without and within.

## 2. The 1967 Conference

The 1967 Conference was marked by a contradiction between the formal political unity visible on the surface, and the dissension fermenting beneath.

Apparently, everyone agreed on the basic definition of our party's program and basic character.

We considered ourselves a bolshevik vanguard party, based on the tradition of revolutionary Marxism developed by the world communist movement under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky and continued in the U.S. by the early SWP, led by James Cannon. We agreed on the central importance, for the American scene, of the extensions of this tradition as set forth by the Kirk-Kaye tendency in the SWP, characterized by two main programmatic positions:

(1) Revolutionary Integration for the Black liberation struggle -- Black people in the U.S. cannot end their special oppression by turning in a nationalist-separatist direction, but in the course of fighting for their own rights, must take their rightful place as the vanguard detachment of a working-class socialist revolution.

(2) The first-rank importance of the Woman Question, in both theory and practice, within the party, the mass movement, and on the general political scene.

Further, in accordance with the high political standards it had set for itself, the FSP was to maintain democratic centralism, as its organizational principle, i.e., full freedom of discussion in arriving at decisions, and complete unity in action, based on the rule of the majority, in implementing policy.

There was likewise an appearance of agreement on current tasks and perspectives. The party's main role in the coming period was to be propagandistic. In preparation for this, the most immediate task was to complete the publication of the basic documents setting forth the party's distinctive contributions to the Marxist tradition.

It was also generally recognized that the party's internal functioning must be drastically improved. The party executive committee had been paralyzed for several months by intense disputes over strategy and tactics, -- disputes that had in the main been contained within the executive committee, but which the party ranks knew of vaguely, mostly through rumor and conjecture.

Meanwhile, there was considerable frustration and puzzlement over the maneuvers of some party leaders in the mass movement. Their action took the form of a series of desperate plunges in different, sometimes antagonistic directions. Different elements of the party leadership were involved at different times. Thus, in the Independent Socialist Union -- the party's abortive attempt to initiate a youth organization -- Comrade Kirk maneuvered with opponent elements, directly betraying his own party fraction; Comrade Frank was the author of our nearly disastrous "deep-entry" tactic in the first Peace and Freedom Party; it was again Kirk (opposed by Frank) who

led the FSP into a "fraternal" association with the Spartacist League that set the party up for the Spartacists' successful organizational raid. All these sorties displayed an opportunist current in a section of the party leadership, a willingness to make unprincipled political concessions and combinations in adaptation to a "mass" movement.

At the same time, party organization and administration were degenerating.

The bulk of the party rank-and-file were annoyed, critical and perplexed. Not at all sure exactly what was wrong, they were sure that something was, that a section of the leadership could no longer be relied on for firm, principled political direction and organizational guidance. They demanded a change.

There was a cleavage between a majority of the party leadership and the ranks but its precise nature was not yet clear to anyone. Since there was every appearance of political unanimity in the party, differences were seen as purely tactical and the solution proposed was accordingly of an organizational character. There was a general consensus among all sectors of the party that room must be made for new leadership that would represent a broader spectrum of political experience, age, and reflexes. It was hoped that such a new leadership would be able to organize and direct the party's activities more effectively than the old leadership.

Thus, the party arrived at a general agreement on the need for reorganization, which was codified in two decisions of the 1967 conference:

(1) A new executive committee was elected, its members drawn from several generations and political backgrounds. Most of the new members were also officers with definite administrative responsibilities in the party apparatus. From the outgoing Executive, only one member - Clara - was retained.

(2) A Literary and Correspondence Committee (LCC) was established. This committee was to prepare the party's basic documents for publication, maintain national correspondence, and prepare position papers on pertinent issues to present to the party for discussion. This committee contained all the members of the outgoing executive.

These decisions were passed unanimously by the conference, with Comrade Frank, the outgoing organizer, presenting the major proposals, including the slate of officers for the new executive. Despite the emergence of tactical differences in the conference discussions, all was harmonious on the surface.

Still, there remained the unpleasant reality that the reorganization measures taken by the conference had arisen out of what was in fact a partial revolt in the party rank and file against the old leadership. The removal of all but one of the former executive members from the leading body and the simultaneous creation of the Literary and Correspondence Committee was motivated in

part by the urge to free some of the party's most qualified writers and theoreticians to carry out some very necessary literary work. But there was also a very real desire to free the party from their organizational leadership, which was felt to be increasingly arbitrary and capricious. It was hoped that in their new role the party's former leaders could accomplish something constructive, and that with a new organizer, the party could get down to its business. Events were to show that this hope was doomed.



## II. THE BREAKUP OF "UNITY"

### 1. The Priorities Crisis

There had been an apparently minor dispute at the Conference concerning the division of labor between the executive and the LCC. Comrade Frank, in his original presentation of the reorganization proposals, had characterized the LCC as a "kind of Politburo" or "rational" committee, implying that it was to take the role of primary leadership and direction of party strategy, while the executive was to provide the administrative and service apparatus. This formulation was decisively repudiated by the conference. It was made clear that, while the LCC was to produce literary and theoretical work of a high order and act as an advisory council on programmatic issues, the executive was to be the political directorate of the party.

With this clarification of structural roles, the new executive committee tried to settle down to the business of directing the party, but it was soon evident that the conference decision had not, in fact, solved the basic problems of authority. No sooner was the new leadership installed than it faced a direct challenge to its hegemony by the Literary and Correspondence Committee.

The new executive committee's first assignment to the LCC was to immediately begin preparation of the party's basic documents for publication. This was not accepted. Instead, the committee chairman, Comrade Frank, backed by Comrade Kirk, insisted on broadening the scope of the discussions to include China, with a view toward intervening in the broad left milieu with a call for the defense of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which at the time was at its height. Comrade Clara, an LCC member and the liaison with the executive committee, pointed out that this would completely disrupt the work priorities laid down for the LCC, and that despite the great importance of the Chinese events, it remained the basic task of the party to publish its own fundamental political documents presenting its already-developed positions on the key questions of the American Revolution. A finished position on China would simply have to wait.

This dispute over work priorities paralyzed the LCC for several weeks, while no literary work was done.

Finally, the exec brought a policy motion before the party membership, instructing the LCC to give exclusive priority to the basic documents. Comrade Frank contested this, moving an amendment to delete the word "exclusive" from the executive's motion, and substituting "first priority", with the qualification that the LCC continue to carry out its "normal" functioning.

This was confusing, for what it gave away with one hand, it took back with the other. Nevertheless, to those who followed the debate closely, it was apparent that by "normal" functioning, Frank meant the right of himself or anybody else on the LCC to introduce new questions on its agenda, regardless of the committee's assigned priorities. Frank's amendment passed by one vote.

The LCC had successfully challenged the executive's authority to set the priorities for literary work, and had in fact established its own autonomy with the sanction of the general membership.

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### 1. The Priorities Crisis

There had been an apparently minor dispute at the Conference concerning the division of labor between the executive and the LCC. Comrade Frank, in his original presentation of the reorganization proposals, had characterized the LCC as a "kind of Politburo" or "rational" committee, implying that it was to take the role of primary leadership and direction of party strategy, while the executive was to provide the administrative and service apparatus. This formulation was decisively repudiated by the conference. It was made clear that, while the LCC was to produce literary and theoretical work of a high order and act as an advisory council on programmatic issues, the executive was to be the political directorate of the party.

With this clarification of structural roles, the new executive committee tried to settle down to the business of directing the party, but it was soon evident that the conference decision had not, in fact, solved the basic problems of authority. No sooner was the new leadership installed than it faced a direct challenge to its hegemony by the Literary and Correspondence Committee.

The new executive committee's first assignment to the LCC was to immediately begin preparation of the party's basic documents for publication. This was not accepted. Instead, the committee chairman, Comrade Frank, backed by Comrade Kirk, insisted on broadening the scope of the discussions to include China, with a view toward intervening in the broad left milieu with a call for the defense of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which at the time was at its height. Comrade Clara, an LCC member and the liaison with the executive committee, pointed out that this would completely disrupt the work priorities laid down for the LCC, and that despite the great importance of the Chinese events, it remained the basic task of the party to publish its own fundamental political documents presenting its already-developed positions on the key questions of the American Revolution. A finished position on China would simply have to wait.

This dispute over work priorities paralyzed the LCC for several weeks, while no literary work was done.

Finally, the exec brought a policy motion before the party membership, instructing the LCC to give exclusive priority to the basic documents. Comrade Frank contested this, moving an amendment to delete the word "exclusive" from the executive's motion, and substituting "first priority", with the qualification that the LCC continue to carry out its "normal" functioning.

This was confusing, for what it gave away with one hand, it took back with the other. Nevertheless, to those who followed the debate closely, it was apparent that by "normal" functioning, Frank meant the right of himself or anybody else on the LCC to introduce new questions on its agenda, regardless of the committee's assigned priorities. Frank's amendment passed by one vote.

The LCC had successfully challenged the executive's authority to set the priorities for literary work, and had in fact established its own autonomy with the sanction of the general membership.

The executive, seeing this as a repudiation of the perspective endorsed by the conference and finding itself in the untenable position of lacking the "confidence" of the party, no longer allowed to represent the program it was mandated to serve, resigned. Four out of the five executive members offered their resignations and demanded that the real majority, led by the LCC, take over the leadership and carry out its perspective.

This did not happen. Despite the confusion over the nature of the differences in orientation and organizational principles, the party membership was not prepared to deliver itself back to the leadership of Comrades Frank and Kirk. At the same time, the opposition amalgam was unwilling to take responsibility for the administration of a party that had adopted contradictory perspectives out of sheer confusion.

The outcome of the dispute was a membership decision to reject the resignations of the executive and to re-establish the policies of the party conference -- a qualified victory for the new executive committee.

## 2. The Internal Discussion

Throughout the debate over priorities, Frank, Kirk, and the others around them had constantly intimated that the new exec represented a political grouping with views contrary to the basic line of the party -- views which were being intentionally concealed. The exec, puzzled, denied this, but nevertheless agreed to a proposal for an extensive internal discussion, designed to review and analyze the party's basic political positions in order to determine what differences, if any, might exist.

This discussion in search of "differences" occupied a good deal of the party's time throughout the spring of 1967. It failed to disclose any major differences whatever in principle on the "main political questions" of China, the Black Struggle, Regroupment, Youth work, etc. Nevertheless, sharp and acrimonious disputes erupted on tactics, style of work, past events and how they were handled, and the relative emphasis to be placed on each question -- again priorities.

It was not the 'big questions', but the character of the party that emerged as central to this dispute. Clearly, there were two different images of the party's nature and the correct methods of operation deriving from it.

One concept put forward most clearly by Comrade Clara, regarded the FSP as a vanguard party with definitely-set goals, priorities, and standards of conduct. The first goal was to establish the party as an integral entity in the radical arena with its own politics clearly defined and differentiated from all others, and a consistent internal discipline.

The contrary view espoused emphatically by Comrades Frank and Lee, was that of a broader, looser, more "flexible" organization, without fixed priorities, but ready to take up anything and everything at once in response to developments in the mass movement and

opportunities for entries, collaborations, and hopefully, quick "unification". Some proponents of this view, particularly Lee, claimed that the FSP should see itself as a temporary, purely transitory formation, looking forward to early dissolution in a broader formation. To this group, "mass work" was everything, and party integrity was a trivality.

The gut-level depth of the emerging differences between the two crystallizing groupings in the party became revealed with the onset of vitriolic attacks by the Frank-Kirk opposition against other leading Comrades. Comrade Bob, the organizer, was particularly singled out for sharp criticism for regarding the FSP as "The party", rather than just "a party", while Clara's "inflexibility" on matters of consistent standards and equal organizational responsibility was labeled as a "bureaucratic Stalinist" trend, supposedly inflicted on her by Comrades Bob and Gus, with their long years in the Communist Party.

In sum, the opposition had begun to politically characterize the executive leadership group as Stalinist, bureaucratic, sectarian, and hostile to regroupment.

By way of reply, the executive summed up the opposition's political trend in two words -- liquidationists and mensheviks -- i.e., liquidating the very concept of the revolutionary vanguard party.

At the conclusion of the internal discussion in June of 1967, it was clear that there were fundamental organizational differences dividing the party. What was not yet clear was the political basis of these differences, and in the absence of any visible, definite difference in basic programmatic line, neither of the two groupings was ready to organize itself along definite factional lines and press a determined struggle for hegemony within the party.

Nothing was resolved. Rising dissension, often over what seemed to be petty matters, continued to disrupt the life of the party. In this charged atmosphere, the party could neither orient itself toward effective intervention in the mass movement, nor carry out its basic and incompleated internal tasks. The publication schedule had become inoperative; six months after the Conference, only one document - "Introducing the FSP" - had found its way to press, and this was the document that Clara had been assigned to edit and prepare for publication.

### 3. The Election Campaign

In the summer of 1967, the big-city Black ghettos across the country erupted in a series of spontaneous, massive explosions. This was a qualitative leap forward, involving millions of people, in an arena of the class struggle which our tendency has always regarded as the key to the American revolution and thereby to the international revolution.

The entire party saw the importance of this development, and the exceptional opportunities presented to us for intervention in the Black struggle with our own politics. After a long discussion

the party decided that despite its previously established priorities and serious internal problems, it would intervene in the situation by running a Black candidate-- Skip --in the upcoming City Council elections.

The party had high hopes for the election campaign. Here, if anywhere, appeared to be an opportunity to unify the party around its basic political line. Also, there was a chance to make solid contact with rebellious, revolutionary-minded elements in the Central Area. This kind of healthy contact with a mass upsurge, it was hoped, would revitalize the party cadres and heal the growing rupture in the ranks.

The political content of the campaign was carefully worked out beforehand. Its main thrust was to be an articulation of the political logic implicit in the gut-level rebellion that had burst out of the ghetto, implemented through a series of transitional demands explicitly linking the struggle of the ghetto masses with the class struggle for socialism.

The election campaign was to be a crash program, claiming virtually exclusive priority over all other work and mobilizing the energies of the entire party. It was to be a solid, "professionally"-organized effort, requiring full-time personnel and a competent director to take responsibility for day-to-day activities and necessary administrative decisions. This responsibility, and the authority that went with it, was to rest with three different campaign directors for three consecutive two-week periods, since no one comrade could work full time for the duration of the campaign. Each director was to oversee the operation during his two-week term. The director's administrative decisions were to be, within the framework of the campaign committee, authoritative, and could be challenged or over-ridden only by the party executive. In other words, definite procedure, definite responsibilities, a definite line of command-- good, businesslike, bolshevik procedures-- were to be the rule of campaign organization.

This perspective was agreed to by all. Comrade Clara was assigned the decisive post of initial campaign manager and was to spend her two-week vacation working full-time in the headquarters to get the campaign rolling. After this, ~~she was to be~~ succeeded by Lee and Frank respectively in the office, but she was to retain final authority over news releases.

In the beginning, our high hopes for the campaign appeared to be justified. The party's campaign program and the excellent quality of the campaign literature met a highly favorable response from Black and white radicals alike. There was no great difficulty in securing endorsement of our candidate from several organizations and prominent individuals, including Black militants. We managed to break through the wall of silence initially imposed by the bourgeois press, and received the best and most frequent publicity mileage of our long history as a tendency.

But in the end, the campaign ran aground on two political snags.



One was the growing opportunism of the candidate. Instead of addressing himself forthrightly and directly to the Black revolt and the ghetto, Skip turned more and more toward an effort to gain the sympathy and intellectual admiration of the white liberals, whose aim was to end the revolt by offering concessions. His political over-adaptation to this milieu was strikingly evident in his last TV broadcast, where he soulfully "begged" (his words) the white community to do something for the Black minority by electing him. Instead of using the campaign to mobilize Black support for socialism, he strained desperately to get elected.

Coupled with this strategic irregularity was the opposition's deliberate disruption and characteristic disorganization of the campaign. Despite their formal agreement with the procedural rules adopted, they could not live by these rules in practice. Throughout the campaign, unanimous organizational decisions were unilaterally and frivolously challenged, sabotaged and overturned by members of the opposition. This not only dislocated the campaign apparatus, but exacerbated the inner-party feud.

In the atmosphere of organizational anarchy and personal bitterness that surrounded the campaign, the party was unable to unify itself sufficiently to correct the opportunist course taken by the candidate, or to effectively direct its attention outward to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities presented by the situation. The great propaganda gains made during the campaign were balanced, on the negative side, by the growing hysteria of the opposition and the general demoralization following in its wake.

The campaign ended as a public success, but an intra-organizational disaster. The two wings of the party were polarized to the point of virtual stasis; for the first time, there was an atmosphere of split in the party.

### III. THE WOMAN QUESTION EMERGES

#### 1. Kirk - the Crisis of a Leader

What does a party do when its most prominent spokesman and ideologist falls apart both politically and personally, and is transformed into a detriment to the party and a danger to its very integrity? This question was thrust upon the FSP less than a year after its formation. The struggle for a definite answer occupied a great part of the party's time and energies during 1967.

In the course of this struggle, all of the party's internal differences were greatly sharpened and embittered, and a new issue was added to the list of disputed questions that symptomized the deepening internal crisis. It was this issue, and the differences that emerged over how to deal with it, that gave decisive impetus to the final chapter of the party's internecine conflict.

The leader in question was Comrade Kirk. The new and fundamental issue raised-- in a peculiar fashion-- was the Woman Question.

As the principal architect of our tendency's position on the Black question, Comrade Kirk was for years our most prominent political representative and spokesman within the milieu of radical politics and the ghetto. Nevertheless, long before the January conference, he was displaying a marked political and personal degeneration, which accelerated with time. His theoretical work was reduced to zero, and he showed an increasing propensity toward opportunistic maneuvering in the mass movement and the national political arena. His organizational behavior inside the party was increasingly factious, disruptive and arrogant. His characteristic response to criticism was sullen withdrawal, punctuated by outbursts of violent rage. His irrational behavior was rendered virtually uncontrollable by his growing alcoholism, which he alternately denied and used as an excuse for his actions.

By the time of the January Conference, Comrade Kirk's irresponsibility was so marked that he had been relieved of most of his organizational duties. Only national correspondence, which he worked at sporadically, remained. The decision to place him on the LCC (Literary and Correspondence Committee) when it was formed was largely motivated by the desire of the entire party (including the coalescing opposition) to be free of his disruptive organizational influence. It was hoped that by confinement to literary work, he could still be induced to make a positive contribution to the party. This hope was unfounded.

The new party leadership was hardly installed in office before Kirk began a campaign of innuendo and slander against it, which paralleled, while it was not always identical with, the attacks of the minority. Over the following months, his behavior became more and more intolerable. Explosive, undisciplined behavior in party meetings, veiled organizational charges and vitriolic personal attacks against comrades, drunken and violent scenes at internal meetings and public functions -- all became part of his regular modus operandi.

Finally, his diminishing political effectiveness and rapid personal disintegration became linked to an increasingly virulent male chauvinism. Our tendency has always been characterized by its advanced position on the Woman Question. Kirk had never voiced any political disagreement on this position; in fact, he fancied himself as one of its foremost proponents. In practice, however, his actions belied his political pretensions.

His male-supremacist attitude expressed itself most openly and clearly in his intense personal vendetta against Comrade Clara, to whom he was still legally married, although they had been separated for over a year. By repeated demands on her for money and by continual personal harassment to the point of public physical violence, he in effect denied her right to a life of her own. He unilaterally assumed custody of their son and of possession of their jointly-owned house and refused to discuss either child custody or a financial-property agreement with her. Thus he condemned the child to an upbringing by an irrational alcoholic, despite the fears of everyone that the child was endangered, and blackmailed Clara into supporting him because she feared he would provoke a legal-political scandal if she refused.

In her struggle to free herself and the child from this oppression, Clara was completely alone. The party maintained an olympian detachment from such "personal" matters, and Clara never raised them.

## 2. The Party Finally Moves

Given the party's indulgence of his organizational disruptiveness and rampant chauvinism, Kirk made no effort to curb his behavior. Instead, he repeatedly raised the charge that he was being slandered and maligned, and demanded an investigation of "corridor gossip" directed against himself -- a demand which he conveniently refused to put in the form of a motion requiring action.

Finally in May of 1967, the executive committee decided that something had to be done about Kirk's repeated charges. They named a sub-committee to investigate these charges and Kirk refused to meet with it, claiming he hadn't requested it! A second sub-committee was named, and Kirk's shabby performance was repeated. By now the matter had dragged into July, and Kirk was still demanding "vindication".

After a last unsuccessful attempt to obtain a meeting with Kirk, the second sub-committee submitted a report to the exec detailing its lack of success. The report charged Kirk with a flagrant violation of party discipline for his refusal to meet with an authoritative body, mandated to investigate the charges he was flinging, and recommended that since he was incapable of functioning in a rational and disciplined manner, he be either suspended or expelled from the party.

The exec, in substantial agreement with the report, initiated the formation of a Control Commission with powers to investigate, bring charges, carry out a trial and decide on the necessity and nature of any disciplinary action. Also, at the request of Clara, the exec directed the CC to assign an arbiter to mediate an out-of-court divorce and custody settlement between herself and Kirk, adjudicating

the disputed issues in the light of the party's principles (rather than those of the bourgeois courts). Kirk was constantly threatening legal action and the party had to move to avoid a scandalous confrontation between two leading party-members in a public divorce court.

Kirk's behavior was of the sort that no serious revolutionary organization can long afford to tolerate. His internal disruptiveness and chronic, uncontrollable violations of the basic rules of comradely behavior, along with his chauvinistic persecution of Comrade Clara, posed a threat to the political and organizational integrity upon which our party is based. The growing tendency of this behavior to break out in public threatened the party with real scandal.

Virtually every comrade felt that Kirk represented at least a serious problem that should be dealt with in some fashion. At this time (before the election campaign had generated any serious frictions) there still appeared to be some grounds for believing that the Kirk problem could be separated from all of the party's other internal problems, and that the party could unite to bring him into line.

It was with this view in mind that the Control Commission was formed. To make sure that it would not be an instrument of any single faction or grouping, the commission was made larger than necessary (five members), to accomodate representatives of every current of opinion in the party. It included Comrade Lee, even though she (and Comrade Frank) had bitterly opposed the very formation of a CC.

It was hoped that such a broadly-based body, with the authoritative backing of the overwhelming majority of the party, could resolve the "Kirk problem" without resorting to the drastic measure of expulsion.

### 3. The Debacle of the CC and the Emergence of Two Factions

The CC did not live up to these expectations, partly because its proceedings were interrupted for several weeks in the late summer by the election campaign, but more fundamentally because of its own internal paralysis.

From its inception, the CC was bogged down with legalistic pettifogging over its "proper jurisdiction" and endless disputes over procedural questions - usually raised and pushed to the limit by Comrade Lee. These were countered by the "hards" on the commission (Melba and John) who were able to convince the wavering "center" (Al and Skip) of the need for decisive action, pulling them along step by step.

Finding her efforts at procedural obstruction frustrated, Lee adopted another strategy. She raised a barrage of counter-charges against Comrade Clara, to the effect that:

(1) Clara was responsible for Kirk's misbehavior, since she had failed in her proper role of keeping him happy, productive and under control;

(2) In insisting that the CC use its authority to force Kirk into an equitable divorce settlement, Clara was lending unwarranted political weight to what was essentially a personal dispute, outside the jurisdiction of party disciplinary bodies; and

(3) Clara was using this issue as a cover-up maneuver to conceal her attempt, along with the "Stalinist" Bob, to wrest control of the party from the "established leadership". The CC was part of a devious conspiracy, Lee warned, to "get Kirk", and Clara had even gone so far as to maneuver Kirk into "acting badly" just so he could be dealt with as a discipline problem, rather than in open political debate.

This reactionary attribution of Kirk's weaknesses to Clara's lack of wifely devotion had long been Kirk's main line of defense, and now it was being accorded political sanction.

Lee's new strategy was effective. After months of wavering and reluctant assent to the arguments of the "hards", the all-male center collapsed and stumbled gracelessly into the opposition camp. A new theory was proclaimed: Comrade Clara was now and had always been, a WITCH.

By October, the original case against Kirk had been completely submerged and replaced by an inquisition against Clara and every other comrade who had demanded enforcement of women's rights and equal standards of party discipline for all. The oppositional nucleus (Frank and Lee) had gained effective control of the CC by discovering the one issue around which they could regroup all the vague and disparate oppositional currents in the party into a single faction.

This faction, which never openly admitted its own factional character, had one "principle" and one rallying cry: "Stop Clara and her clique!"

So there now existed a faction in the party that viewed the Woman Question and the nature of the party in mystical and subjective terms. There could be no resolution of the inner-party conflict until the basic issues could be brought before the membership in a programmatic and materialist manner. At Comrade Clara's initiative, a second faction was formed, openly organized to defend our official position and tradition on women's emancipation and the nature of the party. Comrade Clara simply announced at a party meeting that she was calling for the formation of such a faction and invited the membership to join it. Characterizing her faction as bolshevik, and the opposition as menshevik, she declared an open political contest for leadership of the party.

This faction made clear from the beginning that it aimed to fight for the implementation of abstract ideological norms through the affirmation of practical standards of comradely conduct deriving from them, to be used as guidelines in real-life situations.

It aimed to win a majority in the party in order to gain the authority to enforce these standards and end the previous modus operandi which was arbitrary, capricious and eclectic.

Now, at last, definite lines were drawn, and the issues defined. The field was clear for a decisive contest. The party was geared to fight out and settle the political issues, including the question of leadership. The contest was to take place at the forthcoming party convention, scheduled to take place in December. For a short time, it appeared that the FSP would settle its internal crisis by a principled confrontation of opposing views, in accordance with the Leninist tradition.

But the party was headed toward a split, and many comrades felt this. Clara's flat and unambiguous declaration of program and purpose completely unnerved the opposition. The party could not anticipate the time and manner of split, but the pandemonium among the minority telegraphed split, and split did occur, determined, not by the results of a convention, but by the desperation of Kirk and his faction. The Control Commission, now exalted by fear and morbid hysteria, was powerless to render justice and enforce sanity.



#### IV. THE SPLIT

Virtually the last official act of the CC Chairman, Comrade Al, was to confess once again the commission's complete inability to control or even modify Kirk's actions. Kirk had already refused to meet with a mediator to discuss terms of divorce and child custody, declaring his intention to carry the contest into the public divorce courts. Furthermore, even though he was employed, he informed Clara that he was filing bankruptcy, a malicious action which, under this state's oppressive community property laws, would result in garnishment of Clara's pay check to pay his personal debts and would probably cause loss of her job. Under these circumstances, Al announced, Clara should "just go to court" in order to protect herself, because "there is nothing the CC can do with Kirk".

Given this ultimatum from the CC Chairman, representing the CC majority, Clara filed for divorce and protection from garnishment. Kirk responded immediately with a counter-suit!

And now the party was confronted with the actuality of an impending court fight between two of its leading members. It had two choices: it could abstain from the situation, letting the principals slug it out in court, or it could intervene directly, using its authority to bring about a settlement out of court and an uncontested divorce.

In order to implement the latter course, the FSP would have to do something it had never done before-- enforce party tradition and discipline in a case it had always preferred to treat as a purely personal matter.

But the abstentionist course presented grave dangers to the party as a whole. In the first place, the very fact of a bitter legal contest between two leading comrades threatened a very damaging scandal. But even more important was the nature of the contest that was about to take place. In any divorce case, the issues on which a bolshevik party stands (particularly one noted for its strong stance on the Woman Question) are different and often opposite to the capitalist marriage norms of the bourgeois courts.

Moreover, in this particular case, these very ideological issues would appear in an especially explosive form. Kirk was obviously out for blood using any weapon at hand to gain victory.

He clearly revealed his treachery in the contents of his counter divorce-suit. He accused Clara, among other crimes, of being an "unfit mother" because of "frequent absences from the home", "staying out all night", failure "to make a real home" for him, "insistence on working outside the home" and, conversely, "refusing" to work during certain periods because she "preferred doing other things", i.e., full-time party assignments.

The reactionary essence of these charges should be apparent to any socialist. Kirk was standing four-square on the ground of the injured male done wrong by his little woman who, rejecting all

the proper duties of wifery, had frustrated his efforts to build a conventional home. Implicit in his charges was the accusation of adultery. The FSP oppositionists pretended not to see this implication, but it was clearly understood by the lawyers on both sides, and Kirk's lawyer soon made it explicit in the courtroom, naming the party organizer as "co-respondent". This scandalmongering, from the standpoint of FSP policy on the Woman Question, not to mention simple modern-day decency, constituted an absolutely impermissible act of Babbitry and open scabbery - an outright denial of the fundamental right of sexual freedom of choice, which socialist and humanist tradition has always regarded as fundamental liberty.

Even more important, the whole thrust of Kirk's legal case was designed to deny Comrade Clara her right to live as a professional revolutionary, devoting her life to the movement, rather than to his care and feeding. By flinging Clara's intensely political life-style (how else could she explain her "frequent absences from the home"?) into court for public scrutiny and arbitration by a bourgeois judge, Kirk was endangering the entire party.

Kirk was publicly finking on the Woman Question and on the party. That was the reality of the matter. The question before the party was very simple: did it in fact take its own politics -- its own position on women's equality -- seriously enough to intervene and stop overt scabbing-- yes or no?

It was this "yes or no" that determined the final polarization within the party and provoked the split.

The exec finally said yes: Kirk's legal line was impermissible. Recognizing the grave danger for the party's political integrity and morale posed by Kirk's counter-suit, the exec resolved to take the matter directly to the party ranks.

There were two exec proposals:

- (1) That the CC be dissolved as an utterly ineffective body, and
- (2) That Kirk either withdraw his case immediately and submit the issues to arbitration within the party or be expelled from the party as an open fink.

The first proposal was agreed to by all; the second precipitated a division along majority-minority lines, though there was still some hesitancy about taking decisive action in the ranks of the majority (bolshevik) faction.

The point of the proposal, however, was not to press for an immediate vote for expulsion, but to present the alternatives posed by Kirk's actions squarely before the party ranks: he must be either controlled or expelled.

Two long meetings were devoted to a discussion of the exec proposal, long enough for the full implications of Kirk's legal strategy to become clear to the party majority.

Finally the alternatives were embodied in the following motion:

- (1) That Kirk be enjoined from pursuing a contested divorce in a public courtroom;
- (2) That a mediator, mandated to determine the actual terms of the divorce settlement on the basis of socialist ethical norms, be appointed;
- (3) That if Kirk fails to comply with these conditions, he be summarily expelled.

The measure passed by one vote, over the strenuous objections of the opposition to the effect that the party was exceeding its authority by intervening in such a "personal" matter, that it was a maneuver to get rid of Kirk, etc. "You can't DO that!" was the general outcry from the ranks of the minority.

Nevertheless, the decision held. Two days after the measure was passed, Kirk attended and two minutes later walked out of a meeting with Clara and the mediator, bellowing "I'll see you in court". He was expelled at the next regular party meeting.

At the following membership meeting, the opposition raised a barrage of procedural objections to the expulsion declaring that the decision was based on an "artificial majority", not reflecting the real relationship of forces in the party. The entire meeting (which included all party members in Seattle) was devoted to a discussion of the expulsion, and again the expulsion decision was ratified - by one vote.

And now the opposition took an unprecedented step. Rather than stay and fight for a political decision at the convention projected for a few weeks away, they walked out - over a procedural question on which, if their claims to represent a majority were to be taken seriously, they could have won an easy victory. "I resign! I've had enough", Frank roared, and with this as their rallying cry, his troops stumbled confusedly after him and out of the party.

This desertion took place toward the end of November. The behavior of our former members in succeeding months showed the split to be permanent.

First, they tried to open phony "unity" negotiations, proposing a "parity" conference in which they would represent not only themselves but the proxies of some of the party's national supporters they had won over to their side - after leaving the party. Moreover, Kirk, as one of their leaders, was included as a party to the proposed negotiations.

In reply, the FSP invited them to reapply individually for membership. Kirk was informed that, as an expelled member, he had the right to appeal his expulsion at a party convention, but no right to "parity". The party also demanded the return of its Publication

Fund, with which the deserters had absconded. This ended negotiations. Now the former oppositionists suddenly discovered that, instead of being a group of members who had quit the party, they were the party. Again claiming the "majority", they demanded that we recognize their right to the name of the Freedom Socialist Party, the headquarters, and the assets of the organization. We rejected all claims.

The split was complete.

## V. THE NATURE OF THE SPLIT

### 1. The Problem of Analysis

The split in the FSP did not happen cleanly and neatly. There was no clear counter-position of opposing views, no intensive internal discussion bringing out the political character of the disputes, no final confrontation and decision at the party convention. Had all this taken place, the nature of the split would have been crystal-clear. Since it didn't happen, the nature of the split became a question of ex post facto political analysis.

The immediate occasion of the split was an organizational dispute over an expulsion. In one sense, then, the split can be seen as the culmination of a long series of clashes over organizational norms, priorities and procedures. If our analysis went no further than this, we would have to say that the split in the FSP derived from organizational differences, with the majority asserting organizational standards that the minority was simply unable to live up to. Finding the party's internal discipline unbearably constricting, they walked out and established a club of their own in which they could operate more comfortably.

This is part of the truth, but it does not go far enough. It is an axiom of Leninism that no serious, long-term organizational conflict, especially one culminating in a split along factional lines, occurs outside of a deep underlying political polarization. It is the task of analysis to reveal this basis.

### 2. The Nature of the Opposition

The oppositionists in the FSP, even at the point of split, never admitted the factional nature of their grouping, because they were unable to explain the political basis of their factional cohesion. They had never thought through the implications of their politics. They remained to the end an unprincipled combination, unable to find any basis for their bloc other than a reflexive hostility to the standards, methods and personnel of the party majority. The question is: what lay behind this hostility?

Obviously, most (but not all) of the oppositionists felt an instinctive repugnance to the practice of bolshevik organization. This in itself reflects a certain political attitude. At the basis of Leninist organizational norms lies the concept of the vanguard party, standing in an advanced position, ahead of the mass movement, and constantly striving to bring the movement up to its level, while maintaining its own principles and program intact. An attack on organizational norms and procedures, therefore, is generally an implicit attack on the concept of the vanguard party and a drawing away from the clear and sharp definition of program that characterizes such a party.

It is important to realize that an attack on the party's program need not take the form of an open, direct ideological assault. It can express itself through an attempt to interpret the program

in an opportunistic fashion by softening its distinctive features to make it more palatable to more backward elements, and even to opponent tendencies within the movement. Party members who display such opportunistic leanings will also manifest dissatisfaction with the "undiplomatic" behavior of comrades who are too "pushy", too "inflexible", too "intolerant" -- who insist on a clear, sharp and uncompromising political differentiation of the party from its opponents and from the mass movement.

The oppositionists in the FSP instinctively shied away from any attempt of the majority to push the party's program as its determining feature, and to insist on principle as the guideline to party tactics in the mass movement.

Seen in this light, the major clashes that preceded the split reveal a general pattern.

The February priorities crisis involved something more than a publication schedule. The real priority involved was the priority of the party program as defined in the basic documents containing our distinctive positions on the Black Question and the Woman Question. This program should have been the key to determining the party's public image and its course of intervention in the mass movement. The minority's sudden preoccupation with China, their tortuous attempt to make it a central point of dispute with the majority, and their urging the party to enter the regroupment arena before clearly and publicly presenting its own program, can be seen as aspects of the same general tendency to push the FSP's own distinctive contributions to the revolutionary tradition into the background.

The same trend was evident in the internal discussion that occupied the party for some months in the spring and summer. In citing the China question as the "key to the international situation" and the key to the regroupment process in the U.S., Frank pushed the FSP program on the decisive American questions - the liberation of Blacks and women -- into the background, thereby minimizing our differences with the Workers' World Party, with whom he was then carrying on a flirtation.

The whole dispute over regroupment and the nature of the party ("a party" vs. "the party") revealed an oppositional current that only became fully explicit much later, after our former comrades had launched out on their own. They were looking for a "regroupment" in which they could find a comfortable home as a left wing of a larger, broader organization; we saw the whole regroupment process as a very protracted and difficult one. For us, the FSP would necessarily be the party for some time, and would cede that claim only to a new, nationwide Leninist party that could rightfully assume the task of leading the American Revolution.

Again, in the election campaign disputes, the differences that emerged between the majority comrades and the candidate concerned the latter's unwillingness to stress the program that had been agreed upon, while the opposition, unconcerned with this major political problem, concentrated their efforts on fomenting organizational impediments to effective prosecution of the campaign.



concentrated their efforts on fomenting organizational impediments to effective prosecution of the campaign.

### 3. The Decisive Question

These examples are symptomatic of a general tendency. The opposition members were, in general, drawing away from a sharp definition of the party program and from bolshevik political and organizational concepts. Nevertheless, up to the final split crisis, the opposition was never fully unified. There was always some wavering and some crossing of lines, and a few comrades tried to remain aloof from both the main tendencies that were crystallizing.

The decisive question that finally drove all the disparate elements together was--the Woman Question. Here again, the opposition's attitude toward the party program was expressed not in open ideological confrontation, but in personal and organizational conflicts

The opposition could not see a Woman Question inside the party - only a "Clara Question." It was Clara, the leading spokesman of the party majority, who became the figure upon whom all the various elements that comprised the opposition eventually focused their hostility. There had always been latent male chauvinism within the party, which Clara had usually successfully over-ridden with the cooperation of the rest of the old party leadership. Now she was appearing as the leader of the party majority against her former male colleagues. This independent decisive leadership from a woman was too much for some comrades to take. Thus the fantastic success of the anti-Clara campaign with some of the male comrades who tended to stand with the bolshevik majority on almost every other question. What had been a latent, half-expressed tendency was transformed into a raging disease. The final crisis in the dispute between Clara and Kirk was enough to bring it out into the open.

When disciplinary action was finally taken against Kirk, the entire party faced a decisive test. Principle required solidarity with Clara, in the face of Kirk's open scabbery on the Woman Question. The majority passed the test. Kirk was expelled, and his expulsion was ratified. Thus the party reaffirmed in practice its theoretical position on the Woman Question, and made clear to all concerned that the FSP regarded it as a fundamental, first-class political issue.

The minority could not pass the test. Not only were they unwilling to stand by their principles on this question, they were unable to live a minute longer inside a party that would. In walking out, they made clear that for them the Woman Question was at best a second-class question, and that they would not tolerate its elevation into a guide to living practice.

The opposition's hypocrisy on the Woman Question - their real backwardness on the question, which they attempted to conceal with demagogic rhetoric -- was the decisive factor impelling them into hurried flight from the party ranks. This was their first definite, organized break with the party program; it was not to be their last. From the moment they deserted the party, the oppositionists followed a political course that has led them further and further from revolutionary Marxism.

The Woman Question was not the sum and substance of the differences in the party, but it was the barometer of the opposition's political degeneration, the weather vane pointing out the direction of their political drift. In exposing their incapacity to deal honestly with this fundamental question, the deserters signalled their growing inability to deal with any question in the bolshevik manner - clearly, incisively and forthrightly, on the ground of principle.

#### 4. A Historic Parallel

The split in the FSP was unusual in form, but not without parallel in the history of the Marxist movement. A similar struggle, the famous bolshevik-menshevik split in which Lenin first emerged as the leader of the revolutionary movement in Russia, was fought out in the Russian Social-Democratic Party in 1903.

Although the Russian party was a great, mass movement, and ours is a small revolutionary nucleus, the parallels between the problems faced in both cases are too striking to be ignored, and the struggle in the FSP appears in some respects as a microcosm of the vast earlier struggle.

The Russian Social-Democracy was a party still in its formative phase, struggling to unify itself around a program and defend its political integrity as a vanguard detachment of a much broader radical movement. The Russian revolutionists, like ourselves, very soon faced an organizational crisis over what appeared at first to be even trivial secondary questions.

The crisis came to a head at the 1903 Congress of the Russian party over the question of the composition of the editorial board of Iskra (the central party organ) and a minor difference of wording in two nearly identical drafts of the statutes defining membership requirements.

In the first instance, Lenin simply proposed a reduction in the size of Iskra's editorial board, weeding out the less effective and productive members of the original team in the interests of efficiency. But, to quote Deutscher (The Prophet Armed), "considerations of efficiency clashed, as they often do, with acquired rights and sentiment." The future mensheviks (who at that time included Trotsky) sensed in Lenin's simple proposal a deep, dark conspiracy to wrest the hegemony in the Russian revolutionary movement away from its traditional leadership.

This dispute immediately threw into relief the "minor" differences in the drafts of the membership statutes. Lenin had proposed that the primary requirement of party membership be activity as a member of a local organization of the party, while Martov, future leader of the mensheviks, proposed that it be activity under the direction of a local party organization. It became clear that the difference between the two drafts was hardly trivial, for it concerned two basically different definitions of the party. Lenin was looking toward a tight, disciplined formation in which each member would be bound to the revolutionary collective by a close,

integral connection with its local organization; Martov envisaged a looser association, with the individual member's responsibilities very vaguely defined and leaving each member free from regular control and supervision of the local organization.

The question of priorities - efficiency in carrying out the party line versus sentimental considerations, and the nature of the party - these were the split-issues that divided bolshevik from menshevik. As we now know, the differences that lay behind these disputes over technical questions were anything but superficial. They set in motion a long process of political dispute and the Russian Social-Democracy broke up into two camps; the bolsheviks, who stood at the head of the 1917 revolution, and the mensheviks, who stood as obstacles in its way.

## 5. Lessons of Our Split

Our party also faced its first crisis very early in its existence. The problem was similar: once a party has declared its independence and come out into the open, it is forced to define itself, and this means first and foremost defining its attitude toward its own politics. Even the best politics, so long as they remain on paper or confined to discussions within closed circles, have no definitive existence. They must be carried out into the real world and put to work as operating principles of a living organization. This is the final test of the seriousness with which an organization regards its politics. This determines what its real program is.

This was the test our party faced during 1967. In withstanding the test - a split not with our enemies, but with those who had been long-time friends and comrades - we ended the formative process set in motion a year and a half earlier, in which the FSP came into being. Only after the split did the FSP finally stand by itself, firmly rooted in its principles.

## VI. 1968: OUR CONDITION AND PERFORMANCE

### 1. The Post-Split Situation

The party's salient accomplishment of 1967 was to maintain its integrity in the face of a menshevik challenge from within its own ranks. In so doing, it saved itself from an opportunistic drift into centrism, reformism and eventual liquidation.

This lifesaving struggle exacted heavy costs. The bitter and protracted internecine conflict seriously drained the energies of the party cadres and prevented significant party growth. The year ended with some major tasks uncompleted; only one basic document had been published, and new sources of growth opened up by the election campaign couldn't be exploited.

With a new year beginning, our party had new tasks before it; the first of these was political and organizational survival.

The virtual halving of the membership required a substantial scaling down and alteration of perspectives. The deserters not only absconded with the party correspondence and documents, but stole the \$300.00 Publications Fund as well.

We had to settle the ideological account of the split, making our position clear and tracing out the inner logic of our opponents' evolution. We had to maintain public functioning and momentum, as well as continued contact with and intervention in the mass movement. We had to prevent the usurpation of the name of the FSP by the mensheviks. And we had to strengthen the party, tempering and toughening the small cadre for the great responsibilities it now had to shoulder alone, while augmenting our slender forces through intensified contact and recruitment work.

### 2. Performance Analysis

The 1968 record is characterized by some successes, some unfinished tasks, some projects that never got off the ground, much exploratory activity in probing the possibilities of alliances and united efforts with other groupings, and the eventual clarification and strengthening of our identity, mode of operation, and course.

A. Our first job was to explain the split to our friends and periphery. We accomplished this slowly and painstakingly, but effectively, in that we made our position unmistakably clear, definite and political-programmatic. We refused to borrow a leaf from the book of our opponents' style and label the dispute as "the Frank question" or "the Kirk question", etc. Instead, in a series of detailed open letters to our former comrades in response to their demands and charges, we opened a political debate on issues of principle and program. We hoped thereby to engage them in open ideological debate, but this they fled from, preferring to circulate their version of events privately.

It was difficult for us to completely convince many people of the validity of our course in the face of the general hostility

toward our conception of the Woman Question as a major political issue demanding independent mass organization, and the resistance of the student movement to any organizational forms geared toward serious revolutionary action and pointing in the direction of a vanguard party.

Nevertheless, we forced an examination of these issues and a general consideration of their role and import, thereby definitively establishing ourselves as the hard-core proletarian tendency and the rightful inheritors of the party's name.

B. We were highly successful in keeping the party publicly visible through forums and social functions.

The series on Afro-American History, held in February and March 1968 featured an impressive roster of speakers and was widely publicized. The series built up to a good attendance by the final sessions.

A long summer series on the history of women's emancipation, jointly sponsored with Radical Women, was so successful that it contributed to this very history. It was a major breakthrough in bringing the Woman Question, as a serious, first rank political issue, before a new generation of radicals in Seattle. The speakers' roster, organization and presentation were all excellent. The whole series was an important learning-experience for a substantial sector of the local movement.

Our winter series, criticizing the politics of the New Left, was less popular from the standpoint of attendance, due to the sharpening of political differences between ourselves and the mass of student militants in the wake of the elections. But the programmatic differentiations that we explored and clarified in the course of the series were political accomplishments of the first order, in terms of sharpening the theory and character of the party.

C. Our hall was an invaluable resource, and our utilization of it guaranteed our right to the party's name once and for all in the eyes of the general radical public. It was also an important financial resource, as income from increasing hall rentals provided a decisive margin of solvency.

We did not, however, use the hall as a political resource to the extent that we should have, being particularly deficient in keeping the bookstore open regularly and publicizing this resource. We thereby deprived ourselves of an important arena for political contact and dissemination of literature.

D. Our work in the mass movement engendered very mixed results. A correct evaluation of our record in this field requires an analysis of the relation between the objective thrust of the movement as a whole and the internal condition of the party.

The dominant feature of the movement over the past several years has been the increasing radicalism of youth, Black and white. During

1967, this process accelerated suddenly and qualitatively. Early in the year, the student movement, with SDS in the lead, proclaimed a shift from "protest to resistance". Coincident with this was a piecemeal eruption of local draft resistance groups around the country, initiated by Black youth but soon taken up by white students. Explosions in the Black ghetto over the summer were followed by a massive influx of Black Student Unions across the country, and the first thrust of the Black Panther Party toward national prominence.

The opening months of 1968 found a continued deepening of the process of radicalization. SDS mushroomed on campuses across the country. A new third-party movement, initiated with the formation of the Peace and Freedom Party of California, began to attract young people seeking an independent political outlet for their radicalism. The draft resistance movement began to manifest signs of outgrowing its initial formlessness and developing a broader political and social consciousness. A nascent women's movement appeared from out of the student milieu. The Black Panthers proclaimed their intention to form a Black revolutionary vanguard with a socialist ideology.

These national developments were reflected locally. From a position as an isolated backwater on the national scene, Seattle was being sucked into the maelstrom of a reviving radical movement.

At the beginning of the year, the FSP was apparently in a very good position with respect to the new radical movement. We had broad connections in SDS, good relations with young Black militant leaders, and a fraction of two comrades exerting considerable influence in Draft Resistance. When a group of young women from SDS became interested in forming a radical women's organization, they turned immediately to our comrades for assistance in public speeches, programmatic guidance and organizational cooperation.

This era of good relations did not last long. In a very short time, our friendly and cooperative relations with the New Left on various fronts gave way to increasing divergences and friction.

1. Seeing our own program as the most advanced expression of these needs, we cast ourselves in the role of leadership of a potential revolutionary left wing in DR, devoting most of our energies and the guidance resources of the entire party to this enterprise. When the moment of decision for the left wing arrived, a choice between principled politics or endless clique maneuvering as the pathway for decision-making, the left wing promptly collapsed as a left wing, crystallizing into a conscious counter-left wing. This is an old story in politics, but one which newer comrades seem to have to learn through personal experiences. That no opportunistic adaptation were made, and the party fraction emerged from the battlefield with an enhanced understanding of the primary need of building the party, is a tribute to their growing maturity and ability to profit from experience and party guidance.

The fraction learned it had been overly sanguine and optimistic; it should have seen its role more clearly as one of swimming against the stream consciously and energetically, paying more attention to

to the needs of the party and utilizing the party as a center for pulling together the best individuals in the mass movement.

The chief lesson derived was to relearn once again that the party needs to retain its own separate existence outside the movement, in opposition to it when necessary, and always available to the most advanced elements for advice, assistance and the opportunity for membership.

By late summer, both DR and SDS were driving in an anarchistic direction, characterized by deliberate organizational formlessness, irresponsible adventurism and unbridled subjectivism. Concurrent with this was an increasing hostility to "Old Left" -- that is, Marxist -- concepts of class line, program, organizational structure and procedures, and methods of delineating strategy and tactics. In this atmosphere, we were forced into increasing isolation.

Finally, the party decided to withdraw from active organizational participation in the student arena in order to concentrate its forces on educational work with individuals not polarized into the politics of prolonged adolescence and the cult of spontaneity.

2. Our sojourn with the New Left in Radical Women had similar results, although in a different form. At its inception, we were very favorably disposed toward this fledgling organization we had helped to initiate. Its very formation was historic and dramatic, an exciting validation of our long-proclaimed but lonely stance on the Woman Question. Here seemed to be the best field for close cooperation with a key sector of the New Left - its young women.

Even before it was really off the ground, Radical Women acquired a name for itself through its forums and actions. Nevertheless, it was not able to clearly define itself in matters of program, organization or tactics. Our attempts to orient the organization in a pro-socialist, working-class direction based on a serious organizational foundation was met with discomfort, outrage, clandestine maneuvering, chronic attempts to ignore or violate decisions, growing hostility, the withdrawal of some members and finally division in three directions. Our comrades, together with a few sympathizers, were left in possession of the organization, while the New Left and single-issue types formed two new organizations.

One of these, the "Women's Majority Union", oriented blatantly toward middle-class suburban housewives who "want to kill their husbands" ("the real battlefield!"). They announced their devotion to an ongoing mystical soul-search for their true natures and a quest for a fully "liberated" lifestyle in this society - liberated basically from wage-labor, children, and the responsibilities of life. They renounced connection with the ghetto movement, the labor movement, and the general movement for social revolution, preferring to work for women's rights in an exclusively reformist and respectable fashion. In their urgency to build a mass movement, they resorted to red-baiting, personal attacks and unrestrained malice, so fearful were they of being branded a "red front" as a result of guilt by association with revolutionaries.



The other split-off tendency from Radical Women formed itself into a "Women's Liberation Committee" of the SDS and the Peace and Freedom Party (then of SDS alone, with the demise of the PFP). This group went off in the opposite direction, opposing the need for the business-like organization of an independent women's movement and adopting an ultra-left course, resulting from an erroneous belief that the answer to reformism is a sectarian contempt for the struggle for limited and partial objectives. They, too, hysterically resisted a structured organization.

Our attempts at close collaboration with some sections of the New Left resulted in a polarization of ideologies and methods. Discussion within the movement was thereby raised to a much higher level than previously, which is always the case with clear-cut splits, as every Leninist knows! Issues were clarified and positions taken, and the in-fighting among the women radicals in particular had a significant impact upon the student movement as a whole, struggling on a national plane to resolve these very differences.

3. The Peace and Freedom Party displayed some initial promise, but it soon became apparent that it was unable and unwilling to advance programmatically past its first burst of enthusiasm and beyond its socially narrow and classless student base. A large outpouring of radical sentiment of various hues coalesced into a loose association, but no concise program of clear political direction emerged, and the party took shape in shapelessness -- as an indeterminate all-inclusive, Peoples Front type of action-apparatus, composed of equal parts of radicalism, reformism, revolution, progressive capitalism, and socialism.

Our unwillingness to enter the party and "help shape its course" flowed from the impermissibility, in principle, of supporting a United Liberals, Radicals, and Socialists type of political stew. We could not have altered its course, given its overwhelming composition and direction, and we could not have operated as a minority within it without compromising that very principled approach to electoral coalitions which we had upheld for so long against the opportunism of the former comrades who had defected from our party. We did give critical support to the two Black candidates of the PFP -- Cleaver and Flo Ware; nevertheless, our persistent refusal to enter or endorse the PFP organization created considerable friction between us and most of our younger friends who had rushed into the "new" and supposedly non-Stalinistic PFP as soon as it was launched. They failed to see that only the faces had changed; despite definite and welcome improvements in the planks of the Black struggle, the labor movement, women's rights, and independent political action, the fundamental and overriding character of the program was its appeal for multi-class support on supra-class issues -- i.e., the Peoples Front against war, fascism, poverty, etc.

PFP was an anti-monopoly, anti-military/industrial coalition -- anti-establishment, not anti-capitalist. This type of program topping a middle-class/student base spells precisely that kind of mish-mass electoral coalition which Leninists deplored, despite its

apparent radicalism and super-militancy. The party was a Stalinist type of party, even though few of its adherents realize it to this day, and are furious at the allegation! But friendship is friendship, and politics is politics, and a political party like FSP must choose.

4. Friction between us and PFP increased with our active support of the Black Panther Party electoral campaign. The local Panthers were trying to free themselves from the injunction to effect an electoral coalition with the PFP imposed on them by Cleaver's candidacy on the PFP ticket. This questionable move by Cleaver deprived his own party of the drama, momentum and influence it needed to build its own ranks through electoral activity. The local BPP had only one candidate in the field, and it was incumbent upon us to help assure his ballot status and mobilize electoral support on his behalf. This campaign was the decisive action in Seattle, crucial for the Black freedom movement and therefore crucial for the entire movement, -- and yet SWP was running a counter candidate to Cleaver, PFP had Cleaver on its slate, and both parties were straining mightily on behalf of their own campaigns. Only FSP took upon itself as a primary responsibility the task of assisting the local BPP campaign whenever we could, providing publicity, nominating petition signers, technical assistance, etc.

The non-self-seeking on our part was recognized by the Panthers, who included our spokesman on their roster of Nominating Convention speakers, and we were generously afforded the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with them and the audience at that event.

The highlight of our supportive activities was the mass rally called on their behalf and in their defense by an ad hoc unity committee initiated by our comrades in Radical Women and composed of virtually every radical grouping in town. To achieve this hugely impressive and effective united front against police harrassment in the ghetto was not only a herculean task, in which we succeeded, but a tremendously expensive one. By virtue of our remorseless pressure on Radical Women, PFP, SDS and other groups on the issue of supporting the mass meeting, we incurred resentment and annoyance. Nevertheless, we would be happy to do it again in another just cause for the Black freedom movement that would otherwise be ignored by white radicals stewing in their own organizational juices and self-concerns.

### 3. Performance Evaluation

By the end of 1968, the FSP stood out as a clearly independent, unique and determined tendency amid the myriad of local and national factions and groupings within the radical movement.

We ended up organizationally alone and politically together, a rather remarkable achievement for our small cadre of hardheads attacked consistently and sometimes hysterically from all sides because of our intransigence combined with flexibility, a dialectical approach to strategy still unabsorbed by old and new left alike. By refusing to sacrifice principle in exchange for popularity, we had earned someoutright hatred from those who demanded our participation and collaboration in their projects on their terms.

The lifespan of our alliances, therefore, was dictated precisely by the limits of our actually broad capability for compromises and concessions, but limits we did insist on. This earned us a general, if infuriated, respect.

We failed to write enough, publish enough, hold enough public meetings, to complete all of our documents and projects in time and to follow through consistently on administrative responsibilities. But we significantly improved our functioning in some areas and, most important, we emerged from this year of difficulty, contradictions and challenge with a vastly expanded self-knowledge and capacity for realistic judgments and decisions.

## VII. 1969: A New Conjuncture and A New Growth

As the new year rolled in, the FSP was left with its name, its integrity, an excellent and popular headquarters, and a lot of experience. It was detached from the white student movement and lacked a substantial periphery.

Since then, rapid changes in the political conjuncture, in which our active intervention has played no small part, have radically altered this situation, presenting new opportunities, new problems, and new responsibilities for the party.

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### 1. The Tide Turns

A. The New Left grew out of an intense, often highly personal student rebellion against the constrictions, brutality, and inequities of capitalist society, and through all of its twists and turns, it reflects this basic social character. Its programmatic vagueness, organizational incoherence and lack of solidarity, its wild leaps from one end of the political spectrum to the other, and its ideological glorification of emotionalism and subjectivism, all arise from the fundamental capriciousness of a movement with no solid attachment to any productive class. Any "program" this movement espouses is a momentary choice resulting from a mood, rather than a stable and long-term commitment to the needs and interests of the working class.

Continual political search and experiment become the substitute for serious program, and the movement feels an instinctive hostility to any demand that it settle down to serious ideological discussion, chart a rational course for itself, and stick by its decisions.

This inherent instability is accentuated by the class vacuum in which the movement operates in the U. S. In the absence of a strong working-class or socialist movement off the campus, exerting a commanding influence upon it, few objective forces exist to give programmatic substance and social weight to the student rebellion.

This lack of a solid social base to connect it with reality is the New Left's gravest constitutional weakness, and the one weakness that the movement truly agonizes over. Its hysterical moods of "go-it-alone" hysteria are balanced, on the obverse side, by a desperate longing for an authoritative voice -- for an infallible pope -- to lay down the law from on high.

So, the movement turns frantically from one saviour to another -- the PFP, the "Third World", Chairman Mao, the Black Panthers -- and lately, resurrected in all his glory, Comrade Stalin and the terror tactics against opponents for which he is so well remembered.

The New Left, supposedly arising out of the purest existential "freedom", is in fact at the mercy of its own whims, dictated by whatever looks biggest or most necessary to it at any given moment.

None of the twists, turns, and about-faces of student radicalism, from "participatory democracy" up to and including Stalinism, has served to alleviate its crisis of program and leadership. On the contrary, this crisis now assumes graver proportions with every passing week, as the movement splits and fragments in a dozen different directions.

B. The Black Movement continues to experience a protracted crisis of leadership. Locally, there are two main contenders, neither as yet successful, for the loyalty and support of the ghetto masses.

On one side are the reactionary cultural nationalists, represented in Seattle by the Afro-American Journal gang. These forces have a real neo-fascist character. Behind a mask of super-militancy and super-Blackness, they employ terrorist tactics to intimidate political opponents, especially radicals, and to line their own pockets. Their aim is not to overthrow the white capitalist power structure, but to reach an accomodation with it, allowing them to rule and exploit the ghetto.

Terrorism and extortion do not make for instant popularity. But the steady appeal to the Black mystique find some response in the ghetto. Given the virtual leadership vacuum that now exists, the Afro-American crew can win adherents, especially among the de-classed "street" youth.

An effective challenge to the fascist elements can only come from the left, and the only substantial group in the ghetto on this end of the spectrum is the Black Panther Party.

This organization is still going through a very contradictory development. The BPP has proclaimed itself as the revolutionary socialist vanguard party inside the ghetto. In further asserting the working-class character of the coming revolution, and their right as Black revolutionists to play a vanguard role in the whole revolution, the Panthers approach our basic concept of revolutionary integration. Another step in the right direction has been their recent attempt to come to grips with the Woman Question, for the first time taking a public position against male chauvinism in the ranks of the BPP and in the black community as a whole.

Still, despite these evidences of the Panthers' willingness to pose and confront the key issues of the American Revolution, their organization suffers increasingly from serious internal illnesses.

Lacking a base among black workers, the BPP is essentially a party of youth. Its leaders come out of the student movement; its mass base is among high-school students and young street blacks.

This kind of formation, while it can display great militancy and combativeness, is also highly volatile and unstable. Lacking the necessary conservatism of a workers' organization, the Panthers are given to mercurial shifts in line.

Much like the white student movement, the Panthers leap from one end of the spectrum to the other. Putschist, desperate, and extreme nationalist moods, fed and aggravated by continual police repression, continually erupt within the ranks of their party. The leadership responds to this recklessness with purges of the "undesirables" and, in a frantic search for allies, jumps all the way from ultra-left adventurism into People's Front alliances with white liberals, whom they try to control with threats and bluster.

This People's Front trend was already evident last year in the national Panther alliance with the Peace and Freedom Party. It has lately surfaced again in the form of a "United Front Against Fascism", Stalinist-style, and a close alliance with CPUSA hacks.

This recent turn spells real danger to the Panthers, and, because of their strategic position on the left, endangers the movement as a whole, especially the student movement, whose instability and irrationality are aggravated and reinforced by the Panther example.

The Panthers are the only organized radical force of any consequence in the Seattle Central Area, but they by no means represent the total of its radical potential. There exists a considerable body of young, militant Black workers and intellectuals, both men and women, who display a remarkable level of political sophistication and willingness to act. Yet, repelled by the ravings and goon-squad terror of the cultural nationalists and the militarism and arbitrariness of the Panthers, they are left without leadership to represent them and give them a program.

Many of these militants are concentrated in the government anti-poverty agencies, as both staff-members and trainees.

So great is the leadership-vacuum in this area, that many of these workers and professionals, ordinarily very suspicious of whites, have been willing to accept cooperation and collaboration with some white FSP members, who have daily on-the-job contact with them. The persistent work of our comrades in this milieu has not only provided the party with valuable experiences and associations, but has furnished the initial thrust toward the formation of a militant left-wing within a vital stratum of the Black working class.

The most promising development to date within this arena has been the emergence of a union of anti-poverty workers (PAPS). This organization was initiated with the purpose of improving the salaries and working conditions of non-professional anti-poverty workers, giving them some leverage to curb the arbitrariness of agency rulings and providing a nucleus for the organization of super-exploited, unorganized and unrepresented workers throughout the city.

PAPS is very young, and still far from completing its initial task of organizing anti-poverty workers. Yet, it has already won significant concessions from the OEO bureaucrats, and has courageously weathered its first red-baiting attack. Its prestige and impact are considerable.

Our comrade in the organization, who is president of the local, has exercised decisive leadership in organizing and maintaining PAPS, bringing it through a difficult formative period while maintaining a thoroughly principled political stance.

SOIC, the major job-training agency in the Central Area, has been another fruitful arena for political work with Black militants and for establishing an important base for socialist education and organization in the ghetto.

The work of our comrades in the poverty program resulted in the dramatic contingent of Central Area women who sparked the mass lobby for abortion reform organized in March. The abortion-reform bill was almost forced out of the Senate Rules Committee in the wake of the mass action led by Radical Women. Hundreds of poor and minority race women were inspired into action on their own account, learning valuable political lessons in the process and the State Legislature was rocked to its foundations.

Currently, the most important contribution of the party in the anti-poverty arena has been the initiation of a mass-protest campaign against the terrorism and extortion of the Afro-American super-nationalists. This campaign, which is still in progress, has assumed an independent momentum of its own, and is literally sweeping the Central Area.

It would not do to paint a one-sided rosy picture of the possibilities for radical action, particularly white radical action, in the anti-poverty agencies. The situation remains contradictory, and fraught with dangers as well as well as opportunities.

Nevertheless, the work of our comrades in this field serves as a model for what can be accomplished by even one comrade alone in a situation where one comes into daily contact with Black, Indian and poor people who feel the need to struggle. Moreover, it should lay to rest the myth that it is impossible for whites to actively intervene in the Black community. What is needed to qualify for this work is courage, integrity, modesty, the tactical sense to gauge the opportunities and the caution and tact required in acting to meet them, and, above all, a correct theory.

It is not accidental that the effective party activity in the ghetto is being carried out by revolutionary white women.

Because of their acute awareness of the nature of their own social oppression, they characteristically display a far greater sensitivity to the needs and problems of Blacks than do white men, even revolutionists. In the eyes of Blacks of both sexes, white women represent the oppressor far less than do white men, LeRoi Jones notwithstanding.



C. The GI Movement is similar to the student movement in the shifting and unstable character of its social base; the status of GI is no more permanent than that of student, and since GI's are continually subject to transfer at the command of the brass, their opportunities to establish permanent ties, and stable nuclei around which to form a movement, are distinctly limited.

Still, army life is markedly different from life on a campus, and imparts a qualitatively different character to the soldiers' movement.

GI's resemble workers in one important respect: they are disciplined, concentrated, and collectively oppressed by the ruling class, often in a very brutal and crushing manner. Under such circumstances, playing at radicalism, acting in an irresponsible and adventurist way, is not only impractical but extremely dangerous.

This affects the nature of the movement. The soldier-militant who wants to fight the system is typically more cautious than his student counterpart, and, once he has become radicalized, tends to take political ideas very seriously, since they represent a much more serious commitment.

For these reasons, the GI movement hasn't suffered from the most typical sicknesses of the New Left. But it has problems of its own.

Fort Lewis, the largest military base in the Western U.S., has for the past year been the scene of considerable radical activity arising out of the attempts of local movement activists to build a viable GI movement.

The most promising endeavor in this field was the GI-Civilian Alliance for Peace (GI-CAP), in which the SWP-YSA has exercised predominant influence. This organization has suffered several vicissitudes. It reached its high point last February, when several hundred GI's participated in a mass march against the war in Viet Nam. Since that time, it has gradually petered out, under the able guidance of the YSA, whose main policy orientation toward the soldiers' movement was to try to build a soldier-contingent of the mass single-issue anti-war movement. They still hope to accomplish this in cooperation with the pacifists, liberals, and Stalinists, but locally, the prospects are dim, because GI-CAP became imprisoned within the SWP formula, stagnated, and lost its attractive power for GI's.

Nevertheless, the GI movement has been a fruitful arena of work for the FSP. Persistent propaganda activity within GI-CAP provided the party with a milieu for some months, out of which we gained an excellent recruit who is the leader of the movement.

Despite the decline of GI-CAP, the ferment at the Fort continues, and our comrade has built a nucleus of GI's interested in organizing a movement able to challenge the repressive apparatus of the Army brass. The potential for building a movement, and the party, in this area remains very good.

D. The Trade-Union movement has not occupied us a great deal in recent years, for a very good reason: most of the action has been elsewhere.

Nevertheless, an important sector of the local working class has come into motion recently, and, again, an FSPer has been in the middle of it. For several months, the Service Employee's Union has been carrying out an organizing drive among nursing-home employees in Seattle, who are predominately women and Blacks; one of our woman comrades is organizing it.

This kind of work proceeds slowly, and an organizer is continually hampered by the bureaucratic procedures imposed by the law, and by the conservatism of the labor bureaucracy. Nevertheless, our comrade has been able to exercise considerable latitude in her organizing strategy, and has quite successfully appealed to the workers as both super-exploited Blacks and women.

This nascent awakening of one of the most intensely exploited categories of workers, while still tentative, is a portent of the future, forecasting a general upsurge of a new layer of the working class that is only now beginning to gather self-confidence.

A decisive success in this drive can catalyze activity among broader sections of the class, while redounding greatly to the benefit of our party.

E. The Women's Movement is the one sector of the mass movement in which no evaluation of the present conjuncture can be made without referring the FSP, for here our party's influence has been decisive in shaping the conjuncture. At the same time, it is difficult to separate party activity in this field from mass work in the Central Area and in the Union movement, for our work in these areas, which has been done almost entirely by women comrades, has contributed to building the general Women's movement, and has in turn benefited from this movement.

Nevertheless, an independent women's movement has emerged in the Seattle area, and its history in recent months has provided swift and striking vindication of our insistence on the top-level political importance of the Woman Question, and our perspective of building an independent working-class women's organization with a basically socialist character.

Last winter, things didn't look so good. After the breakaway of both the "Women's Liberation" and "Majority Union" contingents from Radical Women, the parent organization was hardly more than an FSP women's caucus. But the subsequent evolution of all three groups soon showed who had the correct line, the staying power, and, the organizing know-how.

The single-issue, anti-political stance of the Women's Majority Union and the infantile ultra-leftism of the Women's Liberation Committee soon revealed themselves as simply two sides of the coin of petty bourgeois frivolousness and ignorance of political realities. Isolated in a campus milieu, these organizations had in common a basic lack of gut-level understanding of the needs of

working women, Black women, and working class housewives, and their theoretical grasp remained utterly inadequate to orient them consistently toward these sectors - the indispensable base of any serious fighting mass movement of women.

Unable to link up with any of these vital sectors of exploited women, both the Union and the Committee were unable to project outwards and turned inward to feed on themselves. The Majority Union seems to have slowly starved to death on such a diet, while the Liberation Committee has maintained a discussion-club and guerilla-theatre role, unable to orient itself independently in any direction.

By contrast, Radical Women, beginning once again with only principles and a small nucleus of comrades, soon revived and rebuilt itself on the basis of these same principles. Serious working women and minority race women were attracted to the organization by precisely those features that repelled the petty-bourgeois student types - a clearly defined program and taking-care-of-business structure, appropriate to a fighting organization.

Indeed, the first major gain for the party was made in the very course of the factional struggles that had led to fragmentation into three factions. The single non-FSP working-class radical member of Radical Women elected not only to stay with the organization, but to join the FSP, soon proving to be one of the party's most valuable activists.

The decisive turn came when Radical Women projected itself into the mass arena and spurred the eruption of a tremendous agitation for abortion reform.

Thousands of women were mobilized in a mass rally at the Capitol early this spring, and by virtue of its immediate and distinctive propoganda approach and the energy and political solidity of its mass workers, Radical Women found itself transformed from a small isolated cadre organization into the main attractive pole toward which the more radical wing of the women's movement was drawn.

This transformation of Radical Women was made possible by the work of party activists in the anti-poverty agencies. Through energetic day-to-day contact work, they were able to recruit some of the best militant woman workers into the abortion action and then into the ranks of Radical Women.

Radical Women was now strong and established enough to initiate an action solely on its own responsibility. When the Strike Committee chairman of the local photo-finisher's union appealed to some of our comrades (who also were in Radical Women) for aid to their strike of beleaguered women who were ridiculously underpaid, Radical Women decided to throw its energies into a demonstration to build support and win publicity for the strike.

Radical Women called for a mass picket line, agitated others in the radical movement into supporting it, and was able on very short notice to build an effective sympathy demonstration at the Perfect Photo plant.

The demonstration was an outstanding success in focusing attention on the strike, helping the Photo Finishers to gain a victory settlement, and enhancing the prestige of Radical Women.

It also resulted in a mass arrest of picketers, including several Radical Women members. At the subsequent trials (on charges ranging from "obscenity" to "resisting arrest"), once again, it was Radical Women who distinguished themselves in court by their forthright defense of their actions and demand for constitutional rights, while the "Liberated Women" and New Left males showed themselves incapable of pursuing a principled defense.

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As a result of its intransigence in theory and practice, Radical Women now exercises ideological and organizational hegemony in the Seattle women's movement. Not loved by its opponents, granted a grudging respect as the authentic bearer of principle, it points out the road to real impact, and others, grudgingly or otherwise, follow in the direction it has pointed. Also, because it is objectively far in advance of the whole national Women's Movement, Radical Women has a surprising number of contacts across the country, finding itself in a position to exercise national influence.

Needless to say, the success of Radical Women not only puts the FSP in immediate contact with a healthy and growing working-class movement, but also redounds directly to the credit of the party, as a vindication of our principled position on the Woman Question.

## 2. Perspectives

### A. Our New Role

Our party has entered as a component, and often a major one, into many phases of the movement since the beginning of 1969. Nevertheless, it is also an independent entity; while it has developed in interaction with the entire movement, it has a separate character and distinctive objectives of its own.

A few months ago, we regarded survival as our major objective, and we have managed this rather well. In fact, this is one of the things we do best. In the past three years, we have witnessed a whole raft of radical organizations come into being. We have outlived several and we will outlive several more. But, we have not just survived. We have managed to grow in contrast to the menshevik splitters, who, despite all their tail-wagging and deep-entry tactics in frantic search of a home, are today more orphaned than ever. We have demonstrated a capacity to intervene in the mass movement, to build a movement, and to win respect for our policy. We have been able to do this precisely because we stuck by our principles, even and especially when the going was rough.

The FSP has become the party of the Woman Question in Seattle, and the only party of the Woman Question in the U.S.; this is as it should be. We have followed the logic of our political development. It was only natural that our party, as the only consistent and persistent exponent of the Woman Question on the entire left, should attract in its direction the best elements of the rising Women's movement. Now that every other radical organization is jumping onto the bandwagon, we should be very conscious of the historic significance of our pioneering and the urgent necessity to continue to defend and expand our position.

This becomes doubly important when we realize that it is work among women that has provided us with a key to the working class and the Black movement, just as our theory predicted. So far, we have empirically followed the line that our principles indicated; it is necessary for us to recognize this fact and to more consciously shape our perspectives in accordance with the proven correctness of our special ideology.

### B. Perspectives

(i) The Women's Movement, as indicated, should be the party's main mass orientation in the coming period. Our responsibilities in this area are both ideological and organizational, and demand a contribution from the entire party, including the men comrades. Since this is the most fertile area of party mass work, particular attention must be given to maintaining a high quality of performance throughout.

Party activity in this and all related areas, i.e., the ghetto and anti-poverty arena, trade-union organizing, etc., must be organized and coordinated much more systematically than has been done to date. This could be handled through the establishment of a women's fraction, under a responsible, experienced chairman, so

that the party's active workers in all areas of work with women could consult on a regular basis and receive practical guidance and advice on policy and technical questions in their respective fields.

(ii) The Black Movement. Despite the excellent quality of our comrades' work in the Central Area, we must recognize that whites cannot solve the leadership-crisis of the Black movement. The problem remains as before: the formation of a Black revolutionary socialist vanguard. Even with all their contradiction, the Panthers remain the only force in the ghetto striving in this direction, and if they go under, the movement will not improvise a new vanguard formation on short notice.

At a moment like this, when the Panthers are beset not only by the police and a nascent fascist movement inside the ghetto, but by the virus of Stalinism, they need ideological stimulation and practical support more than ever.

The Black Student Union is more complex in its character-- both better and worse than the Panthers; better: more ideologically developed and theoretically oriented; worse: less disciplined and homogeneous.

As a broad, mass organization (actually, a loose federation of separate organizations on several local high school and college campuses), the BSU is more flexible, lacking the rigidity and paramilitary psychology of the Panthers. The leadership, comprising a small group of Black radical intellectuals, mostly elder students, is on the whole at a higher political level displaying possibilities for much greater political maturity and the evolution of a vanguard nucleus.

On the other hand, the BSU's loose structure and lack of program and internal discipline encourage opportunistic adaptations to external pressures from "respectable" society by the leadership; these same traits give free rein to the wild capriciousness of the mass of young, raw, and politically inexperienced declassed Blacks who have recently surged into the ranks.

It is our responsibility to our own program and to the brave, young and inexperienced radicals of the BPP and BSU, to find ways of assisting them with ideas and expertise. Our failure to do so amounts to an abdication of basic responsibility and this must be remedied. Knowledgeable and capable comrades should be selected to work intensively with the Panthers and the BSU.

This work will be difficult, demanding not only a good grasp of theory and tactics, but perseverance and an ability to roll with the punches. Comrades involved in this work must have thoroughly absorbed the significance of the strategic role of Blacks in the vanguard of the American revolution. Since Black radicals sense this reality, disputes over theory and tactics are made easier when pursued within this context.

(iii) The GI Movement. There is only one comrade presently active in this field, and this should be sufficient, along with occasional intervention and assistance by others. However, the party should give this comrade all the political-ideological support he needs in bringing soldier-contacts closer to the party. A definite strategy in this area should be worked out through discussions in the party as a whole, and regular consultations arranged between our mass-worker and the organizer.

(iv) The Student Movement. Our main responsibility in this arena is ideological. The party must make itself more available to individual contacts within the student movement to discuss basic politics, avoiding embroilment in organizational campaigns and factional conflicts that serve no political purpose for us. We should be much better prepared for this, and much more cognizant of the necessity of orienting student work closely around the party, after our "New Left" experiences with Draft Resistance and the SDS women.

Our immediate aim in work with people in the student movement should be recruitment, to build a fraction able to combat the characteristic diseases of the New Left and the newly-acquired Stalinist goon-squadism prevalent in SDS. Some of our comrades who have been around for a while will find themselves on familiar ground here; only the FSP can effectively counter the baleful influences of Third Period CP ultra-leftism and SWP conservatism in the student movement.

### C. Organizational Tasks

(i) If the FSP is to meet its political responsibilities, a way must be found to maintain a full-time organizer, able to direct and coordinate all departments of party activity, utilizing the talents of every comrade to the best advantage of our organization. This will require considerable political and administrative skill, and the party should select the best possible comrade to fill this key post.

(ii) This need immediately places on the agenda the question of financial solvency. Given the current cost of living, we can't expect an organizer to maintain himself on less than \$100 a week. If we are to meet this expense, we will have to rack our brains to come up with new sources of money, but the comrades will have to pay their fair share by increasing their pledges and donations.

Also, we cannot expect to reach this degree of solvency without a new dynamic and new efficiency in the financial department, which has been administratively neglected for some time.

(iii) To effectively discharge our ideological responsibilities, we must utilize our headquarters much more extensively than heretofore. While political crises break all around us, we have not had a forum since last December! We must institute more regular and frequent forums, classes and socials; this will aid us in solving our financial problems, as well as bringing more people around the party.



(iv) Bookstore remodelling and publicizing. The work of the Literature Committee in this direction must be expedited and followed through. Literature sales have picked up considerable, but could be enlarged even more with attention and attractive displays.

(v) To facilitate expansion of our general educational work, it is recommended that the agit-prop director post be revived, not only to organize forums and classes, but also to supervise the writing, production and distribution of propaganda leaflets and documents.

## APPENDIX I

(Note: The following article was published in the April, 1968 issue of The Forge, a local radical newsletter.)

### CONCERNING THE SCHISM IN THE FSP

An organization of former members of the Freedom Socialist Party who quixotically call themselves the FSP has been circulating a document entitled Statement on the Split in the FSP. (See Forge, Vol. 1, No. 1, Feb. 1968). We of the Freedom Socialist Party believe it necessary for the record, and in the interests of the truth, for us to publicly state our attitude toward the Statement and its authors.

We do not question the right of this organization to exist and disseminate its ideas. We do deny its right to our party's name, standing and assets. The Freedom Socialist Party has always proclaimed its identity as a vanguard-type revolutionary organization in the tradition of the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky; this has always been the standard to which we aspired and we have done our best to maintain the high norms of objectivity, responsibility, self-discipline and accuracy necessary to the integrity and effectiveness of a party seriously involved in the class struggle. Unfortunately, the Statement authors have fallen tragically short in their fidelity to political principle and organizational maturity.

Most of the Statement supporters were at one time associated with the FSP, some of them quite prominently. They constituted a definite minority faction within the party. They are no longer associated with the party; one of their number was expelled from the organization some months ago and the remainder resigned immediately thereafter, voluntarily cutting themselves off from all rights of membership.

This occurred while the FSP was in the process of planning a convention where the differences in the party would be fully discussed and debated, and resolved by a vote -- the Bolshevik process by which a party overcomes an internal crisis and charts a definitive course for itself.

But the minority chose a Menshevik course and stalked out of the party. They began to undergo a series of bewildering identity changes that culminated in an assertion of full rights to the FSP's name, headquarters, funds and other assets. Meanwhile, they had appropriated and spent \$300.00 of FSP money in their possession at the time of their walkout.

Such behaviour has little in common with simple rationality, let alone Leninist organizational norms. If these people seriously wished to represent the FSP, they were obligated to stay inside the party and put up a fight for their ideas, with the purpose of gaining a majority support for their convention resolutions. They rejected this course and thereby negated any and all subsequent claims to represent the FSP in any capacity whatsoever.

It is highly unfortunate that these desertions occurred and that they occurred in such a sudden and hysterical way as to permit no extended pre-convention debate and the formal documents usually entailed. This has permitted the splitters to play fast and loose with the facts,

concealing the deep going differences over political and organizational principles that were decisive in bringing on the split, and inventing post hoc and spurious "explanations" of their peculiar behaviour.

The immediate precipitant of our former comrades' walkout was an attempt by the party to restrain the excesses of a prominent party member who provoked a divorce case involving another equally prominent party member. Far from representing a purely personal contest between two individuals, or a minor incident deserving only of sneers and snobbish contempt, this unprecedented violation of socialist practice and principle on the part of a male party spokesman brought to a head differences within our party that had been smoldering for months.

A Bolshevik party always assumes the right and responsibility of preventing public legal contests between comrades, particularly in divorce cases where questions of property, custody and the rights of women are always at issue -- questions on which socialist equalitarianism differs sharply from the oppressive laws and mores of capitalist society. For a real revolutionist, party norms of human relations represent a higher law than the decisions of the bourgeois court, and the party's decision is binding on the public actions of its members.

In this case, the long-established norms were grossly violated by a leading male comrade who was directed to accept party intervention and arbitration of the disputed issues. He refused to recognize this directive and proceeded with a court case that embodies every reactionary tenet and prejudice of bourgeois male chauvinism. This was a contemptuous challenge to the party's obligation to enforce its own programmatic standards as binding on the public behavior of its members. And it was an especially obnoxious flaunting of discipline for an FSP member precisely because of the great importance our party has always attached to the political issue of women's rights.

The party could have retreated before the challenge, thereby renouncing its integrity, or it could back up its program by insisting on organizational consistency. The party made the right decision; after months of entreating, cajoling and warning the comrade, he was finally expelled, thereby serving notice that the FSP will tolerate open scabbery on the Woman Question no more than it will accommodate a practicing racist or a strikebreaker.

It was this decision that our former comrades could not stand, for it appeared to them as an intolerable and non-political restriction on their freedom! They could not live in an organization that demanded accordance with the rules, respect for decisions, adherence to program in life as well in sophisticated literary commentary, and, finally, real equality between the sexes in the party, with no special supremacist privileges for "acknowledged leaders." Especially not for leaders!

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The internal factional situation in the FSP erupted over the Woman Question and the question of the Nature of the Party. But the differences were hardly posed before the minority, which was predominantly male, exploded in rage and stormed out. Such tremendous heat is seen in politics only in relation to "gut" issues like Black liberation and woman's emancipation, and those radicals who find the FSP split-off incomprehensible are invited to analyze the division in the context of this highly-charged social question of women's rights.

--Submitted by Gus Carlson and  
John Severn, for the Freedom  
Socialist Party, Freeway Hall,  
3815 Fifth Ave. N.E., Seattle  
98105. Me2-7449.

(Two detailed documentary accounts of the split are available to inter-  
ested radicals. Please write or phone FSP headquarters.)

April 8, 1968

## APPENDIX II

Statement by the Freedom Socialist Party  
August 1969

### LESSONS OF THE NOVEMBER, 1968 ELECTIONS

#### I. The Rise and Fall of the Peace and Freedom Party

##### A New Version of the PFP Emerges in Washington

The Freedom Socialist Party was very interested in the Peace and Freedom Party in the course of its reorganization last summer. The old guard Stalinist pacifist leadership was out, and in its place was a section of the student New Left, seeking to utilize the party machinery to overstep the limits of single-issue movements and campus politics, and find a fuller expression of their radicalism and a link with the outside world through the medium of a political party.

This in itself was a step forward, or at least an attempt at a step forward. We saw it as such, but were not prepared to give this new formation our political endorsement until the basic questions concerning its program, class nature and composition, direction, and organizational solidity became clarified.

We knew the basic weaknesses of the student movement: its political and organizational formlessness, its tendency to leap wildly from one course to another, its basic resistance to the concept of class politics. It seemed unlikely that these fundamental weaknesses had been overcome through the organizational conquest of PFP. It seemed much more likely that the new organization would retain the weaknesses of the movement that gave it birth. A principled, consistent, working-class oriented party was not a likely product of the New Left.

Revolutionary socialist principle demands that support may be given to a mass party composed of middle-class elements only if the party's program is anti-capitalist and its candidates responsible to the program. The PFP, from the outset, was led by New Leftists who decisively repudiated both programmatic clarity and organizational discipline, and sought in PFP a political party extension of SDS: an all-inclusive coalition of liberals, independents, radicals and reformers coagulated around a vague minimum program entitling each spokesman to go his own route and do his own political thing. The PFP was a clear example of new-breed reformism, despite the efforts of a small leftwing to inject working class radicalism into this SDS-hippy-old left opportunist political stew.

As revolutionary socialists, we clearly had no role in such a party. At the outset, we gave critical support to Flo Ware's campaign, because she was a Black working class candidate whose political history as an active supporter of previous FSP projects and political campaigns and as a community organizer and militant liberation fighter, indicated to us that her campaign would be distinctive among the general PFP menagerie of political tendencies. Ironically, her campaign turned out to be the most reformist and least militant of them all. She, as an

independent within the PFP, with no grounding in any political organization, fell prey to the worst tendencies of the PFP. Her increasingly conservative political trend since the election campaign has reflected the degenerative effect of being swallowed up in the swamp of reformist multi-class, experimental politics.

### Politics, New Left Style

Our original prognosis for the PFP quickly proved to be very accurate indeed. This was evident in the platform adopted at the Primary Day convention. It became even more clear during the election campaign, and it remained clear in the PFP press and in PFP's general political orientation.

The State platform contained much that was good, even a few planks that could be classed as socialist (workers' control of automation, democratic control of productive forces, etc.). But the main line was not that of a basically socialist party advocating a proletarian struggle for power. Instead, the PFP presented itself as a radical "peoples'" party, aiming to unite a broad, classless movement of those willing to "resist the current direction of American life", who would announce their "opposition to oppression and . . . determination to revitalize democracy".

During the campaign, even this ambiguous platform was shoved into the background, indicating that it was not to be taken seriously. Rather than a party, there appeared a number of individual campaigns whose character was determined by the politics and personality of the individual candidate rather than the party platform.

The various candidates stressed a vague, all-inclusive kind of radicalism, claiming no definite class character. In fact, it was taken as a virtue that the PFP was as yet politically unformed and that its character would be determined by those willing to join it in its unfinished state. "Come join us and we will find a program together" was the real "program" of the PFP as the campaign unfolded. In the place of answers and analysis, the discontented and disenfranchised were offered an experimental search for a perspective. Serious radical politics were eschewed in favor of OEO-style "creativity and innovations"; political education was ignored and "let's take the building" mass actions became the modus operandi of the campaigns.

### After the Elections

Following election day, the PFP still made no progress in its search. Indeed, the process was endless, for the party gave every evidence of having petrified into an unprincipled combination of opportunists; a melange of inveterate impressionists and super-rebels. The prolonged search became an end in itself, and any fixed program was looked upon with aversion, and labeled sectarian and/or dogmatic.

Multi-class, multi-tendency politics raised to the level of a principle -- that was the "new politics" of PFP, exposed in its call for "real reform". The results were confusion, demoralization, frustration, and drift toward various brands of escapism and reformism. All-inclusiveness presumed at least a tacit agreement between all the various political tendencies and groupings that none would carry through a determined struggle for ideological hegemony over the party.

In the face of this gentleman's agreement, no one dared fight to gain programmatic hegemony and make his line predominate. The result was that nothing could be firmly decided, no project involving the party as a whole could be carried through consistently and the program remained an eclectic hodgepodge of fundamentally different political lines. In practice, and finally in theory as well, the party was reduced to its lowest common demoninator, which turned out to be the very liberal reformism it set out to escape.

The internal life of the party centered less and less around the fundamental political questions that threatened to divide it. Instead, the organization became an ingrown social milieu, held together by personal contacts and friendships. Bitter factional conflicts erupted, but these took the form of behind-the-scenes battles between personal cliques rather than open political confrontations. PFP had the choice of either breaking with its multi-class, all-inclusiveness and setting itself on the road to a clear, principled, working class opposition to capitalist politics, or of being inevitably drawn back into the swamp of petty political maneuvering, class collaboration, reformist politics and eventual demoralization and degeneration. The latter course prevailed, soon mercifully ending in death and dissolution of the PFP.

### Could Our Intervention Have Made a Difference?

Our intervention in PFP would not and could not have "saved" PFP from becoming what it was. The entrenched purpose and direction of PFP were contrary -- not just divergent but contrary -- to the basic thrust of principled radical politics.

PFP could only be another failure for the radical movement, because it ignored the most fundamental precepts and all the historical experience of a world revolutionary movement which has seen the rise and fall of precisely this type of ineffectual formation over and over and over again, and found it not only useless to the building of a real revolutionary struggle oriented to taking state power, but the eventual cause of counter-revolution and disastrous defeat. The Peoples' Front is as treacherous in politics as in the anti-war movement; it directly brings on the victory of the far right and the fascists.

Events have shown our analysis of the PFP to be correct, and that is not because we were lucky or because we have ESP. Our predictions were true to life because they were based on political theories that were tested in life, through the accumulated experience of Trotskyism.

The disappearance of PFP would be a tragedy only if its errors are not exposed and if nothing is learned from them. The task before those who participated in the PFP "experiment" is to have the courage to draw the political lessons of the experience and to educate the rest of the movement so that this kind of expensive sport with multi-class politics will not be repeated.

## II. Black Panthers and White Radicals

### Race, Class and Revolution

The Freedom Socialist Party has always upheld the principle of independent working-class political action. To us, the only kind of mass party worth encouraging, supporting and building is one that



clearly represents the independent interests of the exploited, the oppressed, and the minorities, for only this kind of party can connect with the class struggle and move the working class in the direction of an open contest for state power.

Such a party need not be composed primarily of workers, but it must, in its thrust and its program, reflect the primary need of the working class for an independent political organ to serve as a rallying point for the unification of all the oppressed in the struggle against capitalism.

This principle is not grounded in thin air. It derives from the experience of the revolutionary movement, it is implicit in the dialectic of class struggle, and in its essential features it is just as applicable to the capitalist United States as it is to the rest of the capitalist world.

Furthermore, some unique features of American society, arising from the special character of racial oppression in this country, dictate a special form for the emergence of an independent working class movement.

Blacks constitute the largest and most dynamic specially-oppressed minority in the U.S. Their oppression is integral to the whole system of economic and political power relations that comprise American capitalism. For the mass of Blacks, no accommodation with capitalism is possible. Their relegation to the bottom of the social scale, with the whole weight of white society pressing down upon them, keeps them in the lower levels of the working class and a disproportionate force in the ranks of the unemployed. Doubly oppressed -- as Blacks and as workers -- they have no way to break free from their bondage except through revolution.

But the working class remains divided along racial lines. The white workers are permeated with the general racism, which grants them certain privileges, and Black people react accordingly with hostility to the white labor movement. This polarization within the working class creates a terrible obstacle to the development of full class consciousness AMONG BLACK AND WHITE WORKERS ALIKE.

This division must be overcome, but it is extremely unlikely that the initiative will come from within the relatively privileged white sector of the working class, and even less likely that it will come from the student movement, which antagonizes workers by its adventurism and irresponsible compulsion to confrontation. We must look instead to the increasingly radicalized Black movement to provide the political leadership capable of linking the struggle for racial freedom with the struggle of the entire working class for the overthrow of capitalism.

The current mood of suspicion of whites in the ghetto decrees the tactical reality that only a Black revolutionary party can develop the Black cadres needed to form the core of a revitalized American revolutionary movement, serving as a vital transition toward the formation of a mass party of revolution that will unite Black and white on the basis of true equality and mutual power, and move the general struggle to a higher level of revolutionary consciousness and determination.

The emergence of the Black Panther Party was a confirmation of

analysis. Here was a political party arising out of the struggle for Black freedom, anti-capitalist in its ideology, committed to a conception of politics as the guide to revolutionary combat. The Panthers have moved away from simplistic, dead-end nationalism, were beginning to come to grips with the Woman Question, and had articulated as their goal the formation of a Black socialist vanguard party to lead the Black masses who would comprise the advance detachments of the American revolution.

At the time of the election campaign, the Seattle Panthers were relatively inexperienced, unsophisticated, and ideologically untrained. Nevertheless, and despite strong political counter-pressure, they were seriously attempting to develop in the direction marked out by their national leadership, establish themselves politically and organizationally, as the independent, Black, revolutionary vanguard political party. They saw in the local elections an opportunity to appear publicly, in their own name, as a political party with its own line and its own claims to leadership.

Thus they were determined to field their own electoral ticket, with Eldridge Cleaver as their own presidential candidate. They needed this, they were prepared to fight for it, and they had the right to expect the support of their own national organization and the rest of the radical movement.

At the same time, the Panthers were literally fighting for their lives against vicious and unrelenting police repression, which they faced largely by themselves, with only token solidarity from the majority of the radical movement.

#### PFP Prefers to Compete with the Panthers

But the New Left, and particularly the PFP, ignored the urgent necessity of unequivocal support and defense of the Panthers. Rather, they insisted on running their own show and attempting to incorporate the Panthers into their scenario. The PFP treated the Panthers' demand for their own ticket with scorn, labeling it as Black arrogance and separatism, and, united with the Panther national office, represented by none other than Eldridge Cleaver, they maneuvered the Seattle Panthers into a coalition with the Washington State PFP. Cleaver and the Panther national office played into the PFP maneuver by agreeing to "loan" PFP their presidential candidate, thus diluting their own electoral identity and impact, and creating an internal dispute in the Party over this question. The leading spokesmen of the Black Panther Party appeared as the candidate of another party -- the PFP -- but the local Panthers ran candidates for local offices in their own name.

The result, on Primary Day, was a three-way contest among the PFP, the Panthers, and the SWP for the necessary signatures to get on the ballot.

And with all the PFP's rhetoric of support to the Black struggle, when Primary Day came they couldn't so much as put their names on the line for the Panthers, because they were busy across town having their own convention.

## Meanwhile, Back at the SWP . . .

The SWP, with its super-nationalist, separatist approach to the "black nation", was willing to endorse and defend the Panthers but they could not see the Panthers as the potential core of a new revolutionary vanguard that could be instrumental in raising the consciousness of the entire working class, both black and white. So the SWP's support, too, was equivocal. Seeing the Panthers as an exclusively ghetto organization, the SWP felt justified in running its own white-man for vice president! This was designed to appeal to the white movement. And on primary day, they, too, were out mustering bodies to sign their own petition, at their own separate convention. The SWP thus exposed itself and its "support" to the Panthers as separatist, hypocritical, and regressive in nature.

The concept of revolutionary politics as a three ring circus - with various political formations cavorting as ringmasters for various sectors - has never been a part of Leninist tradition. Nor is the notion that the way to support the black vanguard is to build a separate and competitive political party for white folks a bolshevik concept. Support to the vanguard must be direct support to the vanguard, ideologically and organizationally. It is ironic that the SWP, which opposes all-inclusive coalition politics, advocates federated revolution minus the direction of a unified and centralized general staff.

SWP policy deepened the separatist tendencies within the Panther movement, and reinforced the existing obstacles in the path of unity between Black and white revolutionists.

## The FSP Offers All-Out Support

As against the opportunism and cynicism of the SWP, the FSP stood alone in the local radical movement in unequivocal support of the Panthers' campaign. We recognized in practice as well as in theory the first-priority importance of supporting the developing vanguard-- not just the leadership of the "Black revolution", but the key sector of the leadership of the entire revolution.

At the time of the election campaign, the Panthers needed all-out support. They needed technical assistance from honest and experienced revolutionaries in sharpening their campaign program and operation.

For the FSP to have done anything other than support them would have been to betray our own commitment to class politics, our theory of revolutionary integration, i.e., human solidarity within the revolution, and our conception of the decisive nature of the Black liberation struggle and its impact on the overall American revolution.

### III. The View From Today

Weighed in the balance, the campaigns of PFP and SWP did not result in greater solidarity between Black and white radicals, but in the exact opposite -- mutual hostility and suspicion. The majority of white radicals learned little or nothing from the experience. SDS was split between Stalinism, three versions of Maoism, and a welter of other tendencies and independents. Political isolation in the wake of police terror and the desperate new alliance with discredited Stalinism have taken their toll on the Panthers and their periphery. The search-and-destroy security and absolute bureaucratic control imposed on the United Front Against Fascism "conference" in Oakland disoriented Black and white revolutionaries alike, and severely damaged Panther prestige and influence, especially among the most dynamic sector of the movement today-- the women. Demoralization, adventurist moods, and an absence of political perspective are in evidence in the movement as a whole.

The entire radical movement is the loser in the wake of the '68 elections, for an exceptional opportunity to catapult the entire movement to a higher level of programmatic grasp and solidarity was utterly botched. The foundations of a meaningful revolutionary regroupment might have been created through solidarity on the electoral arena that focused on the black power issue, but PFP's empty rhetoric and SWP's self-determination to separate itself out from the paramount issue of Cleaver and the Panthers, reduced the campaign on the left to the same old competitive jockeying for position among different parties.

In retrospect, the 1968 elections proved that experimentalism and going where the action is, no matter what, is a shabby and dangerous substitute for principled politics. Similarly, SWP traditionalism and refusal to come to grips with the central role of the Black struggle in U.S. politics only served to further alienate Black and white radicals. SDS-style blind support to the black vanguard and PL style blind dismissal of the independent aspect of the black struggle are two more avenues of descent into oblivion for everybody.

The current status of the movement only reinforces the long overdue necessity to implement what we in the FSP have long advocated and proclaimed as the only viable road to revolution in the U.S. -- the consolidation of the movement around a Black Marxist cadre which will emerge out of the intersection of "The Negro Question" and "The Woman Question", i.e., the coming together of the two most oppressed sectors in this country.

Events have already clearly demonstrated that black women, the occupants of the lowest rung on the socio-economic ladder, project a special dynamic into the struggle that forces the movement to examine its own dangerous internal contradictions caused by the pressure of the alien capitalist culture bearing down upon the liberation movement. The solidarity of black and white women, recognizing their common misery and common enemy -- capitalist racism and capitalist male supremacy -- is engendering the stresses and strains and debates within

the overall movement which will result in the building of a Black vanguard that is acutely aware of the needs of all the oppressed and brilliantly prepared to be their spokesmen, organizers and leaders.

Women and Blacks together can impart to the movement the urgency of the need for revolutionary change and the stringent self-discipline and "cool" basic to the assembling of a revolutionary army capable of taking the power.

# # # # #

FSP LETTER ON ABORTION LEGALIZATION

Freedom Socialist Party  
Freeway Hall  
3815 Fifth Avenue N.E.  
Seattle, Washington 98105

February 4, 1969

Dear Legislator:

We urge you to support the passage of the proposed legislation to legalize abortion.

The right to abortion is of special importance to poor women, both black and white. To these women, an unwanted child is a virtual guarantee of continuing poverty and despair, whereas the availability of safe abortion frees them from the demoralizing existence of ADC motherhood, and allows them to enter the mainstream of American life as socially productive, economically independent and self-respecting people.

The bill would likewise be a boon to working mothers, who would be enabled to better plan their families and thereby increase their stability and value on the job, a condition that would result in higher pay and more meaningful job opportunities for women in general.

This bill is of no less importance to all children and to all educational institutions. The economic, cultural and emotional deprivation so often the lot of underprivileged children produces a crying and unsolved need for remedial education and special counseling in the schools, and the right of all children to good, integrated education is compromised by the inability to meet these special needs. The legalization of abortion will be a decisive step in equalizing opportunity among children.

Legal and safe abortion is an elementary prerequisite for the liberation of an entire sex; only when woman can regulate and control her production of children will she be freed to help solve the urgent social, political and human problems of this age. But so long as she is fettered and trapped by a purely domestic and breeding function, she remains an infantilized second-class citizen, doomed to dependency, discrimination, and oppression.

This bill reflects the tradition of advanced social thinking in the Pacific Northwest which caused the state of Washington to pioneer in granting women the vote. This bill offers Washington a new historic opportunity to serve again as a model for other states; the passage of this bill will bring prestige and gratitude to its supporters.

Very truly yours,

Robert Patrick, Organizer  
Freedom Socialist Party

## APPENDIX IV

### THE REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO THE UNITED FRONT

(Statement issued by the Freedom Socialist Party to National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism, July 18, 1969, in Oakland, Calif.)

"Victory cannot be won with the vanguard alone. To throw the vanguard alone into the decisive battle, before the whole class, before the broad masses have taken up a position, either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality towards it and one in which they cannot possibly support the enemy, would be not merely folly but a crime."

-- V. I. Lenin, Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

-- Leon Trotsky, The Death Agony of Capitalism

The Black Panther Party deserves the commendation of the entire left for calling this conference. Solidarity in the face of repression is the most urgent need of the movement today, and only the BPP, which is generally recognized as the socialist vanguard of the black liberation struggle, can command the moral authority needed to initiate it.

It would be a grave error to underestimate the dangers inherent in the present attack on the democratic rights of the movement, despite the relative scarcity of openly fascist street gangs. The police have acted in an increasingly fascist-like manner, mounting a wave of brutal assaults on key sectors of the movement, aided and abetted by other governmental bodies with repressive legislation and court injunctions.

Nevertheless, this is not yet fascism. The decisive contest between fascists and revolutionists has not yet occurred. If it had, and fascism were here, this conference could not take place openly and publicly.

The degree of political freedom available at any given time is a resultant of the relationship of political forces, and will grow or diminish in proportion to the intensity of the struggle for democratic rights. There have been no great victories in this area recently, not because of overwhelming pressure from reactionary forces, but because the movement has not yet closed ranks to fight for its rights, while it has mobilized only a fraction of its potential allies.

The United Front should be geared toward forming a broad, mass movement to maintain and extend democracy. There is a base for such a movement in broad layers of the population, especially the super-oppressed - Blacks, women, young people, GI's - who feel an instinctive solidarity with rebels against the system. To make this potential movement a reality, radicals must initiate it, putting themselves forward as the foremost proponents of constitutional rights for the oppressed.

The contempt which many radicals, especially student types, have for such legal methods of struggle is undeserved. Substantial concessions can be won by mass pressure for limited objectives. There is nothing opportunist in this. The needs of the movement correspond to the needs of all the oppressed to secure the fullest possible exercise of democratic rights in order to openly organize themselves to fight the system.

The fight to expand democracy, while monopoly capitalism continually strives to restrict it, is part and parcel of the revolutionary struggle. Any victory raises the fighting spirit of the people who have won it, and provides a lever for moving more to the side of the revolution.

There can, however, be no political concessions to the enemy or to liberal and reformist allies that are drawn into the United Front. Revolutionaries must fight clear of entangling alliances that blur lines of political demarcation. They must continually press for uncompromising opposition to governmental repressions, and must be prepared to carry out the struggle independently beyond the point where the liberals are willing to go.

Full internal democracy should be the rule of any United Front. This is necessary to make room for full ideological confrontation between all tendencies, aiming at the elaboration of a minimal program for the American Revolution and the eventual formation of a party that will unify the scattered detachments of the vanguard in one disciplined organization.

Unity must begin somewhere. The primary objective announced in the call for this conference was community control of the police. In our opinion, too, this is the right place to start.

If there is any place in the U.S. where real fascist terror is a clear and present danger, it is in the Black community. The danger is two-sided. Coming from the outside are the police, while within the community there are various cultural-nationalist, proto-fascist formations which use demagogic appeals for black unity to mask their efforts to smash the socialist vanguard and substitute themselves as rulers of the ghetto in profitable accommodation with the white-capitalist power structure.

To win free of this dual threat, the black community must win the right to police itself; to select its own police and to control them through its own democratically-elected bodies. The struggle for this right can mobilize a key sector of the forces of the American Revolution, building the whole revolutionary movement in the process. Victory would be a decisive step in rolling back fascism and establishing an outpost of power for the oppressed. Such a fundamental change in political power relations in this country could provide a vital link in the transition from capitalism to a workers' power and socialist society.

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Robert Patrick, Organizer

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