

X:PC

NOV 10 1978

Bill Breihan
1571 S. 15th St.
Milwaukee, Wis. 53204
Milw. branch
November 7, 1978

Comrades,

Enclosed is some recent correspondence between the Milw. branch and a leader of the Debs Caucus in Ann Arbor. The matter of "agent-baiting" is in the process of being cleared up. We are bending over backwards to maintain a conciliatory attitude toward members of the Debs Caucus. This charge of "agent-baiting" is a totally contrived and phony one. But it needs to be removed as a obstacle to further serious political discussion with the Debs Caucus. Hence, the tone of my letter to Bruce Richard.

Comradely,

Bill Breihan

Bill Breihan

Bruce Richard
420 Detroit St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
November 3, 1978

Dear Comrade Alexandra,

I'm sorry I've haven't written sooner in reply to your letter of Oct. 6, but (as you can understand) events have kept me pressed for time over the past month. Also, I'm sorry I missed speaking with you at the SL forum Oct. 28. (I was sidetracked into a discussion and by the time I got free you and your comrades had gone).

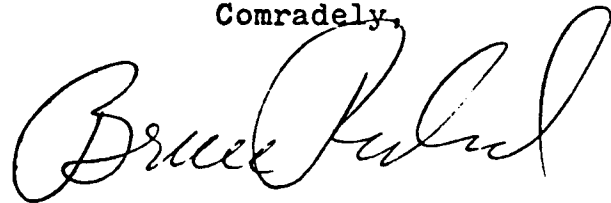
Your comrade Denis Hoppe of Ann Arbor YSA proposed a series of joint SP-YSA discussions on the history of the socialist movement in America at our last local meeting. (I've enclosed a copy). We are still discussing among ourselves some ideas for changes in the series, and hope to get back to him next week.

I would be very interested to hear any reactions you or your comrades had to the Oct. 28 SL forum (either to the actual subject of the forum or to SL's behavior there). I was somewhat disappointed that a debate didn't take place between you and the SL, but then I'm not sure what your discipline requires in such situations.

Also--I'm not sure how to raise this, but we heard from one of our comrades in Milwaukee that a member of the SWP accused Tom Spiro of being some kind of agent for the SL (or of operating under their discipline). I don't know how much you know about the current SP faction fight, but agent-baiting (and Trotsky-baiting!) has been one of the favorite tools of the SP right (I've enclosed a page from an SP right-wing factional bulletin to give you an idea of what's been going on). We would be very disturbed to know that SWPers were doing the same kind of thing. Perhaps you could tell me more about this situation.

Again, I'm sorry I've delayed writing you so long. Hope to hear from you soon.

Comradely,



Bill Breihan
1571 S. 15th St.
Milwaukee, Wis. 53204
(Milwaukee SWP)
November 6, 1978

Dear Comrade Bruce,

Alexandra Topping showed me today your November 3 letter to her. I would like to respond to the two questions you raise in that letter: (1) the charge of "agent-baiting" and (2) our reaction to the October 28 Spartacist League (SL) forum in Milwaukee. My response to this second question will be brief. Due to considerations of time, the lengthy response required will have to be deferred to a second letter.

Now, concerning the charge of "agent-baiting". It is necessary that I respond to this charge since I am undoubtedly the suspect "agent-baiter" in question.

The issue of agent-baiting is, as you correctly point out, a serious one. It certainly is not now, and has never been, the practice of the SWP to engage in such activity.

Let me start off by stating that I (nor any other member of the SWP, to my knowledge) has ever accused comrade Tom Spiro of "being some kind of agent for the SL (or of operating under their discipline)." I did, however, make the statement to Tom, in the course of an unfortunately very heated exchange on October 31, that I thought he "was being fed questions by the Sparts" at a October 27 Militant forum sponsored by the Milwaukee SWP. (Tom was present at that forum as were seven members of the SL.)

That statement was a very unfortunate one. I am willing to retract it and make a public apology to comrade Spiro if that seems necessary. In fact, I called Tom twice the next day (November 1) to make a retraction and offer an apology, but was unable to reach him. Since Alexandra was going to see Tom that same night, I asked her to express my apology to him. She did. I have not seen Tom recently, so I have been unable to discuss the matter with him. I will send a copy of this letter to him. Hopefully that will help to clear up this matter somewhat.

Let me explain what took place in my discussion with Tom on the night of October 31 that led me to lose my temper and make a comment to him that is, on reflection, most certainly an incorrect one.

After a public candidates' forum at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in which the SLP, SWP and SP candidates spoke, Tom, three other SPers, and five members of the SWP went to the local tavern. We drank some beer (not a good medium for serious discussion) and started talking politics. In the course of that discussion (and the one that preceded it after the forum), Tom and two other SPers raised a whole series of charges against the SWP: that we are undemocratic and bureaucratic, that we turned the names of dissident party members over to the government, that we are "reformist", "social-democratic" and "opportunist", that we "scab" on strikes, so on and on. Now, I've read every issue of Workers Vanguard for the last three years, and I've read it off and on since 1971. I know all

of the scurrilous and slanderous charges that the SL has made against the SWP. Tom was repeating these same charges, one by one, as though they were gospel truth. He was even using SL formulations and terminology.

It is, of course, understandable that someone generally unfamiliar with the methods of the SL might have some serious questions about the character of the SWP after reading WV or talking to SL members. Tom, however, appeared to have no questions. He made only accusations. I and another member of the SWP tried to answer these charges. But each answer was followed by yet another slander from the pages of WV. The discussion became a very heated debate. At that point, I lost my temper somewhat and made the above statement. Tom then accused me of "agent-baiting", broke off the exchange, and stormed out of the room. He was furious.

My comment that Tom was "being fed questions by the Sparts", though certainly incorrect, is not the same as accusing him of being "some kind of agent for the SL (or of operating under their discipline)". No such charge was made or even implied. This evidently was only Tom's own interpretation of what I had said. The last thing I said to Tom as he walked out of the room was that I was not calling him an agent of the SL. He obviously did not accept my explanation.

Your sensitivity to the question of agent-baiting is quite understandable given the record of the SP right wing. I am acquainted with their methods. You note in your letter that "we would be very disturbed to know that SWPers were doing the same sort of thing." Well, I am very disturbed that you might think that our methods are the same as those of your factional opponents. I hope that this brief explanation is acceptable to you and clears up the matter. If not, let me know.

Concerning your second question--what reactions we "had to the October 28 SL forum(either to the actual subject of the forum or to the SL's behavior there)." First, in regard to the actual subject of the forum. Seymour's presentation was a quite interesting overview of the debates that have taken place in the Trotskyist movement over the years on the "Russian question". He did, however, drift far afield of this subject in his talk.

I'll make only this brief comment on the SL charge that the SWP has abandoned defense of the Soviet Union: it is untrue. I'm enclosing a xerox of a short letter Cannon wrote from Sandstone prison in late 1944 on the relationship of "active slogans" to "program". You can see by this letter that for Cannon (and the SWP) the slogan "Defend the Soviet Union" is not any sort of sacred cow. It is not the central slogan for Trotskyists at all times and in all circumstances. The SL claims to be the only true "Cannonites". The SWP and Cannon, you see, abandoned Cannonism in the early 1960's. But you can see by the enclosed letter that Cannon's approach varies greatly with the doctrinaire and formalist methodology of the SL (on the "Russian question" as well as other questions).

As to the "behavior" of the SL at the forum: Those of us acquainted with the functioning methods of the SL were not surprised at the

way they carried on. This is simply how the SL operates. When you've seen them in action a number of times (in coalitions, at public meetings and demonstrations, etc.), you become accustomed to their 'politics of denunciation'. The shock effect tends to wear off.

What was the SL trying to accomplish by that forum (the first they've ever held in Milwaukee)? The answer is simple and it needs to be clearly stated. The SL wants to drive a wedge between the SWP and the Debs Caucus. They want to bloc any moves toward fusion between our two tendencies by any means necessary. A SLer told me after the forum that they want to break down any "illusions" Debs Caucus supporters have in the 'revolutionary integrity' of the SWP; this as a first step toward recruiting a few of your members to the SL.

There is simply no way for me to answer all of the charges raised against the SWP at that forum, short of writing a small book. In a subsequent letter I will, however, attempt to deal with as many of these charges (and slanders) as possible.

You note in your letter that you were "somewhat disappointed that a debate didn't take place between you and the SL." A debate was impossible at that time for a couple of reasons: (1) As I noted at the forum, members of the SWP at that event were not authorized to engage in a public debate with the SL. The SWP places groups like the SL and the Workers League (WL) in a separate category from other tendencies on the left. Groups such as SL and WL have a publicly declared goal, which they regularly repeat in their press, of destroying the SWP. They say that the SWP is one of the (if not the) central obstacle to the making of the American socialist revolution. It must, they say, be destroyed, broken up, and the few salvageable elements that remain, won to the SL or the WL, whichever the case may be. We, of course, are not particularly keen on doing anything that might aide these groups in accomplishing their goal. So, our relations with them tend to be somewhat less than cordial.

Whether or not to engage in a public debate with the SL is simply not a question that an individual member of the SWP is free to decide on her or his own. This is especially true when relations with a third group (in this case, the Debs Caucus) are involved. If the SWP leadership decides that such a debate is worthwhile, it will take place. Not otherwise.

(2) The atmosphere at the October 28 SL forum was not very conducive to a calm and dispassionate discussion of differences and areas of agreement between the three organizations present. It was rather like a public trial of the SWP. First, the indictment. Then several hours of testimony from "hand-picked" witnesses (the 20 SLers). And then finally, the verdict: guilty as charged. After all this, SWP members present were given a full ten minutes to state any last words before the carrying out of the sentence. In sum, it was not an atmosphere in which a reasoned exchange of views between revolutionaries could have occurred.

This letter has ^{become} quite long. I think I'll break it off here and con-

4
tinue on this subject in a second letter. If you have any comments on the points I've raised, please respond when you find the time.

Comradely,

Bill Breihan

Bill Breihan

cc: Tom Spiro, Joel Miller, Tony Prince (Milw. SWP organizer),
National Office-SWP, Denis Hoppe (Ann Arbor YSA organizer)

* "The art of politics consists in
knowing what to do next" *

* October, 1944 *

Excellent critique of sectarian
methodology of - Spartacist League (eg.)
- on question of slogan of "Defend Soviet
Union", etc.

Letter 104-B

Sandstone, October 1, 1944

I finished Volume 6 of Grote and *Pictures in the Hallway*. This is the second volume of O'Casey's autobiography and nothing much has happened yet. These writers seem to take a lot of words to tell about themselves.

* * *

Continuing: Our "Russian" policy, however, is only one section of a complete program based on a fundamental class concept and a world view. Our active political slogans of the day must always be consistent with our general program and express *that phase of it* which has the greatest urgency at the moment. It is important always to keep in mind this subordinate relationship of active slogans to the program as a whole and not to identify the one with the other. Serious politics is impossible without a firm program of Marxist internationalism; those who dispense with this chart produce nothing, as we have seen, but speculation, guesswork and irresponsible experimentation. *

We do not change our program. No amount of criticism and impatience can modify our "conservatism" in this respect. But to stand firmly by the program, naturally, does not authorize us to repeat the same active political slogans all the time with the same degree of emphasis. That would reduce the art of politics to memory work and, as the Old Man once remarked, make every sectarian a master politician. The art of politics consists in knowing what to do next; that is, how to apply the program of Marxism to the specific situation of the day.

We do not change any of our slogans insofar as they represent, each in its own way, the various sections of our complete program. But if we are alive to the complexities and quick changes in the world political situation as well as that at home, we must always be ready to change the *emphasis* with which we advance one or more slogans while holding others more or less in reserve as the situation may require.

We think Aunt's letter must be considered from this point of view. When the Nazi military machine threatened the destruction of the Soviet Union every communist had to put the slogan of the defense of the Soviet Union in first place. Those who denied this defense were then no longer comrades having a different opinion on a theoretical question, as Morrison still wants to treat them, as if nothing had happened, but people on the other side of the barricade with whom comradesly arguments were out of season.

But this fight for the defense of the Soviet Union against Nazi militarism has been decisively won. The problem will most probably arise again, with another power in place of the Nazis, but that will take some time. The political reality of the present day is: The military, economic and moral collapse of the Hitler "new order in Europe" which some people, even in our own ranks, took far too seriously; the military occupation of the continent by Anglo-American and Soviet troops; the indicated beginning of a workers' revolutionary movement and the conspiracy of the imperialists to crush it with the active aid of the Stalinists. Our active slogans, the slogans which we put in first place and *emphasize* in all our agitation, must correspond with this political reality.

In our opinion there can be no question of abandoning the slogan of the defense of the Soviet Union; in principle it retains all its validity and will most likely acquire burning urgency again at a later stage of events. But to continue to shout this slogan in the present situation would be the greatest political ineptitude, putting us out of tune with events.

All our *emphasis* now must be placed on the *defense*

of the European Revolution against the conspirators. Our program gives us all the guidance we need, first to evaluate the problem theoretically, and on that basis to deduce the appropriate active political slogans of the day. (I will send some notes on this in my next letter.)

N.B.
James
Robertson

Joel Miller in Electoral Alliance with Trotskyists

Notice - This is a factional bulletin published by ex-National committee member Virgil Vogel. Note mentions of "Frank Turner"

THE MILITANT/SEPTEMBER 29, 1978

19

SWP and SP Campaign in Milwaukee

A dozen activists from the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party, USA, campaigned door to door in Wisconsin's 9th State Senate district on Saturday, September 9. The SP is running Joel Miller in the 9th District. Adrienne Kaplan and Bill Breihan, SWP candidates for governor and lieutenant governor, are calling for a vote for Miller.

Socialist campaigners will continue joint campaigning each Saturday between now and the November elections.



JOEL MILLER

a result of SWP penetration. (Nashville also had an FBI stool, member, Bruce Richards, an acknowledged Trotskyist, taken up 12 pages of the summer issue of *NYT* with Trot propaganda. The Trot bulletin *Impressor* has been used as the basis for several stories in the Socialist Tribune. The Manhattan Local endorsed a Trot candidate for mayor of New York.

In 1937, Trot penetration caused the loss of 60% of the membership of the Young People's Socialist League, and did great havoc in the C.P. James J. Cannon, founder of the SWP, wrote of negotiations for merger with the SP in 1946: "Trotskyist will do anything for the party, even if he has to crawl on his belly in the mud." After a few months of unity, a split was forced, and Cannon wrote that the Trots had greatly weakened the SWP. Speaking with Leon Trotsky about the total results of our entry into the Socialist Party and the pitiful results of the organization afterward, Cannon wrote, "Trotsky said that alone would have justified entry into the organization even if we hadn't gained a single new member." Cannon concluded: "Every other party is a rival. Every other party is an obstacle." Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, [1941], pp. 226, 242-43.

One of the favorite tactics of the Trots is to discredit democratic socialist leadership. Thus the *NYT* in 1976 editorially accused Frank Zolner, who has an impeccable civil rights record, of being a "racist." Joel Miller implied that Zolner was a "dog" for particular attack at the 1977 SWP national convention in his recent call for a "dog" attack.

Corn Cob Award



BUILDING A MASS SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN AMERICA RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

The following is a list of events and discussions which the Ann Arbor YSA would like to work on jointly with comrades in the Ann Arbor SP. The last three classes deal with the interaction of American Trotskyism and the American Social Democracy and would be particularly helpful for our political education. In cases where the "required readings" are long, the first few pages of the long set are the crucial parts.

Nov. 4 SWP Campaign Rally in Detroit(6:30) The Ann Arbor YSA invites all members of the SP to this rally and we will make sure you get there and back.

Nov. 12 YSA Internal Educational on the Transitional Program for Black Liberation; speaker Fan Baily(Detroit SWP) All comrades are invited. Time to be set.

Nov. 26--or Tues. Nov. 28

Class I. The roots of American Communism. The IWW, De Leon, the Socialist Party of Debs. The 1919 Left-Wing split in the Socialist Party and the founding of the American Communist Party.

Required readings: "Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Movement of His Time," J.P. Cannon in The First 10 Years of American Communism pp.245-276, pp. 95-97

Suggested: Cannon, History of American Trotskyism, pp.1-40

Friday Dec. 3--or Tues. Dec. 5

Class II. The Socialist Party in the 1930's. The Minneapolis Division(1934). Communist League of America's fusion with the Workers Party of A.J. Muste. The "French Turn" and entry into the SP. The International Events and their impact on the radical movement and the Trotskyists. The expulsion from the CP(1936-1937)

Readings: History of American Trotskyism, pp. 216-256
Struggle for a Proletarian Party pp.1-85,
pp. 7-8, pp. 47-48.

Suggested: History of American Trotskyism pp.139-216

Class III. Prospects for Socialism in America. The Revolutionary perspective for the U.S. Trotsky on the U.S. The Uneven and combined development of the radicalization of the 1960's and '70's. The nature of the CP, SP, and the centrist and ultraleft currents in current American politics. The need for a mass socialist movement. The 1975 and '77 conventions of the SWP.

readings: Barnes, Waters, et. al. Prospects for Socialism in America pp. 77-78, p.124-26, p.121 pp. 236-238

"Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's
Liberation" Draft Resolution for Fifth World Congress
Since Reunification (11th World Congress), submitted by
the United Secretariat. SWP International Internal
Discussion Bulletin.

Article: Cannon "The Revolutionary Perspective for the
United States" Education for Socialists, SWP,
14 Charles Lane, N.Y., N.Y. 10014

Jobbs, Farrell. The Structure and Organizational
Principles of the Party. Education For Socialists,
SWP.

The Organizational Character of the Socialist Worker.
Part IX Education For Socialists, SWP, 14 Charles Lane,
N.Y., N.Y.