

INTERNAL BULLETIN

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BACKGROUND MATERIAL ON THE INTERNAL PARTY DISPUTE

1. Introductory Note

By Farrell Dobbs

In August 1952 I submitted to the Political Committee a "Memorandum on the Internal Party Situation" which the Cochranites have characterized as a "holding operation" worked out in a conspiracy with Comrade Cannon to prepare for a factional offensive. An objective reading of this Memorandum and the background material related to it will prove that the Cochranite charge is a malicious untruth.

As will be seen, the August Memorandum called attention to currents toward factionalism in the party and declared no political justification for factional formations had yet been demonstrated. It stated: "If the time has come to go to the membership with whatever political differences may exist, it should be done openly, in accordance with well-established party procedure. Every comrade should have full opportunity to hear all points of view before making up his mind." The Memorandum called for concentration of attention on the presidential campaign and an orderly internal discussion after the campaign, asking the leadership to issue a statement along these lines to the membership.

A statement to this general effect was issued in a PC letter to the branches on Aug. 27, 1952. After the presidential campaign a second letter was sent to the branches on Dec. 5, 1952, by decision of the PC announcing that the Internal Bulletin was open for articles on any political issue or party organization problem.

On Dec. 12, 1952 I sent a personal letter to Comrade Cannon in which I referred to the friction generated in the PC by the Cochranite critics of established party policy and pointed out that they showed no signs of preparing any material for publication in the Bulletin. In this letter I again referred to the importance of preventing a factional explosion in the party, if at all possible, and described briefly some analytical material Comrade Stein and I were working on in an effort to get an objective internal discussion started.

Our efforts to maintain an objective internal atmosphere were soon to be exploded, however, by the Cochranite provocations described in the Dobbs-Stein-Hansen "Statement on the Internal Party Situation." These provocations came in the form of an attack on the proposed Los Angeles election campaign and an attempt to smuggle a change in line into the New York Local. Instead of frankly submitting their alternative program to the party in the Internal Bulletin, the Cochranites sought to put it into effect through these maneuvers, operating under the smokescreen of a scurrilous attack on the majority leadership.

The Cochranites called their attempt to change the basic orientation of the New York Local a "purely local" matter, but the Los Angeles proposal to conduct an election campaign -- which is fully in accord with established party policy -- they called "determining national policy through a local decision." The Cochranites labelled criticism of their program for the New York Local "persecution" of Comrade Bartell, but the Los Angeles election campaign proposal they called "a renewal of the battle for a split."

Confronted with these Cochranite distortions of facts and disruptions of party policy, Comrades Stein, Hansen and myself issued a statement to the National Committee on Jan. 6, 1953 analyzing the situation. In our statement we reviewed the facts, presented our evaluation of the basic causes of the internal disruption, and proposed that a plenum of the National Committee be called to go into the whole problem and seek a solution.

In taking this action we were merely carrying out our duty to the party. Yet the Cochranites have denounced our Statement as "only the latest of a series of attempts to precipitate a show-down faction struggle."

Because of these Cochranite falsifications I am submitting for publication the full texts of my August Memorandum, the Dobbs-Stein-Hansen Statement and the related letters. An objective reading of this material will prove beyond a doubt that:

1. The Cochranites were given more than ample opportunity to present their views to the party in an objective, non-factional atmosphere.
2. The Cochranites elected instead to try to put their alternative program into practice without first submitting it for discussion and decision by the party in an orderly, democratic manner.
3. The Cochranites are therefore responsible for the present sharp internal conflict in the party.

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2. Memorandum on Internal Party Situation

By Farrell Dobbs

Some months ago the party leadership began a discussion of political orientation. On the surface we appear to have proceeded objectively.

After heated debate in the Political Committee, a successful attempt was made to reach common agreement on a political resolution. It was expected that the nuances of differences would either disappear or assert themselves more clearly in party work.

The flareup at the May plenum of the National Committee ended in unanimous approval of the PC resolution. General agreement was expressed that an effort should be made to avoid premature internal conflict.

The resolution was submitted for pre-convention discussion in the name of the National Committee. No party leader took exception to the political line recommended to the party, either during the pre-convention discussion or at the national convention.

The convention adopted the resolution with minor amendments. On the surface the party seemed agreed on general perspectives and on specific perspectives for the period immediately ahead, with central emphasis on the presidential campaign.

Underneath the surface a different picture is presented. Signs have appeared of currents toward factionalism in the party that seem to be gathering momentum.

Before the nuances of differences have been fully developed, they are hastily characterized as "sectarian, ultimatic attitudes," or as "patterns of thought alien to us."

The differences are being presented to the membership in lopsided fashion through more or less private discussions.

As a result there is considerable friction between comrades in their working relations. Internal tension is gradually pervading the whole party.

Still another sign of serious disharmony is the developing tendency toward local autonomy in the main lines of branch orientation. After making full allowance for variations in local conditions, evidence remains of unusual divergences in local application of general political perspectives.

Different evaluations are manifested concerning the extent to which, and the methods whereby, mass work should be supplemented by other party-building activities.

Emphasis on attention to opponent parties seems to run the whole scale from negligible to considerable.

Branch educational methods vary in wide degree as to form, content, average level and objectives.

Divergent branch perspectives of this general nature can lead in time to serious impairment of the party's capacity to function as a homogeneous national unit.

To the extent that these divergences may represent premature application of disputed lines of orientation, they will feed the present currents toward factionalism.

This general contradiction between the apparent and real internal state of the party is bound to cause harm, unless the leadership finds a way to avoid unjustified factional formations.

Episodic differences can be resolved without resort to factionalism, no matter how serious they may appear at the moment. Formation of factions cannot be justified politically until it has first been demonstrated that the disagreement is fundamental and cannot be resolved except through a showdown between the tendencies.

The discussion has not yet revealed whether the present differences are essentially basic or secondary, whether they may diminish or go deeper. In fact there has been very little political discussion at all in the leadership since the plenum resolution was adopted unanimously last May. Under these circumstances there can be no political justification for the existing currents toward factionalism.

If the time has come to go to the membership with whatever political differences may exist, it should be done openly, in accordance with well-established party procedure. Every comrade should have full opportunity to hear all points of view before making up his mind.

In deciding how to handle the internal dispute, its effect on the presidential campaign should be considered.

No matter what opinion comrades may have about the relative importance of the campaign, the fact remains that the party has been committed to it by the convention. Nothing should now be done that would unnecessarily divert the comrades from paying full attention to this action.

For all the reasons given, I propose that the leadership issue a statement to the membership along the following lines:

The unanimous resolution of the National Committee having been adopted by the convention with only one alternate delegate expressing serious disagreement, there is no political justification for factional formations in the party.

Since the convention directed the party to conduct a vigorous election campaign, everybody should devote all possible effort to this action.

After the campaign, comrades who have views to express on political issues or party-building problems will be given full opportunity to present their views in an orderly discussion.

August 11, 1952

3. PC Letter of Aug. 27, 1952 to Party Branches

116 University Place
New York 3, N.Y.
August 27, 1952

TO ALL LOCALS AND BRANCHES:

Dear Comrades,

INTERNAL PARTY SITUATION

The Political Committee is greatly concerned with evidence of factional activity in the party ranks which has been brought to its attention. We are informed that this activity bases itself on speculation about differences in the party leadership. Hasty conclusions appear to have been reached in some cases as to the probable significance of nuances of differences expressed in the discussion of party perspectives prior to the recent convention.

The P.C. considers these conclusions entirely unjustified in view of the adoption of the unanimous resolution of the N.C. by the convention, with only one alternate delegate expressing serious disagreement.

The P.C. is of the unanimous opinion that there is no justification for factional activity in our party at this time. It calls on the entire party membership to be on guard against unprincipled factional formations based on speculation or gossip.

The convention has directed the party to conduct a vigorous election campaign and every party member is expected to devote all possible effort to this action.

After the campaign, comrades who have views to express on political issues or party-building problems will be given full opportunity to present their views in an orderly discussion.

Fraternally,

(signed) M. Stein

M. Stein
For the Political Committee

MS:ra

4. PC Letter of Dec. 5, 1952 to Party Branches

116 University Place
New York 3, N.Y.
December 5, 1952

TO ALL LOCALS AND BRANCHES:

Dear Comrades,

PARTY DISCUSSION BULLETIN OPEN

The Political Committee wishes to notify the branches that the Party Discussion Bulletin is now open for articles by comrades who have views to express on any political issues or party organization problems.

Fraternally,

(signed) Farrell Dobbs

Farrell Dobbs
For the Secretariat

FD:ra

5. Letter to Comrade Cannon on Internal Situation

By Farrell Dobbs

New York, N.Y.
December 12, 1952

Dear Jim:

Now that I have gotten completely moved from Chicago to New York and had time to get a preliminary feel of the situation here, I want to give you some information and express a few thoughts.

It has been necessary to give top priority to the difficult financial problem in which we are beginning to see the first rays of daylight. Morris acted firmly in carrying out the necessary cuts in the budget, and his report to the party of the situation and our needs is bringing a heartening response. You will find the details in a circular being sent out this week.

The cuts, plus the response of the branches, have reduced the current deficit to about \$900 a month. This may tend to rise some because part of the branch payments are for back debts, but later responses from branches not yet heard from should partially offset this tendency.

At present we have about \$1,000 on hand which should see us through to January. New York expects to make a special contribution of from \$750 to \$1,000 in January. If the special contributions from Los Angeles can be raised and we keep working every possible angle from here, we should be able to get by until spring before launching the next general fund campaign.

* * *

We have a tough and dangerous problem arising from the court case. . . .

The atmosphere here remains about the same: an undercurrent of tension, considerable friction, occasional flareups; but there is also evidence of caution about appearing to obstruct the execution of established policy. Inferential differences are raised over secondary or derivative points without attempting to come to grips with the basic questions that lie at the root of these matters. It is not a pleasant situation but one can live with it for the present in the higher interests of seeking an objective solution to the difficult internal problem confronting the party.

The internal bulletin has been officially opened for discussion articles. As yet there is no sign that any of the critics here are preparing anything for publication.

My discussions with leading comrades along the road after leaving Los Angeles further convinced me that we must make every possible effort to prevent a factional explosion in the party and press for an open and thorough-going political discussion of the differences. The party is much concerned about the internal situation, but the comrades want a clear understanding of the political issues

involved before they are asked to make their decision as to the proper solution.

Morris and I have been discussing an approach to the problem in the form of a review of the convention resolution: What new events since the convention should be added to our analysis? What propositions in the resolution have been subject to different interpretations and what should the interpretations be? What perspectives should the party set for itself in the next period? What fields of effort should we engage in and what are the correct tactics, the present possibilities and limitations in the various fields of work? As we develop these thoughts concretely we will keep you informed.

Your lecture series appears to have gotten off to a fine start. All reports reflect great interest and a large attendance. It would be helpful for us to have at least the main lines of thought developed in your lectures.

The news of Murry's successful operation is tremendous. What a triumph to have large new horizons of activity open before him after all these years of physical restriction and suffering. It certainly pays to live with hope and have the courage to keep abreast of human progress.

. Comradely,

Farrell

FD:ra

6. Statement on the Internal Party Situation

By Farrell Dobbs, Morris Stein and Joseph Hansen

The existing frictions within the national leadership of the party are known to the whole committee and to a large extent in the membership. They were aired in part at the May 1952 Plenum of the National Committee and prior to that at meetings of the Political Committee.

At the May 1952 Plenum we arrived at a unanimous resolution on party perspectives and tasks. In the light of this common political resolution we agreed to let future events determine whether the disagreements generating internal friction arise from different political lines requiring decision by the party ranks.

Although we sought to carry through the July 1952 Convention in this spirit, the nuances of differences were evident to discerning comrades at the convention in the reports and speeches of National Committee members. Divergent evaluations of the objective situation and the party tasks were reflected in differing analyses expressly stated, as well as through omissions.

Despite the surface manifestation of unanimity at the convention, the under-current of incipient factionalism persisted, threatening to break out into a full-blown factional fight immediately after the convention. This occurred at the very time when the presidential campaign required full mobilization of the party's resources and energies.

In this charged atmosphere Comrade Dobbs introduced his memorandum on the internal situation. The memorandum asked the leadership to issue a statement to the membership that no political justification existed for factional formations in the party; and it proposed that after the presidential campaign all comrades having views to present be given full opportunity to do so in an orderly discussion. A letter along these lines was sent to the branches by the Political Committee.

This effort to establish a more objective approach to our internal difficulties succeeded only to the extent that it alleviated internal friction for the duration of the election campaign. It has failed to establish a healthier pattern of relations within the Political Committee that would permit discussion of political differences in an objective atmosphere. It has failed, not primarily because of the excessive rudeness of any individual, but mainly because of the anomaly of the present internal situation as a whole.

On most questions before the committee involving important party actions, it is evident there are two differing points of view flowing from different lines of approach as to the character of the party, its perspectives and tasks. There has been no opportunity to grapple with these basic differences, except as they are implied in discussions around secondary and derivative issues.

If the fundamental cause of the existing frictions within the committee is to be faced frankly, we should begin by posing the following basic questions: Are we justified in continuing to consider

ourselves an independent party and consequently in engaging within our means in the rounded activity demanded of a party? Or should we close the balance sheet on our experience as an independent party, and conclude that we have failed, that we can operate only as a propaganda group, that we must abandon the effort of acting as a party and instead devote our time, energy, and finances predominantly to propaganda?

When these questions were posed in part at the May 1952 Plenum, those comrades who placed major stress on propaganda work denied that underlying the frictions was the fundamental issue of the character and role of the party.

Yet every important dispute in the Political Committee involves precisely this fundamental issue. That is why every attempt to discuss questions on their merits becomes frustrating, results in unnecessary heat, leads to further irritation and increased friction.

A case in point is the dispute that arose at the December 30 Political Committee meeting over a proposal of the Los Angeles Local to run candidates in the coming municipal elections. Involved is an expenditure of some \$500 according to the estimate of the local leadership. In our present difficult financial situation any action requiring the expenditure of such a sum of money must be carefully considered in its relation to the national financial problem.

While the monthly deficit of the National Office has been substantially reduced through drastic retrenchment measures undertaken last October, we still face the problem of remaining solvent long enough to give the party a breathing spell before we undertake another national fund campaign to cover the deficit for 1953. With careful budgeting and all possible regular income from the branches -- Sustaining Fund pledges, payments for literature, dues, special contributions, etc. -- we may be able to get by until March before launching the next fund campaign.

On the other hand, the political importance of the proposed election campaign for the Los Angeles Local must also be weighed. The ballot requirements for state-wide elections are prohibitive in California. This gives added importance to a municipal campaign where the ballot requirements are less drastic, especially in view of the fact that the local has made a certain mark in the community in previous elections.

The established party position that electoral activity is an integral part of our functioning as a party has not been openly challenged. The Political Committee is not in a position to judge whether the Los Angeles Local can conduct the proposed campaign and still meet their national financial obligations.

It would therefore seem proper for the Political Committee, while affirming the political justification for the campaign, to ask that the local consider whether the costs involved might seriously restrict their ability to help solve our national financial difficulties and leave the final decision up to them. This was the tenor of the motion submitted to the committee by the majority of the Secretariat.

This simple proposal normally would have been discussed on its merits. However, it met with an attack on grounds involving the question of the character and role of the party.

Comrade Cochran stated to the Political Committee: "It is important to have a certain amount of leeway for branches and a considerable amount of discretion given branches, especially so in the present party situation. There is such a thing, however, as branches determining national policy by a series of incidental decisions, one after another. And if we come to the point where each branch is to so determine, I am going to try to interest New York and several other branches to get enthusiastic about projects I consider far more decisive and important than this in Los Angeles."

Comrade Cochran in these remarks charges that the campaign proposal is an instance of a branch "determining national policy by a series of incidental decisions." Yet the Los Angeles Local did nothing more than propose an action completely in accord with an established party policy which no one has openly challenged. The only question involved is whether or not the campaign costs might hamper the solution of our financial difficulties.

Comrade Cochran implied in his remarks that, if the Los Angeles campaign is not called off, he will by-pass the Political Committee in making policy recommendations to other party branches.

Comrade Cochran also stated to the committee about the Los Angeles proposal: "Go into this venture, have three, four, five, six other proposals as the months roll along and the course of the party, if we have extremely limited finances, is set by a few incidental organizational motions, and all your resolutions about policy, perspectives will fly out the window the way the magazine project got washed out, the way the financial crisis mysteriously came upon us, and Comrade Clarke mysteriously off the staff."

This assertion by Comrade Cochran that the financial crisis "mysteriously came upon us" ignores the fact that our serious financial problems were reported in detail to the May 1952 Plenum and in the organization report at the July Convention. It ignores the fact that Comrade Stein presented a memorandum giving a detailed picture of the whole financial problem to the September 30, 1952 Political Committee meeting and that all committee members present, including Comrade Cochran, approved the cuts in personnel and other expense items proposed in the memorandum.

Comrade Cochran speaks of "the way the magazine project got washed out," but he neglects to mention that among other things the Trotsky School also got "washed out" by the financial crisis.

Comrade Cochran refers only to Comrade Clarke being "mysteriously off the staff." He omits any mention of the fact that Comrades Stein, Breitman, Wright and Warde were also "mysteriously" removed from the full-time staff in the drastic retrenchment carried out last October.

This accusation that party finances have been "mysteriously" manipulated constitutes an implied charge that party leaders have used the party treasury as an instrument to put over a political

maneuver. It raises a cloud of suspicion over the comrades charged with the responsibility of handling the national party funds.

These implied charges and the consequent suspicions they raise are so grave a matter that the comrades involved are entitled to a full hearing before a plenum of the National Committee.

After making his threat to by-pass the Political Committee and his remarks about "mysteriously" handled party finances, Comrade Cochran presented a counter-motion on the Los Angeles campaign. His counter-motion, supported by Comrade Clarke, Bartell and Frankel, reads as follows:

"That we inform Los Angeles that we believe it is incorrect for the branch to enter the present mayoralty election campaign in the light of the present financial crisis of the party, and that we believe that as soon as it is feasible it will be wise to raise a special fund to initiate and invigorate our propaganda work around the magazine and allied work with a full-time man to carry through that project."

This motion, if it had passed, would not have formally vetoed the Los Angeles campaign; but it would have thrown the whole weight of the Political Committee officially against it.

More than that. The motion would in all likelihood be interpreted by its sponsors as a basic official decision ruling out all external activities involving any expenditure of funds at least until such time as we have raised "a special fund to initiate and invigorate our propaganda work around the magazine and allied work with a full-time man to carry through that project."

Comrade Cochran's counter-motion, the supporting speeches and the charges constitute a thinly-veiled attempt to shift the basic party position without first presenting unequivocally and openly a fundamental political justification for a change in line.

However, a political line has a logic of its own and a drive of its own. When it is suppressed in one way it breaks through in another. When it is not submitted for calm discussion it asserts itself in a disruptive, heated form. That is how it happened in the discussion of the Los Angeles election campaign.

The differences over the concept of the party, its perspectives and tasks, are breaking through not only in the Political Committee, but also in the New York Local. Comrade Bartell's report to the New York membership, published in a recent pre-convention discussion bulletin of the local, is an example.

Comrade Bartell's report tends to de-emphasize the work of the local which comes under the general heading of rounded independent party activities. At the same time he places such heavy emphasis on opponents work and tactics in this work that one must ask: Is he not tending to modify our basic evaluation of the party's character, perspectives and tasks?

The discussion in the December 9 Political Committee meeting on Comrade Robins' letter to the paper about Huberman of the Monthly

Review should not have generated so much heat unless it involved a bigger question than the correct or incorrect phrasing of the letter.

Comrade Clarke stated: "The letter approaches Huberman as an enemy. Whether in the final analysis Huberman is an enemy or not is an academic question, just as the question would be academic in discussing Bevan or John L. Lewis."

One must ask: How can Huberman, who represents at most a thin layer of Stalinoid petty-bourgeois intellectuals, be so sweepingly equated politically with Bevan or Lewis who have powerful mass followings in the working class? Why this exaggerated estimate of Huberman's importance?

More instances could be cited indicating the charged atmosphere in the Political Committee and around the party center but these should be sufficient to give the general picture: A threat to bypass the Political Committee in making policy recommendations to the party branches; a cloud of suspicion raised over comrades by charges of "mysteriously" manipulating party finances; an attempt, in effect, to freeze all external party activities until a special fund is raised for propaganda work.

A tendency in the New York Local to shift the emphasis away from independent party work and toward opponents work; an exaggerated estimate of the possibilities in opponents work.

As matters are now drifting, with internal frictions mounting, the situation will further degenerate.

This problem must be dealt with openly. In our opinion the root of the matter lies in the question: Shall we function as an independent party, or only as a propaganda group?

We propose the early convocation of a National Committee Plenum to set down a definite political course for the party to follow.

January 6, 1953