

DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 12 OF 16

FOLDER 7

NATIONAL INTERIM
COMMITTEE POLICY
DISCUSSION 1974

Moreover, recognition of the constant pressures which tend to undermine revolutionary commitment also unearths a set of feelings many share on the left, which create a widespread need for a party defined in "revolutionary" terms: especially after the isolation and fragmentation on the left in the last several years, revolutionaries want a "home" of sorts, a medium through which we develop as self-conscious revolutionaries, learn new methods of work and new skills, and receive support and criticisms.

Yet the solution to such problems -- to the needs to resist reformist pressure, to develop the party in revolutionary directions, to sustain and develop our own revolutionary commitment -- does not lie in attempts to come up with the correct politics in a mass party from the beginning. It lies instead in the constant dialogue between ourselves as open, democratic revolutionaries on the one hand, and masses of people, in motion around diverse issues, with widely varying backgrounds, on the other. Most people, outside and inside the new party, will become open to revolutionary perspectives as they hear them voiced in the context of a movement which fuses and clarifies the class basis of the now fragmented strands of revolt. To furnish the continuing catalyst for such class clarification and such a vision, and to build the coherent revolutionary "home" to sustain our work, a self-consciously revolutionary element will be necessary in any new party. Such a force would not operate in the traditional fashion -- as a secret cadre force, which hides its political perspectives. Rather it would openly and clearly explain its revolutionary vision, operate in a democratic and open way, in plain view of the other constituencies in a party, and constantly seek to tie its vision to a class perspective on all the issues the party addresses. Specifically, in any authentically mass party, we should suggest that NAM retain its organizational integrity, and join with other groups of similar perspective.

A new party should not be founded as a "revolutionary party," nor proclaim its intentions in traditional kinds of left speak. The real "revolutionary step" at the present time (over the next several years) would be creation of a party which breaks the Democrats and expresses the anticorporate sentiment which rages among the population in clear and "ordinary" language." I appreciate the boldness, optimism and imagination that have gone into the pieces on a new party which I have seen, but I have been simultaneously dismayed by the style and tone which pervades them. They are full of rhetoric, of "musts" and "shoulds" and declarations which sound belligerent and escatalogical ("it avoids being the party of small changes...we pledge... our lives" etc). In particular, the proposed statement of agreement reflects the kind of purity which simply will not speak to the fears and discontents of most Americans, nor to those specifically who are now increasingly restive in the Democratic Party. It is not a piece I could comfortably give to old friends and activists I know in southern cotton mills, in black communities, in welfare rights groups. It will not appeal to the environmentalists, civil libertarians, anti-militarists, rank and file workers, activist students outside the left, who are nonetheless now furious and open to new directions. For the documents a new party produces, as well as the practice it undertakes, should be far more "outwardly" oriented than the traditional practice of the left; through our tone and language, we need to understand the fears and diverse needs which now move people, the difficulty involved in breaking with established patterns. And we need to respect the long and complicated process people undergo as they are radicalized, the deep needs for reassurances and community as well as militancy and expressions of anger, the need for a focus on the mundane and concrete as well as the visionary.

too little attention to the process through which the now fragmented and many-sided perceptions people have about their pain and frustration become coherent, clarified, and directed at the source -- the capitalist system itself. Yet only through such a revolutionary process, which fuses the diverse strands of discontent in the society against a common enemy, and contrasts the present with the promise of democratic socialism, will a massive revolutionary movement develop. It is this focus on process which should distinguish any efforts to build a new party. Such an approach is quite different than the effort to guarantee "correct politics" by our initial purity. But in building a new party, it is equally important to develop strategies for countering the historic sources of reformism in socialist movements. There are three that are key: the danger of rigid hierarchy and control of the new party by leadership with vested interests in the existing society; the tendency for a party's practice to become defined in electoral terms; and the tendency for a party's anti-capitalist focus to become blurred under the pressures toward "accommodation" and "responsibility."

1) As Ron Radosh argues in the latest Socialist Revolution, it is essential to distinguish between grass roots liberals, who will support a new, anti-corporate party in huge numbers if we don't chase them away, and the ideologues of liberalism. The former are oppressed in multiple ways by capitalism and will become more and more radicalized through participation in the revolutionary process. The latter, on the other hand, have vested interests in stability and order: the leadership of trade unions, tenured professors, independent professionals are more in the position of the traditional "petty-bourgeoisie"; oppressed by capitalism, but also in a position which has status, power and often great affluence. Moreover, especially in the case of trade union officials, they are charged with carrying out policies and protecting an institution--the union -- which perform ambivalent functions; as many leftists observe, unions both defend workers' interests and integrate workers' struggles into the rules of the capitalist enterprise. Historically, trade union (and parliamentary delegations') control over labor and social democratic parties has been probably the single most important source of their reformist evolution. To counter such a tendency, a new party must be founded with elaborate mechanisms to foster the most vigorous internal democracy, including multiple channels of communication and multiple media, collective leadership, single-person (as opposed to bloc) membership, and active caucuses.

2) Frank Ackerman's reply to Kinoy begins to outline an "activist" party model in contrast to the traditional alternatives: parties defined primarily as electoral, on the one hand, or as tight conspiratorial groups on the other. Such an activist party is self-organizing, the formal expression of the much broader and many-sided social movement it constantly seeks to bring into being. It is an important alternative to a party based simply on piecemeal reform or one which eschews "small changes" (and thus has little chance of reaching most Americans, who will never live by visions alone). It undertakes struggles and builds campaigns which win real transfers of power and resources to the people, at the expense of the ruling class. Indeed, the way to build a new party might best be for a network of groups to undertake major organizing campaigns in the next couple of years, e.g. struggle for public control over energy, fights against social service cutbacks and expanded military expenditures.

3) Finally, whatever the internal democracy of a new party, and however skillfully it builds massive class movements, it is not guaranteed "spontaneous" development in a revolutionary direction. Like its individual members, it will experience constant pressure toward moderation.

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time? These are difficult questions, and the following suggestions are meant to stir discussion and dialogue about how to proceed.

It is an old debate. Engels, for instance, chided sectarian American socialists in 1888 with the comment, "a bona fide workingmen's party is worth infinitely more in the present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinally perfect platform." Similarly, Lenin at the second congress of the Comintern in 1920 appalled the staunchly revolutionary American delegation by advocating that they join with progressives, liberals, and the unions in a new labor party. And the argument has by no means been one way; the left response has always been compelling, as a counter to such "pragmatism" -- it has pointed to the long history of socialist and labor parties which have turned reformist or worse; it has used the words of Marx and Engels and Lenin to support the necessity for sharp ideological "clarification" and struggle. Furthermore, as we contemplate building a party in the seventies, we have the immediate legacy of the last decade to fuel our emotions. The new left developed in many ways as a revolt against liberalism. We watched in growing dismay and anger as a "liberal" administration allowed civil rights activists to be beaten up and killed in the south. We saw another "liberal" -- Johnson -- savagely escalate the war in Vietnam. We heard "liberal" administrators confuse and mystify student demands. And thus we came to understand "liberalism" as not simply a bridge between capitalism and an authentically democratic and humane society, but as a weapon of the system, a mystification of real struggle and a way of defusing and absorbing the impulse toward liberation.

The historic left defense against pressures toward reformism has been the demand for clearly worked out political principles, especially in the case of party building. A party must, in this view, embody from the beginning a "revolutionary politics" -- a program for seizing state power. And the contemporary left operates on the basis of the same assumptions: everyone in left circles has had endless experience with the effort to hash out detailed points of unity, or the "correct position." The materials on a new party operate on such assumption, too, even while they try to reach an audience broader than the self-conscious left. For instance, Arthur Kinoy's piece in many respects attempts to transcend the old categories; yet its language and style is still addressed to other leftists. And implicit throughout his article is the assumption that a new party -- from the beginning -- will embody the politics and style of a "revolutionary" party. The contradiction between such an assumption and his desire to reach new constituencies creates a tension throughout, that others quickly pick up on. For instance, Aronowitz's reply eschews the need to "fudge" revolutionary perspectives, and suggests the new party be quite open about revolutionary guidelines for work in unions and other arenas. Similarly, the Motor City Labor League calls for an openly revolutionary party.*

But the effort to guarantee revolutionary politics by crystallizing a revolutionary code from the beginning suffers from the same misunderstanding of the revolutionary process which has historically plagued the left: most people do not suddenly become revolutionary after hearing the good word, nor even by seeing it in action. The left has given far

*A digression on the word socialism: I don't think the word will turn out to be a key issue in a new party, except in the initial discussions. Over time, the victory of "pro-socialist" forces is assured. Any new party will have to develop a collective vision, to contrast with the presently capitalist ~~xxxxx~~ course in the nation that seems so ~~irrational~~ to most people; a vision of a cooperative, democratic socialist alternative will meet with wide-spread approval, and there is ample evidence that the word is no longer so frightening. The real fight will be about what "socialism" means, and how to get there.

Some thoughts on a new party, and criticism of old assumptions
Harry Boyte 2/11/74

For most of us, our interest in a new party stems from our sense of the massive discontent throughout the society, our feeling that huge numbers of Americans are open to new perspectives in an unprecedented fashion, our dismay at the present self-enclosure and fragmentation of the left, and our conviction that a more unified left presence could redefine the political landscape and language of America in exciting ways. Yet in thinking about a new party, there is an immediate and ironic contradiction. On the one hand, if one says that a new party must reach and involve working people not previously involved in the left, that we must, as a central part of the process of party building, learn to speak in ways that respect and value the constituency we would reach, there is wide agreement. And such agreement holds, for most who would form a new party, even if one adopts a broad and realistic definition of "working people" that includes housewives, white collar and service workers, teachers, technicians, etc as well as industrial workers -- there is growing realization that a revolutionary movement and a party must speak to the multi-dimensional nature of oppression in this society, and not to material hardship alone, nor view industrial workers as a "special" part of the working class (though it is equally a mistake to underplay the importance of material suffering, and of industrial workers). Thus in concrete terms the constituency we must reach if we are to form a successful "mass party" is that huge infrastructure of activists which now exists in rank and file caucuses and progressive union circles, in environmental, civil liberties, anti-war groups, in community organizations, in civil rights groups and women's collectives, etc.

But on the other hand, if we substitute the word "liberals" for the words "working people" in the above proposition, if we say that we have to learn to speak to "liberals" in a way they can understand, that we should refrain from immediately demanding compliance with our values and perspectives, then there is of course a very different emotional reaction. The irony is that the "activist infrastructure" of working people we would reach is over-whelmingly "liberal": they think of themselves as liberal, they identify with liberal values -- above all they focus on winning real reforms, on being realistic and "practical." They have a strong need to be taken seriously; they are somewhat frightened by and turned off by words like "revolution," "class struggle," "imperialism," and "ruling class." What is at work here is a conflict between different ways we have of seeing the world -- in class terms on the one hand, and in moral and ideological terms on the other, the legacy of our experiences in the last decade, and throughout the left's history.

There is a reply, of course -- that we shouldn't appeal to people-as-liberals, but rather as-workers. And there is much truth in this view: a new party will have to transcend and redefine all the old categories, and be built along clearly class lines, which array the mass of people against the corporate elite. Nonetheless, reality does not admit of such fine distinctions between parts of people's lives -- those who might join a new party as working people are also likely to think of themselves as "liberal" and "practical" for some time to come. We cannot hope in reality to involve large numbers of activist working people, people outside the present narrow boundaries of the left -- if our rhetoric and approach simply dismisses the values of "liberals" with contempt, or if we seek initial agreement to "our" political positions as the basis for working unity. What approach might we develop to party building which holds some chance of involving massive numbers of those who are increasingly restive? And what would guarantee that a new party which did involve such constituencies could develop in a revolutionary way over

National Interim Committee for a Mass Party of the People
156 Fifth Avenue, Room 812
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212-243-0591

March 12, 1974

Dear NIC members,

Enclosed are the minutes from the Sunday part of our March second and third meeting. The Saturday minutes should be coming soon but the most important decisions from Saturday were recapped on Sunday so you will get that summary from the enclosed.

One of the things that was stressed on both days was the need for a two or three page call or manifesto which could be given to people at all the levels of organizing which are outlined in the Plan of Work. (Copies of that should be available soon, but for now it is summarized in the Sunday minutes.) When Lillian and Arthur met with Howard Zinn and others in Boston, Howard agreed to draft a call; and at our meeting we agreed that Owen and Arthur would take a first crack at editing and/or changing it if necessary. The results of their work will be sent to you as soon as they are done, but for now we thought you might be interested in seeing Howard's draft. When he gave it to us he emphasized that it is a very rough, first draft. He also pointed out that it is difficult to write something that can be used for mass distribution, but that would also have enough substantive content to give organizers and activists a good idea of the kind of party we have been talking about. My own personal feeling is that it might not be possible to do both in the same document and that we should be open to considering having two. But for now, here is Howard's draft--see what you think.

Seven of us met with folks from NAM and People's Party on the 9th, and we will try to send a detailed report within a week. At the risk of trying to comment briefly on a complex and difficult meeting, let me just say that while we all agreed to continue to talk among ourselves and to meet again on April 28, it was clear that there are real differences between People's Party on the one hand, and NAM and us on the other. Relations with NAM are not without problems, but both groups came out of the meeting feeling good about each other and I think we can look forward to working closely with them on both the local and national levels. The only other point I would like to make now is that Don Miller came up from Jackson, Mississippi and Shepherd Bliss came down from Boston for the meeting, and their participation was extremely helpful. It was also great to get to know them better, although the long talk we had hoped to have with Don on Sunday unfortunately had to be cancelled because his father had died suddenly on Friday. Bob Lewis and Arthur will be in Atlanta March 22-24 and will look forward to meeting then with Don and Owen.

You will notice from the Sunday minutes that the proposed dates for an expanded NIC meeting were April 20-21 or 27-28, depending on our checking out what conflicts there might be on either weekend. Since that time we have found out that the National Campaign to Impeach Nixon is calling for a demonstration in Washington on April 27 (and our next meeting with NAM and People's Party has been called for the 28th in Washington), so please reserve the 20th and 21st (although as you will see from the Plan of Work summary, that meeting will happen then only if the level of organizing is such that we can get a good representation). We left it open as to whether we would need to have another NIC meeting before the expanded one.

Best wishes,

Barbara
Barbara Webster

MINUTES OF NATIONAL INTERIM POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING - MARCH 3, 1974

Recorded by Arthur Kinoy

Present: Mark Amsterdam, Gina Cestero, Bob Lewis, Vivian Stromberg, Barbara Webster, Owen Brooks, Arthur Kinoy, Jim Haughton, Joe Carnegie, Fred Solowey, Ro Reilly, and Frank Joyce for the afternoon.

I. The first point on the morning's agenda was a discussion of the meeting scheduled for March 9 between representatives of New American Movement (NAM), People's Party and the NIPC. The staff reported that the meeting was confirmed and that NAM and People's Party were each sending 6 representatives.

A long and full discussion was held as to what our attitude and position ought to be at the March 9 meeting. In the course of developing the consensus which emerged several ideas were put forward which helped shape the ultimate approaches agreed upon. Gina expressed the view at the opening of the discussion that an extremely positive position ought to be taken towards the emerging potentiality of some form of united working together of these groups since this would help to combat the feelings of helplessness and despair which affects so many organizations and groups resulting from the splits and fragmentation of the present left. She stressed the positive impact upon Black and Third World groups of signs of emerging unity among the predominantly white left. At the same time Fred, Mark, Bob and Owen opened the discussion with strong warnings against premature discussion of organizational "merger" of any kind among the three groups. Fred and Bob stressed the necessity for the development of some kind of mechanism to facilitate the continued "coming together" of the groups for mutual exploration and discussion, while avoiding precipitous consideration of organic "merger" of any type.

Bob suggested that the continued discussions, through a mechanism which ought to emerge on the 9th, might result in some joint actions on the questions of mutual agreement, laying the basis, as he put it, for the beginning to "act like a party" before actual formation as a party takes place. Owen stressed the necessity for moving towards discussion and joint activity on certain issues but not "moving too fast too soon." The tempo of motion towards any unity, he pointed out, depends on our ability to move organizationally and politically, as discussed at our Saturday sessions, toward identifying and involving Black and Third World groupings who are ready to join in the discussions and first organizational steps locally and regionally. He stressed that it was not in the best interest of the common cause to move in the direction of organizational unity with NAM and People's Party until we had demonstrated to ourselves and to them our own ability to organize, particularly among the key sections of Black and Third World people, working people and women.

Pointing out that Black and Third World groups are particularly hesitant to make alliances with predominantly white left groups and that someone has to attempt to bridge the gap, Owen emphasized that we must be very careful to identify these groups and "produce" organizationally the regional and local transition forms we discussed Saturday, or else the efforts at united action would be abortive and would fail. Within this caution, Owen strongly agreed with an approach of inviting NAM and People's Party folk to participate fully with us in regional and local planning stages and saw no reason why on a national level, as this developed locally and regionally, we could not act together out of common interests without prematurely moving towards a mechanical "organic merger."

Barbara agreed that "merger" was inappropriate at this stage and would not be on the agenda until considerably more organizational progress was made. She stressed that it would be difficult to involve women in a predominantly male grouping, as well as working class into predominantly middle class. She said we have a lot to learn from NAM and People's Party and we should insure some way of continuing discussions with them

on all levels; and that both groups would undoubtedly want to continue their organizational independence throughout the whole next period of work until the ultimate stage of a founding convention for a new party was reached.

It was agreed that in the spirit of this discussion we would not presently ask NAM or People's Party to formally join the NIPC but would discuss our perspectives fully with them, urge and invite them to participate fully in all local and regional planning and organizational developments, and explore on a national level the emergence of a mechanism to continue the discussions and to move towards joint activity on some questions of immediate common concern. There was unanimous agreement on these approaches. It was further agreed that Gina, Arthur, Jim, Barbara and Bob would be our representatives at the March 9 meeting, and that the possibility of Lillian Shirley, Dorothy Healey, Ramon Arbona and Don Miller (a potential organizer for us from Jackson, Mississippi) also attending should be explored.

II. In the course of the above discussion dealing with the March 9 meeting, there was considerable discussion further amplifying and making even more specific the Saturday discussion concerning a plan of immediate work. The following conclusions of these discussions are summarized here and should be considered as additions to the Saturday minutes.

On what basis?
A) The necessity of including Black, Third World, working class people and women at the very beginning of the planning meetings in regions and localities was stressed constantly. Out of this discussion emerged an agreement that everyone had to participate in the initial organizing work, pooling their contacts with the people initially responsible for a given region or city. Emphasis was placed on the necessity of identifying these groups in each area where work is starting.

Jim stressed the necessity of finding Black and white organizers who can really get out into the country and assist in carrying the message of the necessity of a new party. A proposal was made and agreed to for setting up a subcommittee to draw up a "job description" for at least two such national, travelling organizers, one Black and one white; and preferably one a woman, and to circulate such a description among NIPC members and to start to looking for such people. Arthur and Jim are to function as this subcommittee. There was a full discussion on the work of such national travellers, with Owen warning that national initiative was not to replace the essential local initiative and that the organizing role nationally was to assist local and regional initiative. Jim stressed the necessity for developing both national and local initiative in organizing. Joe emphasized the need for simple, minimum program to work from--simple enough for everyone to relate to. He stressed that now that we are concretely discussing moving ahead, we have to have a program which will appeal to many people; that it is essential to have a document of this type written down to be used as an organizing tool. It was mentioned that hopefully this would be the role of the three page call we discussed drafting on Saturday (to be written by Howard Zinn, edited by Owen and Arthur, and circulated immediately to all NIPC members).

B) In the course of this discussion a three stage plan of immediate work crystallized, based on both the Saturday and Sunday discussions:

1. From now until the end of April: Concentration on small regional and local planning meetings, and then larger regional and local meetings. At both stages Black, Third World, working class and women's participation would be emphasized and fought for. Hopefully transition forms would emerge, such as "councils for people's politics," or "committees to plan the organizing of a party of the people."

2. Weekend of April 20-21 Or April 27-28 (depending on progress with the regional/local meetings, and on further exploration as to best dates): a meeting in Chicago (if possible) of an expanded NIPC to include representatives from whatever regional or local groupings have met by then. The meeting would discuss whether it

is appropriate, considering the level of organization, to call a national conference for possibly as early as June (suggested places for it to be held were Chicago or Washington, D.C.). If the decision is to call such a conference, the period from the end of April until the conference date would concentrate upon preparing for the conference, with the primary emphasis being placed upon the participation of Black, Third World, working class and women.

3. IF decided upon at the enlarged NIPC meeting, a national conference would be called for June or whenever it is felt we would be ready for it. This conference would have as its primary focus the consideration of the appropriateness of the next major step on organizing a party of the people, and would have to consider whether the level of organizational work accomplished by then within the context of the then political and economic situation, warranted the calling of a founding convention, for possibly as early as the fall, or the establishment of a transition form, such as a National Committee to Organize a Party of the People, or indeed even some other transition step entirely.

It was stressed by everyone in the discussion that this "plan" was not a mechanical blueprint, that it would have to be tested at every moment by the level of organization and political activity, and in particular by the level of participation of significant Black, Third World, working class and women's groups and representatives. It was further agreed that this perspective would have to be constantly and openly discussed, not only with NAM and People's Party but with many other groups and people, nationally, regionally and locally, and constantly reconsidered in light of mutual discussions, thinking and experiences.

III. After a brief discussion it was agreed that the name we have been using, "People Working for a Mass Party of the People," was too awkward and should be changed to "National Interim Committee for a Mass Party of the People." It should be noted that the word "political" was left out only for reasons of brevity.

IV. On Sunday afternoon after the above discussions were over, Frank Joyce arrived (he had been at an Indochina Peace Campaign meeting in Cleveland), and a discussion of four hours took place with him on the questions arising out of Motor City Labor League's statement of disagreement and criticism of the Proposed Statement of Agreement. The discussion took place in an atmosphere of comradely searching for both areas of disagreement and agreement in order to understand the parameters of the discussions. It was agreed by all that the serious ideological questions raised by MCLL's statement and Frank's full discussions, and the questions and responses of other NIPC members required not only a full continuation of the discussion (it was proposed that a discussion take place in Detroit with some NIPC and MCLL members--Frank will try to arrange that soon), but that written responses to the MCLL statement be prepared by members of the NIPC who desire to do so, and that these be circulated not only to the NIPC but to the entire mailing list.

There was also a strong consensus that MCLL's statement and Frank's discussion had forced us to recognize that as a group the NIPC had not had sufficient political and ideological discussions, and that we recognized the necessity for encouraging and insisting upon, among ourselves, a more consistent program of study and discussion of critical political and ideological questions. In this spirit it was also agreed that when suggestions for study flow organically from materials circulated to the entire mailing list, such suggestions should be included in the circulated materials.

V. Next National Interim Committee meeting: if there is a need, a meeting will be called before the proposed expanded NIC meeting in late April; but for now that is the next scheduled meeting.

National Interim Committee for a Mass Party of the People
156 Fifth Avenue, Room 812
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March 20, 1974

Dear friends:

We are sorry to have been out of touch with you for so long. We had been waiting for more responses from all of you to previous mailings, but not very many have been forthcoming. A couple of the ones we have received are enclosed: one from Harry Boyte of New American Movement; and one on the reverse of this page by Janet Gallagher who is working with the New York City Continuations Committee.

On March 2-3 the Interim Committee met and came up with the enclosed Plan of Work, as an attempt to give our organizing efforts more focus. We hope it will serve as a model, but not necessarily the model, for an approach to moving ahead during this period. Your reactions and input would be helpful.

On March 9 some of us met with representatives from the New American Movement and the People's Party. Needless to say, seven hours was not enough time to do more than begin to explore some of our similarities and differences, but it was an important beginning and we will meet again at the end of April. In the meantime we are hopeful that the discussions will continue through the mails and in at least some places in regional and local meetings. We will send a fuller report from the March 9 meeting within the next couple of weeks.

As those of you who were at our September meeting will remember, there was quite a bit of discussion about the importance of the struggle around the proposed super-port in Puerto Rico. After that meeting we asked the Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization to send you some of their material which includes information on the super-port as well as other Puerto Rican issues. We hope you found their bulletin of interest and use, and that you have since subscribed. For those of you who have been recently added to our list, we are sending your names to the Committee and you should be receiving their material soon.

As you may have noticed, we have changed our name slightly to make it a little less awkward. If you are in a position to send a check, which we certainly could use, make it payable to National Interim Committee.

We realize how difficult it is to write letters but we once again urge you to communicate with us, for circulation or not (if not for circulation, please specify).

In struggle,

Ro Reilly
Ro Reilly

Barbara Webster
Barbara Webster

Response to the NIPC Proposed Statement of Agreement from Janet Gallagher, N.Y.C.

I guess my initial gut reaction to the Proposed Statement of Agreement is that the style/language is very inappropriate.

It does seem important that even so rough a statement could be hammered out and maybe it's very early in the game to criticize the writing, but I feel that the style makes the paper very much less useful and may set an unfortunate precedent.

It is heavy-handed, harshly rhetorical and uninviting. There are few people that I could share it with in any assurance that it would encourage them about the possibility of a Party. If I didn't know and trust so many of the individuals involved in the pre-formation discussions, that sheet of paper would scare me shitless.

It doesn't seem inappropriate to ask that the early documents of the Party be touched with more happiness and warmth.

Some specific criticisms:

- 1) Too much usage of the word "power" - I don't want to de-militize our concept of ourselves, but it does raise many understandable hackles.
- 2) The phrase "the mass party of the people" occurs too frequently. While it's a perfectly valid political concept, it doesn't quite make it as an inspiring phrase.
- 3) I don't think the paragraph on imperialism is sharp or concrete enough - has no anger or guts to it.

Here are some random notes for a Call for a People's Party.

We hope to be a party of change, not only of socio-economic structures, but of ourselves and of the ways we live and move together.

For some of us there is much to be unlearned -- we will have to confront our own racism and sexism and our class interest in the maintenance of things as they are. That will be painful at times. It will require criticism and self-criticism on every level of our existence. But beginnings have been made, and we will nourish and strengthen change in one another. We are a people in process and struggle. We commit ourselves to that process of re-creation and invite others to join us.

To do this we will all have to help birth a new culture that reflects those changes we fight for. The creation of the beginnings of this culture is already underway -- in song and theatre and chant and poster art. Such a culture is not a refuge, but a base and a part of the beginnings of a model.

As American revolutionaries, we hope to reclaim our own real history -- to find useful roots from which to grow. We have to unlearn the MAN's lie of consensus. The histories of our struggle, here and internationally, have much to teach us -- not as frozen formulae but as energizers and tentative models.

We see change in America happening in many ways and we would be slow to criticize those sisters and brothers whose chosen route of action differs from ours. All of us are learning and "This continent is seed".*

March 1974

A PLAN OF WORK FOR THE IMMEDIATE PERIOD

AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

For the purposes of the immediate period we will emphasize organizing in five areas where we already have done some groundwork, and the National Interim Committee and staff will continue to make contact with groups in other places with the aim of developing other such areas. The areas are designated on a regional level but it will be up to the contacts in those areas to decide whether that is the approach they think is best or whether they prefer to concentrate on a city-wide level. It is felt that a meeting with participation from different locales within a region would have an energizing effect; would be more able to transcend historical squabbling which might exist between people from any given city; would give folks a chance to find out what is happening in other parts of the region; and, given our limited resources, would enable us to involve more people than if we just concentrated on five cities. The five regions and the National Interim Committee member responsible for them are:

- 1) New England - Lillian Shirley
- 2) Mid-Atlantic Corridor (New York City to Washington, D.C.) - Jay Schulman
- 3) South (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee) - Owen Brooks
- 4) Midwest (using Chicago as the center and, if contacts there agree, broadening out depending on their contacts and ours) - Arthur Kinoy
- 5) California - Vivian Stromberg and Arthur Kinoy

STEP ONE: PRE-REGIONAL MEETING

The suggested plan of approach is to begin with a small group (3-5) which will meet as soon as possible to organize a regional meeting. (If contacts feel from the beginning that a city-wide approach is best, the following applies to that level as well.) They will identify all the groups in their region, will discuss their politics and composition, and will take responsibility for deciding who should be invited to the regional meeting and then for talking with them. It cannot be overemphasized that primary consideration be given to involving Third World, women and working class representatives. The small group itself should reflect that as well. It is further felt that a regional meeting should not take place until those criteria are met.

The pre-regional meeting should take place as soon as feasible and should aim to have the regional meeting by early April if at all possible, if the guidelines for participation have been met.

STEP TWO: REGIONAL MEETING

These meetings will discuss the idea of a party of the people, and hopefully will decide upon a form through which continuing discussions and organizing will go on. For example, transition forms which might be called "Council for People's Politics" or "Committee to Plan the Organizing of a Party of the People" might emerge. Even if it is just designated as a continuations committee, some form which is agreed upon and to which people will feel responsible should be fought for. The guidelines for participation in the regional meeting must also apply to the composition of whatever form comes out of it.

If possible these meetings should discuss and decide upon the approach for organizing in their region. For example, at that point they might decide to break down into organizing in sub-regional areas. While everyone at the meeting who agrees with the need for exploring the possibility of forming a new party should make a commitment and accept

certain responsibilities, there is no substitute for full-time organizers. If that need is recognized, agreement should be made to find from within that region and to help fund the necessary person or people.

Relations with national: a member of the National Interim Committee will attend the regional meetings (in the case of New England and the South, a second member who is in daily touch with the national office will also attend). The participants at the meetings will be asked to select one or two representatives to go to the proposed expanded National Interim Committee meeting, now tentatively scheduled for April 20-21. Those representatives should also reflect the criteria for involvement by Third World, women and working class groupings.

STEP THREE: EXPANDED NATIONAL INTERIM COMMITTEE MEETING

Depending on progress on the regional and local levels, an expanded NIC meeting will be held on April 20-21, to include NIC members and regional representatives. The NIC, in consultation with regional contacts, will decide whether that date is too soon to get adequate representation from the regions, and the meeting will be postponed until that representation is assured. Chicago is the proposed site for the meeting but that will depend on the feelings of people there and feedback from other regions.

The meeting will discuss whether it is appropriate, after analyzing the current level of organizing, to call a national conference or, if not, what the next step should be. If the decision is to call a national conference, a date would be decided upon, with June being our present earliest target time; and a location would be chosen--Chicago or Washington, D.C. have been suggested by the NIC at this point. The meeting then would have the crucial task of deciding which groups and individuals should be invited to attend the national conference. The guidelines for significant participation by women, working class and Third World representatives, as well as a broad geographic spread, will be the main yardstick for making decisions on who to invite--assuming the prior decision that involvement by those groupings warrants calling a conference.

The agenda for the conference would also be discussed. Again, depending on the progress of organizing efforts, a major topic for consideration at the conference would be what the next organizing steps are, including the possibility of calling for a national founding convention for possibly as early as fall 1974. Another possibility would be to develop some kind of transition form such as a "National Committee to Organize a Party of the People." It is clear that we cannot predict now what the situation will be then, but that it is important to stress that whatever decisions are made then should be arrived at only after a very careful and detailed analysis of the conditions at that time.

* * * * *

It must be constantly stressed that this plan of work is not a mechanical blueprint. It will have to be tested at every moment by the level of organizational and political activity, the conditions in the country, and in particular by the level of participation of significant Third World, working class and women's groups and representatives. It is also essential that this perspective and plan of work must be discussed with many other groups and people, nationally, regionally and locally, and constantly reconsidered in light of mutual discussions and experiences.

This is an organizational plan of work. It is clear that it will not be successful unless from the very beginnings of organizational efforts on all levels the necessity for encouraging and developing a consistent program of studying and discussions of critical political and ideological questions becomes part of our daily work.

National Interim Committee for a Mass Party of the People

156 Fifth Avenue, Room 812
New York, New York 10010
(212) 243-0591

May 8, 1974

Dear Frank,

Your letter came today and we are, of course, sad to see you go; but I think it is best not to continue the contradiction of your being on the Interim Committee. I'm (as are the others) looking forward to reading The Political Line, about which we have heard some rumblings but no specifics.

Regarding your name on the stationery: wouldn't you know that just two days ago we re-did the letterhead, deleting Jay's name, and then efficiently ran off 1,000 copies?!? We are kicking ourselves for not having thought to phone you to see if your resignation might not be imminent. So now the question is whether you feel strongly enough about being taken off to warrant our chucking the stock on hand, and re-doing it all over again. We are going to have to change it after the June 1-2 expanded NIC meeting, since we should have some additions at that point, and maybe other deletions (e.g., Staughton and Barbara haven't been involved much at all recently and maybe they will feel they should resign--but that's just a guess; tho I expect, the way movement rumors go, it will get back to us that they are definitely resigning!).

Keeping you on the letterhead until the June meeting would mean being on for one more general mailing (which wouldn't "count" since we would be sending your letter of resignation with that mailing) (unless you don't want us to circulate it--in which case, please send the wording you would like us to use) - and for the relatively few letters we send out to individuals on a weekly basis. ("Course we could just scratch your name out on whatever letters we do write, and note beside it "expletive/deleted!")....Do let us know if you still think it is necessary to delete you before June.

And so, on to the always intriguing topic: movement rumors. The easy one first: we've got no idea where the O.L. membership rumor came from (tho last month when talking with Dave Komatsu on the phone he said he'd heard you'd joined R.U.! I told him "not so" and didn't mention it to anyone else, so assume that is not the source of the O.L. one). Re going to Canada to attack the Vietnamese: the part about your being there was developed in the transmission between me and Bob G.--which, for me, is a fascinating example in the classic model of how rumors grow. What I had heard, and passed on to Bob, was that members of the Communist League had done that. You didn't figure into it at all, except in my wondering whether you a) knew about it and b) if so, what you thought about it. Bob told me after he talked with you that you expressed bafflement, and I corrected the misimpression he had gotten from me.

I've been racking my brain to try to remember who told us about the CL alleged attack, and I just draw a complete blank. Ro says it was from Larry Levin (through Mark Amsterdam, to us), at the same time as he said you had resigned from MCLL (the reason for said resignation being their position on the Vietnamese). But I am convinced we heard the attack rumor before the Levin embellishment because I remember thinking at the time, "I wonder what Frank thinks of that." Also, I remember thinking the attack rumor was credible (because of the now-forgotten source, a "usually reliable" one) but then questioning the Levin one (because of the source!). So that's all the info we have on the rumor-mill. If I ever come up with the attack source, I'll let you know.

We've had the proposed Detroit discussion in mind but didn't pursue it from our end because Arthur has been doing so much travelling that he is running himself into the ground, and it is being done on money which we don't have-- and there is only so much credit we can get. He's just gotten back today from a six-day trip in the South, and he'll hopefully get a chance to re-charge his batteries in the next week before going to Youngstown for the 18-19 weekend. Then back here until time to go to Chicago for the June 1-2 meeting. After that the only trip on the calendar is, finally, one to Cuba, leaving June 26 or so. In terms of money, it would make the most sense to try to combine a visit to Detroit with either the Youngstown trip or the Chicago one. But in terms of his energy, that may not be the best time. But I haven't discussed either possibility with him yet so you shouldn't necessarily rule them out in your thinking about the possible times. Just thought I would mention them as some background information.

Final housekeeping matter: which address should we use for you on the mailing list? We are assuming home since you aren't working out of the office now, but let us know if that is an incorrect assumption. Also, can you advise whether we should still keep Ron and Lindsay on and, if so, whether we can combine into one mailing to the office?

Hope we'll get a chance to see you soon.

Love,

Barbara

P.S. What does "Coggle" mean--or is it "Loggle?" As in "...and hope to see you all soon - Coggle Frank." ???

2nd P.S. (which I don't feel a need to preserve for posterity on the carbon-copy in our files):

I want to tell you about this wierd feeling I have about you now. Wierd because it is much like the feeling I've had about Rennie since he's gone over to the guru. Can't really describe it at all but it's got to do with feeling he, and now you, are "lost" to me somehow. With Rennie it's kind of felt like having a friend wind up in a mental institution! With you, it would be more akin to being in another country. I guess it's got most to do with the fact that our friendship has existed around being comrades in a political movement, and existing only in and around political meetings. So I suppose it is not entirely crazy to feel that that means not seeing you any more--but I do hope that won't be the case. Certainly, unlike with Rennie, I still feel we are working in the same struggle and, at least for the time being, I wouldn't feel the strain of having to relate to a "mental case!" I guess I just have a real paranoia about sectarianism--which comes as much from my own ^{rigid} intolerance of rigidity, as from whatever the objective reality may be.

This is all just by way of saying that I really do hope you will come by NY-NJ occasionally and that we will get a chance to see you now and again.

National Interim Committee for a Mass Party of the People

156 Fifth Avenue, Room 812
New York, New York 10010
(212) 243-0591

Interim Committee *

Owen Brooks
Al Brotsky
Joe Carnegie
Rhonda Copelon
Dave Dellinger
Bob Greenblatt
Jim Haughton
Arthur Kinoy
Bob Lewis
Ro Reilly
Vivian Stromberg
Barbara Webster

** in process of formation
nationally and locally*

August 21, 1974

Dear sisters and brothers:

We are enclosing "Love Has Been Exploited Labor--A Dialogue with Arthur Kinoy" by Barbara Deming. The dialogue began with a response by Barbara to Arthur Kinoy's "Toward a Party of the People." Copies of Barbara's first letter and Arthur's response are available from our office for 10¢ a set, including postage; and copies of the enclosed are available at the same price.

Recognizing the importance of and necessity for serious study on the part of everyone involved in revolutionary struggle, we asked Barbara to include a bibliography. Feminism is a critical area for study, and the bibliography should be of help in furthering that study. We also would very much welcome other contributions to the written dialogue.

Our beginning statement of political principles--in the form of "An Open Letter to Activists and Organizers of the Present and Past on the Need for a Mass Party of the People"--is in the final stage of the drafting process. We have discovered that writing such a statement by committee takes much longer than we had thought it would, especially since the committee reflects the political diversity and geographical spread of the June expanded National Interim Committee meeting.

We expect it to be finalized by the end of this week, at which time it will be mailed to the June meeting participants for their signatures. Then we will print it in an attractive, pamphlet form, and hope to have it in the mail to you by the middle of September.

Another mandate of the expanded NIC meeting was to form a publication committee to develop a newsletter, generate and circulate discussion papers and other literature judged useful. Those of us in New York who have been meeting regularly since that meeting have met with Carl Marzani to start working on the formation of such a committee.

We feel that an organizational newsletter-bulletin is the way to formalize communications at this time. This bulletin, a modest, but hopefully attractive, mimeographed publication would begin as a monthly and will run as many pages as is necessary. It will include

excerpts from letters, news of activities around the country, and short discussion articles (say up to 500 words) on current points.

To make such a bulletin meaningful, there must be steady, serious input from all parts of the country. Therefore, we urge everyone to consider themselves a correspondent for the bulletin and to send in material you feel would be useful.

In the discussion about the bulletin some attention was given to a publications program of longer range for the future. The consensus was that there should be two types of publications: internal discussion articles which are too long for the bulletin, and printed pamphlets ranging from 8 to 64 pages, to sell from 10¢ to 50¢. These pamphlets would cover the spectrum of the party's interests and activities, and might be arranged in numbered series, e.g., an Economic Series, #1 Inflation, #2 The Energy Ripoff, #3 Taxation for Whom?, etc. A feminist series might print the Deming-Kinoy dialogue, a political series might start with Behind Watergate, etc.

We would like to have your opinion on these ideas. Any specific suggestions as to titles, subject matter and authors are welcome.

In struggle,

Ro Reilly
Ro Reilly

Barbara Webster
Barbara Webster