

April 6, 1978

TO ALL POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The attached documents are internal SLP material and for the information of PC members only.

The first paragraph of the March 23 letter to Sam Klein refers to a ruling by the NEC Subcommittee that charges could not be entertained by the New York section of the SLP against Arnold Babel because he is a delegate to the upcoming SLP convention. The convention credentials committee (or some subcommittee like that) will make a recommendation on whether or not Babel should be seated as a delegate, censured, expelled or whatever.

The charges against Brinning will result in a trial by the New York SLP section at some point in the indeterminate future.

Syd

March 23, 1973

Mr. Sam Klein  
Organizer pro tem  
Section New York City  
99 Myrtle Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Comrade Klein:

On March 20 I sent you copy of my letter to Comrade Robert Massi conveying the NEC Subcommittee's ruling that the provisions of Article VII, Section 2 of the party's Constitution cannot be waived and explaining the reasons for that conclusion. At the March 17 meeting at which it made the above ruling, the NEC Subcommittee also considered the section's action in arranging a meeting with the New York City local of the Socialist Workers Party as conveyed in copy of Comrade Arnold Babel's March 5th letter to the members of the section. (I also reported to the Subcommittee the gist of the telephone call I made to Comrade Babel upon receipt of copy of that letter.)

In discussing the section's initiative in arranging the SWP meeting, the NEC Subcommittee agreed on a number of points, some of which I had discussed with Comrade Babel, and which we herein convey to the section.

In arranging the meeting without any contact with the national organization, the section was taking initiatives in an area that is of partywide concern. Party-to-party relations, such as those between the SLP and SWP, are not an area in which each section or member is free to make autonomous judgments. They must be guided by the collective policy decisions of the party's governing bodies.

For example, the section is aware that relations with the SWP have been under discussion at the national levels and that the NEC had adopted a resolution in which it stated that "it does not perceive any basis for discussions at any level of a possible fusion of the SLP and the SWP."

It is certainly the right of any section or member to disagree with this resolution and to challenge it in party channels. Members also have the right to argue for a new policy toward the SWP or any other organization.

What a section or member does not have the right to do is to strike out on initiatives of their own without any partywide

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discussion, or to carry out discussions of party policy in this area publicly, or in semi-official or informal contacts with non-members, or in joint party forums.

To some extent, the section seemed to agree with this view in its response to the Spartacist League (SL) several months ago. At that time, Comrade Babel as section organizer responded that it was "our desire at this time to thoroughly explore and challenge our ideas within our ranks before we discuss those views with those outside our ranks." While we thought the SL deserved a sharper response to its "proposal," Comrade Babel's reply did express our common understanding of party norms.

However in supporting the SLP-SWP forum, Comrade Babel wrote that the "two socialist organizations...share significant political views. Perhaps this even extends to basic principles." He also contends rather cryptically that "this meeting is potentially quite significant for us."

But isn't this precisely what those holding such views must prove to our party prior to initiating collaboration? Does not party democracy require an organizational conclusion on a matter that is "potentially quite significant for us" before it is pursued by a local section? The only difference between the SL and the SWP cases appears to be the stronger sympathy of a few section members for the SWP. This is hardly a legitimate basis for taking the discussion outside the party at this time.

It seems apparent that the section has not taken into account some of the implications involved. Over the course of the past year, repeated contacts and initiatives have been made by Section New York City members, particularly involving the SWP. They have established visible contacts which have become generally known both in other areas of the party and in some parts of the left, primarily the Trotskyist left.

As the section probably knows, the SWP and the Militant, the SL and the Workers Vanguard (WV), Sam Brandon and the League for Socialist Reconstruction (LSR), and other organizations and publications have publicly noted these actions, characterizing them in various ways. For example, Brandon implies that they reflect a partywide decision to move toward Trotskyism and an abandonment of De Leonism. The WV speaks of "an active tendency centered in New York openly sympathetic to the SWP." It also reprinted a letter from an ex-SLP'er, Michael Eckert, making several charges against the party in connection with the SWP contacts. The WV also quotes Comrade Brinning as having falsely presented the party's position on the Sadlowski campaign. Brandon has since widely circulated this letter to SLP members and contacts.

We cite these reports here not because we are interested in their accuracy, but because they demonstrate the implications and consequences of the actions in this area taken by some of the New York comrades. They make it clear that this matter is not one of local or individual concern, but a partywide question of policy.

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And while the individuals responsible for giving rise to these reports (true or otherwise) may dismiss their implications, the national organization cannot.

Party members in other parts of the country who have heard the reports or received Brandon's letters have inquired about them to the National Office. Yet because the New York initiatives--and in fact its whole debate over Trotskyism--has been undertaken in an independent, autonomous fashion, without the knowledge of the national organization and without any effort of the New York members to use organizational party channels to open the discussion nationally--we have been unable to respond adequately to these inquiries.

Moreover, we have been unable to secure the cooperation of the New York comrades in order to meet this situation. For example, when in an effort to respond to Brandon's attacks last fall we requested a report from Comrade Brinning, he agreed. But he never sent in such a report and failed to even answer subsequent correspondence. When in November Comrade Babel and I discussed the SWP question, we agreed that it should be fully discussed and referred to the convention, but that further public and formal contacts should yield to internal party discussion. Yet, he too reversed himself, by supporting the latest meeting and pursuing other contacts with the SWP.

It has finally reached a point when we at the National Office have been directly told by SWP representatives that internal section New York matters and contents of party correspondence are openly relayed to SWP members.

Accordingly, we are impelled to take some steps to insure that all contacts with other organizations and all discussion of what our party's policies should be in this area are brought under the control of the party's governing bodies and kept within the organization.

We wish to emphasize that we are not here discussing the substance of the party's policy, but the process of organizational discussion and how it should be pursued.

If there are members in New York who believe the SLP should move closer to the SWP, or adopt Trotskyist positions, their right to argue for their views will be protected. But the party cannot allow this discussion to be pursued publicly, or with non-members or with SWP members. Nor can it allow individual SLP members to associate the SLP with other parties to promote potential fusion at the local level based on their own views before even making any attempt to win the party to such a position.

To that end the section is asked to comply with the following:

1. All discussion of SLP/SWP relations, or similar party-to-party ties, should be kept strictly within the section and discussed in line with party norms covering internal matters.

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2. Neither the section, nor individual members, should make further overtures or arrangements toward exchanges of views with the SWP or other parties between now and the convention. This includes "informal" efforts to promote closer ties between the two parties.
3. Any members who have proposals, polemics or recommendations regarding the SWP, or the party's general policy toward other groups, should prepare them for presentation through normal party channels and submission to the upcoming National Convention. The entire question of the SLP's relation to the left and the SWP in particular will be referred to the convention. Every effort will be made to supply material from members or sections bearing on this matter to the convention delegates as early as possible to permit study.

The Subcommittee will view any future breaches of these measures as a deliberate violation of party democracy and an attempt to circumvent the authority of the upcoming convention. (The above does not apply to routine contacts related to intervention in projects like the anti-Bakke drive, Southern Africa, etc. It is directed specifically at public or external party discussion of our relations vis-a-vis other parties.)

In closing, we wish to offer one general comment. The present section in New York largely involves members who've been embroiled in internal organizational struggle now for several years. The events which led to the exit of many members following the 1977 convention taxed the determination and resources of many of them. The initial response to the challenge of maintaining and rebuilding the SLP in New York was encouraging. Yet within three months the barely regrouped section was plunged into a debate over Trotskyism and the SWP that has apparently paralyzed it and brought rebuilding efforts to a standstill.

We think those comrades who decided at this point in time to press an issue that calls into question the survival of a section that has struggled so hard to protect the party's interests and build a new SLP along with the rest of us, bear a heavy responsibility for the current state of affairs. We do not question their right to press such an issue--(though we obviously question the methods they have used.) But we think those who have made Trotskyism and the SWP the section's main project over the past eight months, instead of contributing to the national effort at intervention and debate on the terms of the '77 convention have made a serious mistake.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter.

By instruction of the NEC Subcommittee,

Fraternally yours,  
  
National Secretary

NX:DGB

cc: A. Babel

126 Bay 41 Street  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

March 15, 1978

Socialist Labor Party  
Section New York City

Re: The bringing of charges  
against James Brinning.

Comrade:

I feel that it is my duty at this time to bring charges against Comrade James Brinning pursuant to the provisions of Article II, Section 29 of the Constitution of the Socialist Labor Party.

I am herein charging Comrade Brinning as follows:

- A. That he has demonstrated extreme disloyalty to the Party;
- B. That he has intentionally engaged in activities purposely designed to destabilize the Party at this crucial time in its history; and
- C. That he has done all of this as a knowing and conscious agency of the policies of the Socialist Workers Party with regards to its plan to push for a fusion with the S.L.P.

The specifications in support of these charges are as follows:

1. At a joint meeting of this Section with a local branch of the SWP, which took place on March 11, 1978, he openly and vigorously defended S.W.P. positions that were being probed by myself and Comrade Ed Leader;
2. He behaved in exactly the same manner at a similar joint meeting held in Philadelphia on December 10, 1977;
3. He has actively hawked individual and subscription purchases of the Militant (the SWP's paper) not only among S.L.P. members but among non-members as well, and he has done so at several fund raising affairs conducted by the S.L.P. in both New York and New Jersey;
4. He has openly advocated S.W.P. positions on various questions in the presence of non-members of the S.L.P. at, among other places, the Mt. Holly Pic-nic conducted by

Section Camden (9/1/77), a Section Passaic social (9/24/77), in a speech given on October 1, 1977 as the Party's mayoral candidate and in the course of campaigning leafletting on the streets of New York during October 1977; and

5. He attended the S.W.P.'s 1977 National Convention as an observer and was present when a member of the S.W.P.'s National Committee (one Larry Siegel) gave a speech in which a possible merger with "certain activist elements within the S.L.P." was mentioned, and he failed to report this immediately to our National Office.

I realize fully that some of the matters raised here are somewhat dated, but I believe that taken as a totality they justify the conclusion that Comrade Brining has been consciously working for the S.W.P. within our ranks.

I respectfully request that these charges be immediately referred to the Grievance Committee.

Fraternally,  
Robert E. Massi





SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY  
National Headquarters  
P.O. Box 10018  
Palo Alto, California 94303

March 28, 1978

To the Delegates to the  
SLP's 31st National Convention

Dear Comrades:

Aside from the usual matters that come before a National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party, there will be several special matters presented to the 31st National Convention to which you have been elected delegates. I believe everyone will agree that these special matters can be handled more efficiently if 1) the delegates are alerted to the fact that such special matters will be coming up for consideration at the convention; 2) the delegates' attention is directed to certain relevant material that ought to be carefully reviewed prior to the convention; and 3) the delegates are supplied with copies of the sections of the National Secretary's report dealing with those special matters as far in advance of the convention as circumstances at national headquarters permit. It is the purpose of this letter to do what is suggested in items 1 and 2.

One question that will come before the 31st National Convention is that of relations between the SLP and the left. Most of you probably are aware that the internal reassessment that has been going on in our party these past two years has attracted attention and elicited responses from various other groups.

For example, the Socialist Party, U.S.A. has commented in its newspaper on the policy changes within the SLP. It has also written the National Office commenting on the Weekly People series dealing with the nature of the U.S.S.R. and suggesting the desirability of a dialogue among the groups and parties it refers to as the "non-Leninist left."

The Spartacist League, a Trotskyist group, recently published a lengthy attack on the SLP in its official newspaper, the Workers Vanguard. At the same time, several of its local groups have sought to engage SLP sections in a debate or discussion of "the differences between De Leonism and Trotskyism."

And there have been others on the left who have become aware and taken note of developments in the SLP. But by far the most extensive response has come from the Socialist Workers Party.

You will recall both from the October 26th National Office general letter conveying the NEC's guidelines on intervention, and from the published proceedings of the 1977 NEC Session, that two representatives from the SWP visited the national headquarters last October and indicated that their party was seriously interested in exploring the possibilities for closer relations with the SLP, even suggesting the possibility of ultimate fusion between the SLP and the SWP. Though our NEC at the last session declared that "it does not perceive any basis for discussions at any level of a possible fusion of the SLP and the SWP," the SWP has continued its overtures during the past several months not only at the national level, but in several areas at the local level. (And, it should be noted, some SLP sections and members have made overtures to the SWP at the local level.)

Within the next week or so, I shall send every delegate a set of letters and documents relating to these developments. This should allow you time to study them carefully prior to the convention and to consider what action should be taken to resolve the issues they raise.

In this connection, I suggest that you familiarize yourselves as fully as the time between now and the convention permits with the activities and views of the SWP through a reading of its offi

newspaper, The Militant, and at least one and preferably both of the following SWP publications: "Prospects for Socialism in America" and "The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution." If not available at a local bookstore, they can be obtained from Pathfinder Press Inc., 410 West Street, New York, NY 10014. They are priced at \$2.95 each.

In short, the question of the SLP's relations with the left generally and with the SWP in particular will have to be fully and carefully considered and definite policy steps taken by the 1978 National Convention.

Another question that will be raised and should be fully discussed is the Russian question. This will involve reviewing the party's policy on the U.S.S.R. and its attitude toward the various other theories advanced by the left (e.g., state capitalism, deformed workers' state, etc.). It will also involve a discussion of the party's history on the question. Among the decisions that need to be made is whether to publish in pamphlet form the two recent Weekly People series dealing with different aspects of the Russian question.

On this subject, I urge every delegate to reread both the party's already published literature ("Proletarian Democracy vs. Dictatorships and Despotism," "Stalinist Imperialism," "Marxism vs. Soviet Despotism," the relevant sections of "The SLP and The Internationals," the appendix to "The Struggle Against Opportunism" and "After the Revolution Who Rules?"), and the two series on the nature of Soviet society and the U.S.S.R. and the SLP--plus the article on De Leon and the 1905 Revolution--which appeared in the Weekly People issues of November 26, 1977 through January 7, 1978.

It would also be worth the time and effort to reread the reviews of Maruice Brinton's "The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control" (Weekly People, March 19, 1977) and Hedrick Smith's "The Russians, Rulers and Ruled" (Weekly People, July 9, 1977).

Finally, there are the comments on the nature of the U.S.S.R. in the SLP Newsletters of March/April 1977 (No. 3); May/June 1977 (No. 4); and August 1977 (No. 6) that you may find it useful to review.

Still another question that should be carefully considered and on which a clear party policy should be enunciated by the convention is the Mideast question. I suggest you reread the editorials on the Mideast in the Weekly People issues of November 20, 1974, December 31, 1977 and April 1, 1978. I shall send you shortly copies of two letters in which the Mideast question is discussed by NEC members Bernard Bortnick (Region 7) and Robert E. Massi (Region 2).

I remind you, too, of the NEC's Resolution on Organizational Norms and Procedures. Those proposed procedures, which were published in full in the November 1977 issue of the SLP Newsletter, were referred to the 1978 National Convention by the NEC for final consideration and action. Accordingly, every delegate should be prepared to consider and act on them.

There probably will be matters relating to the operations at national headquarters and to the party's executive set-up that will come before the 1978 National Convention. I suggest, therefore, that you may wish to review Section Allegheny's proposal for party reorganization that was published in the May/June 1977 issue of the Newsletter and the additional comments on that proposal in the July and August issues of the Newsletter.

As to item 3 mentioned in the first paragraph of this letter, I shall make every effort to complete the sections of my report that will relate to the special matters mentioned above, as well as any other substantive question or issue, in time to have copies made and forwarded to each of you by the first week in May.

To the delegates

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March 28, 1978

One caution: this letter and the material and documents that will be sent you in advance of the convention are not for general circulation. They are for your specific information as elected delegates to that convention. This is not to imply that they are secret documents, or that delegates should not--if they wish--discuss the important questions they involve with party members. I will state frankly, however, that this caution is prompted by evidence that in recent months the contents of letters intended for the members and subdivisions, and possibly copies of the letters themselves, have been available to sources outside the party--including other organizations.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter and of all material that will be sent you as delegate in the days ahead.

Fraternally yours,

National Secretary

NK:DGB