

DISCUSSION  
BULLETIN 3

WHAT FORM OF ORGANIZATION ?

APRIL, 1956

2496

4 5 7

### WHAT FORM OF ORGANIZATION

We have just come through one year and some of working together and putting out a paper. We started out as a group of people who would not take any more of Johnson's purges and his running away from politics. We had spent four years in that atmosphere and wanted to go back to our politics—Marxism.

One good thing about those four years is that we found out that although we thought we had the same ideas and were together, we didn't. The best thing that came out of those years was IH and even there we didn't get all we could have. (See Milton's talk later.) What is coming out now could have been the most important chapters in the book.

We have now to decide what we want for ourselves.

#### What Kind of Organization??

What kind of organization are we to have? As I see it, it will be one that revolves around the book and the paper. The book having our basic ideas and putting them into practice and spreading them with the paper. It will be a continuous give and take, always learning from both. And neither are separated from the world—if we believe what we say that Marxism is in the daily lives of the workers, and the paper, if it is to be any kind of newspaper, will keep up with the objective movement.

The organization at the start will be made up mostly of the people in the group right now. There is the question of re-registration that we have to take up. It should be a disciplined organization. Disciplined not by one man from above who says to a worker "You have to proletarianize this organization" so do this and this and this. Then to the organization he says "See how wonderful the worker is, he does exactly what he has to do", and, aside, he says, "He does exactly what I told him to do."

The discipline has to come from the workers because they have the most to lose where there is none. But how is it to be done?

The question was put to Milton that every radical organization had done him dirty and little by little, although he knew hundreds of workers he is isolated. He related some of his experiences: "When I came back to this city in 1943 I got hired in an auto factory. Because of the situation of the company's policy on segregation it forced about 25 of us to organize. I had quite a bit of experience of fighting down south and always had quite a few around me. We didn't organize in the sense of a strict organization with by-laws, etc. We

got together and worked things out. Any time we decided what to do to fight the company policy. We called each other when to meet.

"There were some Negroes in the shop who were stewards and committeemen. Everyone of us looked up to these guys as some kind of gods. We were sure we would find out what went on behind the scenes, from these guys.

"We had a walk-out. Told the company that if they didn't put Negro women working with white women we would leave. We were surprised when the white workers said, "Well, if you are striking, we're going with you." We didn't think in terms of striking but of just leaving. As we were going, guards with rifles stopped us. People came out from union hall and we all felt so glad when we saw Negroes as committeemen. Don't know why we had the illusion but we felt the Negro committeeman just didn't know all that happened. He must have; he was part of the setup. He asked us to give him a chance to work on grievance and we believed he would and went back to work. We felt it was the worst thing for a union committee man to lie.

"They came to me and told me I should be committee man and take care of grievances. They told me my responsibilities. My first was to the union. Told me what the union button meant to the company. We all thought we had won a victory.

"The second time we walked out to get the company to hire Negro women. They took us into the office. The Negro union man came in and they all guaranteed us they would hire Negro women workers and the ones they had would work with white women. They gave these women the run around sending them to different plants and back. That was my first bitter experience with the labor bureaucracy and it was sickening.

"When I went to another plant I met a new group of Negro workers--we just flocked together again. It was spontaneous. We just kind of formed a nucleus. I came into contact with the CP while working in the union. But we never agreed from the beginning. I used to discuss the no-strike pledge with one and he asked me what political organization I belonged to.

"Met an SWP'er in the shop. I was so happy with their open stand on the Negro question. I joined them and brought 15 workers with me. About a year later they dropped out. I used to sell at least 100 pamphlets a week and had a cousin who did the same. Once he went to the office to pick up some more to sell. He didn't have any change so he just took them to sell. As he was going down the stairs a high leader's wife called after him and asked if he had paid for the pamphlets. He told her, No, he hadn't sold them yet. She said that a lot of change was missing lately and thought maybe because pamphlets were being taken. He threw them back at her. He must have cried for 20 minutes. He left the next day.

"The 2 to 3 years they forced me into the NAACP took everything out of me. Negroes were to go into the NAACP and in the shop Negroes and white workers into caucuses. It was just like being in the army and taking orders.

"Nelson was a very different worker than I knew. When you first meet someone you make an evaluation of the person that always stays with you. He was more SWP than people thought he was. Johnson told me to talk to him. But he never did much talking; always wanted me to talk.

"There was an independent Negro group that I belonged to. D (SWP) was trying to break it up and saying to take them into the NAACP. Nelson asked me if I were their leader. I told him, 'No, not a leader, just part of them.' He kept praising D. A lot of the stories that I wrote up for the book and that I thought would help the paper C tore up, told me the leaders said to tear them up as security and I was not to ask questions. My relationship with C in working on the book was a strained one. When they have something to hide and I catch them in lies--I'm skeptical."

Even the best that we did that was new in the four years with Johnson--IH--we didn't get all we could have because he made it a personal matter between the author and the technical collaborator who had the line. Leaders always took advantage of Milton's confidence. As he put it, "They outtalked me; but they didn't fool me. But I was learning something so I stuck." Each of them had leaders who represented all--Dillard, the Negroes; and Nelson the white workers. Why should any one person represent anyone in an organization unified around Marxism?

#### Discipline and Sense of Organization

Like I said before it has to come from the workers because they have most to lose when there is none. But how is it to be done? It cannot come down from a set of laws or from above. Our last few issues of the paper have been disciplined by the Negro people in the South. The paper, if it is to be at all serious, had to show what is happening there. Knowing that it is the deepest layers or "third layer" that we will learn from the most and the ones who will do the most,--that is disciplining the intellectuals in us to give up their space and words and instead of writing a get smart quick article like Correspondence's Athenian Democracy, we show what the Negro people in Alabama are doing which is a damn sight more important in our day. But how disciplined are we at this point--not enough to insure another issue of the paper.

The sense of organization has to be in every one of us. I believe it was at one time. If we are serious about our politics we have to be about the organization. In 1960 I really thought that workers would run that organization. But after a while you could see the method used--of having worker members supposedly dealing with the concrete problems. When you wanted

to bamboozle the membership you used a worker. The thinking was left up to the intellectual.

The hypocrisy of the Johnsonites saying the third layer is everything came to a head in the 1953 convention when the impression was given that the third layer, "the deepest layer" in our organization was not really ready yet to work on the highest political body.

The suggestion by Weaver that a third layer be put on the REB was fought by Kaufman who interpreted the wonders of the third layer to be that they would never want to be leaders and by Johnson stealthily; he just never acknowledged the letter that was sent to him on that; instead submitted a 4-page letter on electing leaders and keeping the status quo. This same man saw that the criticism for not having put a third layer on the REB appear in the paper as if it were Weaver who had been responsible and kept Weaver's letter to him as well as to the third layer from being published when the paper was totally in his hands.

The same conception as Kaufman's came down to the local in New York through Chapin who said you don't have to put the third layer on committees. I believe she said "burden them with committees"; "the leaders get responses from the meeting and in that way will be guided, disciplined, etc." It didn't work out that way. The worker has to have a vote.

We have to get away from the idea that the third layer members are just a shadow away from cave-dwellers, people that have to be taught everything, that all they have are instincts. If we had workers coming around constantly people would never have acted that way. We said the minute Marx broke from the bourgeois society he went to search for a few workers. When he was expelled from Germany, he found some German workers, a dozen or so, and said "These are the real men." He didn't mean they are just instinct. All history is in their impulses and actions and thoughts. Not just instinct but all intellectual progress can come from them. When Marx said the French workers stormed the heavens he didn't say just their instincts, but "fighting, bleeding thinking!"

The struggle between the third layer and second or between worker and intellectual that will move us forward has to be the struggle that comes from two different ways of life--not that of a label or personality. If we are unified around Marxism, Marxism will discipline us.

We are very few and the few that we are have to make up their minds as to what they are doing here. If we are serious, the paper, the organization will be the most important thing. If we are not, other things become more important. If we are serious the discipline has to come from us. Every one here knows the discipline needed to build an organization.

-5-

We have to be very strict with ourselves and yet flexible enough so that when a worker comes around us we do not shut him off because he is not a member.

#### Local Committees

To my way of thinking the local meetings are one of the most important parts of the organization. The responsibilities of the members lie there. Everything should be in that meeting, insuring the paper--both financially and with material. If we are serious about having a worker as editor, we have first to see that he has a paper to edit. Second, we have plenty of material every issue for him to make a serious choice of what he thinks a workers' paper should be like. Like Milton said, "We made a great stride with having a worker editor but haven't come near to what it should be. He has to have material to select from so that he has a clear understanding and feeling of what the paper should be like."

The local has to become a living body. Everything that committees pass, including the REB, has to be discussed fully and passed on at the local. The chairman of the local is a serious job and must be worked so, ready to listen and incorporate the local's wishes. All doubts, disagreements, and all that members are thinking must come out at local meetings as well as their ideas and concrete actions for moving the organization forward.

When Frazier was around and she said she could come only once a week to a meeting and would like to make it the REB --it sounded very serious: here was a worker who was proud to be on the REB, etc. I don't mean that I don't think the REB important but I said to myself: Why the REB? If she took the paper as seriously as she said it should be the local meeting that she would choose, that is where what even the REB discusses and decides will come down to the organization, where the membership decides, that is also where the paper should be put out. If she were still with us, I would say it was our fault because local meetings aren't that. But she is not here. All I can figure out is that she too just wanted to talk. I have never seen her take any kind of responsibility on the REB or in the organization except her column.

#### Leadership

On the question of leaders all I can say for the 4 years is for an organization that was against leaders to lead, etc. we sure had our fill of them. I'll bet we had more than any other radical group. I don't have much to say on this. But as far as leaders go I hope we don't have any forced on us any more (Why was Chapin my leader?) We are so small now, if we continued the way of Correspondence, we would have one leader to one rank. The ranks don't have to be told who is a leader. They know very well who they consider to be their leader. That is something that Johnson couldn't understand.

2501

-6-

I think leaders have to be very careful. Workers are very distrustful of organizations. I don't think there should be any "whispering" among "leaders" or any back room talk.

Johnson played a neat trick, so he thought, by insisting that he tell us how to elect 4 so called "ipso facto" leaders, one of whom would be the chairman, as if 1)2 we had to be guided, 2)and were it not for him we wouldn't know. The truth is he hoped we wouldn't know because we had no political sense, he all. One thing is true only after we rid ourselves of Johnsonism and, unhindered by him, watched the National Chairman at work, that it was possible to see objectively the functions and responsibilities of the National Chairman and the leadership as a whole.

The past year has shown what the duties and activities and all added work of the national chairman are in a group such as ours.

I do not believe you have to be in the centre to see the work done or try and lighten the amount of work on the chairman. All you need is to go back over the year--the book, paper, and for the ones who are not in the center the REE meetings. It is quite something to see a chairman work. As far as I see the national chairman of a group is the leader, the one who ties the organization together and embodies in person Marxism, so deep that workers' actions, ideas, aspirations and thinking are always there.

#### Youth

When we split from the SWP over 5 years ago we took the "youth" from the SWP youth local. A few stayed with them. But we had a pretty good cross section of the youth in New York City. Later on a group developed in LA around IH and still later on a group in Detroit. But we have not been able to figure out what has happened to the youth group. I think we started off on the wrong foot at the time we split from SWP. There were all kinds of intrigue with the leadership to see that the group had the right leaders from the beginning. But even with all that we started to work and try and figure out what kind of youth group we wanted.

Before we knew it, it became just a miniature of the adult organization. It was brought out at the school. I believe everyone is pretty familiar with what happened. Looking back now we can see that what the "reign of terror"--even calling it by that name was Johnson's doing--did to destroy the youth. Instead of us all working it out with Levy staying as leader it turned into another purge to break another person. We then thought putting a third layer in as "the leader" it would work, but it didn't. The youth group was full of its "types" too. From the "reign of terror" there was a breakdown. We haven't been able to figure it out ourselves. But we can look at what has been done. We put out a page like all the

2502



-7-

others in the paper that was and is different from all other radical papers ever dreamed of. There has been a breakdown and floundering but out of it we got in N.L. Ellery as a columnist, 2. articles from LA that come from the youth there and one letter gotten from a 14 year old from the outside. 3) One of the best articles was "Everything Appears Backwards" both as an article in itself and because it brought the book on the youth page.

In looking at the breakdown you have to see what came out that was good for in so doing you get glimpses of what is possible. I do believe though it would be wrong and crazy for us to think that we have a youth group. We most likely will discuss this too at the convention in more detail--what to do. There are a few youth in the group who can write on youth for the paper. We just have to keep in mind what we are and not exaggerate.

#### A Constitution

At our convention we have to take up a constitution that protects the rights of every member and a list of obligations for membership in this organization. I wish we could make it that workers have 2 votes but then we have to define worker etc. etc. In any case a copy of these rights and obligations should be given to each. We have to make clear what kind of election we are to have in this organization. It cannot be what we had in 1953 where we were told who we had to vote for. As soon as you're told who to vote for you doubt the whole set-up. After one year of working with people you can decide for yourself.

Johnson was trying to create an organization that lived in itself, that was a society in itself, and so would create the "new" in itself also. The "new" was a miniature in a sense of Russia with its network of spies and purges. We spent 4 years with that kind of living and we have to get rid of what may even have been left in us.

Each one represents a certain type in the world, but we can't close ourselves off. We have been saying for years that would ruin us and we have to say it again. In the past year we had glimpses of what we can do, but we have to become more knit together so we can expand outwards. We have had very few routines. Even a routine like local minutes has been bad; we have to clear these things up.

There are just so many general ideas on organization. When we are all together we have to discuss the past year which is concrete--our activities in that year. One will be why in one year's time, reaching more people than in the previous 4 years, we have not been able to gain more members. We have a new one in San Francisco, two in West Virginia, and a few around us in other places, but why not members.



We have to clean up our thoughts and go back to why we joined the movement and always keep that in mind. Even if it is as simply put as one member said "To make the world better".

It is impossible to have a sense of organization when you have forgotten what brought you to the movement. The two must be united. What we are trying to work out is a "kind of nucleus" which is trying to be a part of the objective movement and contributes what it has to say.

To end this I would like to quote two paragraphs from our first conference bulletin last spring:

"Each has brought something different and that is good. Some of us have been around since 1917, others since the CIO, others came from the Trotskyist groupings, but—as Milton put it at the last plenum—he doesn't consider that he learned politics only in the movement, not if politics means the class struggle for that matter of fighting the capitalists just came with his being what he was, where he was. It was the conditions under which he lived, contrasted to those he aspired to; it was this revolt against what is, that brought him to others, who thought like him. So it wasn't a question of learning to hate the system of oppression from the politicians. It was a question of hammering out a path himself and finding others like him on the road." (p.13)

"We are a serious group and we mean business. The point is to get down to it. The historic necessity of a group like ours not out "to lead" but only to clarify workers politics, is not in history alone, nor in the fact that we will bring Marxism theoretically up to date, but in the daily class struggle, beginning with the form of our own committees and the paper. Workers learn not through books, but through their way of life, and the people with whom they associate with naturally. What will our people look like to them?"(p.14)

--Mary

\*\*\*\*