

Present: Full: Robertson, Stoute, Nelson, Turner
Alts: Janacek, Small, Glenn Staff: Gordon
Other: Ellens (CC Alternate), Mark T. (NYC Organizer)
Absent: Full: Henry Staff: Martin
Meeting convened 9:45 p.m.

Agenda: 1. Personnel and Organization
2. International Movement
3. General Information and Correspondence

1. Personnel and Organization: Mike M. has applied for membership. He cannot this semester regularly attend NYC local meetings and therefore comes under the category of a member-at-large. Comrade Mike is an 18-year-old high school student.

Disc: Ellens, Turner

Motion: To accept Mike M. as a candidate member.

Passed

2. International Movement:

- a. British situation (Robertson reporting): There seems to be a great deal of flux at this point, not only among Trotskyist groups (The Marxist, a British Maoist publication, has a new editorial board). The Lawless group (Irish Workers Group) seems in some danger of breaking up; one grouping, the Matgamna group, has already split and is now putting out "Workers Fight". Meanwhile, Edward Crawford has abruptly left Socialist Current to join the state-capitalists (International Socialism, Cliffites). The question of jeopardy to our relations with S.C. is raised, as Crawford was the closest of the S.C. comrades to our positions. The Matgamna group is now attacking them from the left, mainly with positions parallel to ours. The latest issue of Socialist Current contains a statement by Crawford disagreeing with their line on the Arab-Israeli crisis, which was evidently simply critical without any teeth to it (i.e., not explicitly revolutionary defeatist). Crawford explicitly cites the line of the SL as the correct one.

The Matgamna group has taken control of "Workers Republic", which is still nominally the theoretical organ of the Lawless group. The content is quite Trotskyist in character and very close to us. Their domestic organ, "Workers Fight", is not that good--not politically bad, but the content chosen is mainly not very political reportage of large but interminable industrial struggles, with a lack of sharp analysis and polemic--not different from many other British Trotskyist publications. The lead editorial in the first issue, "For a Regroupment of British Trotskyism", is quite good in domestic terms, but has no explicit international perspective. The politics of the Matgamna group, on the basis of their evolution and documents, seem to be very good. Their long founding document, "What we are and what we must become", presented to the Grant group (orthodox Trotskyists, legalistic, deep-entrist in Labour Party) in July 1966 was full of petty organizational gripes about the Grant group, but the political arguments were very good; they seem to be some sort of sane

Healyites, politically. From the Grant group they went into the Lawless group, which is a dissimilar grouping in which Lawless does a bonapartist balancing act between various incipient factions. As a result of their split with Lawless after a no-holds-barred faction fight, they claim 20 members in six areas. They seem to see Lawless as acting badly in moving against them; they have no international perspective but Lawless, since he has a perspective of unification with the U. Sec., must see the founding of their group as in conflict with the English Pabloists (the Lawless group itself, although operating in England, is not in competition with English groups, as it is Irish).

Socialist Current sent a letter to the Matgamna group as soon as the first issue of "Workers Fight" came out, urging continuing written discussion between themselves and the Matgamna group. The latter wrote back an insolent, arrogant reply. In the main the political points of Matgamna's reply are well taken, but the tone indicates either exuberance and inexperience or something more sinister in the conduct of political relationships. The Matgamna group tends to view as a crushing argument by itself their numerical growth as a pure and simple vindication of their political positions. Socialist Current, in its turn, replied with blistering indignation. This exchange effectively stalemates our estimation of the possibilities involved. Our last communication with the Matgamna group was a long letter from Phil Semp, much of which is devoted to the rottenness of Lawless. They have discussed our political positions and find pretty general agreement, except for the question of the Arab-Israeli war, on which they critically support the Arab side. They consider that what took place was a war against imperialism by the national bourgeoisie of the Arab states, that the Pabloites end up indirectly supporting the bourgeoisie by not posing the issue of working-class struggle, but the SL supports imperialism more directly. Our line is that both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. want to keep the status quo in the Near East, and the U.S. has been truly neutral. The war was basically a distraction from the struggle against imperialism. If Israel didn't exist it would have had to be created as a scapegoat. At least the Matgamna group is clear-eyed enough not to be taken in by "Arab Revolution" rhetoric. They set up a scale of Arab bourgeoisies ranging from very bad to very good, and a theory of the Arab-Israeli war as a conspiracy to screw the Arabs. They agree with us on U.S. Black Power, although they make a too simple transformation of this line into British terms. They also agree completely with our memo on the Rhodesian question. The letter makes an interesting point about their opinion of the Cliffites: that they are not "a bad Trotskyist group" but a non-Trotskyist, centrist organization. It is certainly not we who see the Cliffites through rose-colored glasses. The Matgamna group finds itself initially closest to Voix Ouvriere; VO's relationship with the Cliffites should give them pause. The letter ends with a request for "discussion and an exchange of papers"; in our view, they should feel the need to seek more in the way of international perspectives.

Regarding the SLL, at some point a qualitative transformation must have taken place, from a somewhat defective but basically good group into shallow, sectarian semi-Stalinism. The SLL came into existence in the 1956-58 period through two good faction fights (against Brian Behan, against Peter Fryer). We hypothesize that an internal fight may have taken place in the SLL about a year and a half ago, after which the subtitle of the paper was changed, Healy started writing editorials against "propagandism", the SLL de facto surrendered its industrial base and began building its Red Guard-type YS.

The current British situation reaffirms our urgent need for the projected pamphlet, "Toward Rebuilding the Fourth International".

Disc: Janacek, Glenn, Gordon, Ellens, Nelson, Robertson, Glenn, Mark T., Nelson, Gordon, Janacek, Mark T., Janacek, Robertson

Motion by Robertson: (1) In the light of the exchange with "Workers Fight" and the resignation of Crawford from Socialist Current, we reaffirm our fraternal relationship with the S.C. group and seek to continue contact and discussion with other groups in Britain, such as the Irish Militant (Lawless) and "Workers Fight" and individuals, keeping S.C. informed meanwhile. (2) The "Workers Fight"- "Workers Republic" (Matgamna) group certainly seems on the basis of its brief literary existence to stand very close to the views of the SL. This, however, needs testing, especially in other ways and over a more extended period of time. (3) That we bring out an internal information bulletin on the British situation, consisting of correspondence, brief documents and extracts from longer ones, including a reply to "Workers Fight"'s latest letter to us, taking up their criticisms of our Arab-Israeli line and our concern over their lack of concrete internationalism. We might preface the bulletin by our general perspective for the international movement as adopted by our recent plenum. Passed unanimously

- b. European Report (Ellens reporting): There is a long history behind Voix Ouvriere's attitude toward the organizational question. During World War II, under German occupation, the Trotskyist groups found themselves isolated and operating alone. Of the five groups existing then, four took a more or less nationalist position of support to the French bourgeoisie against bourgeoisies aiding Germany. One group even encouraged city workers to buy only bread made of wheat from French farms. The group which became VO, which then had about 6 members, was distressed by these capitulations and began a discussion of how this had been able to take place. They decided that the policies taken by the other groups had come about in the absence of contact with working-class areas, as a way of meeting widespread petty-bourgeois sentiment. They wanted to avoid themselves coming under such strong petty-bourgeois influences. They saw that groups could change their policies very easily under pressure and concluded that this was a func-

tion of a lack of basic education and training and an attitude toward being a lifetime Trotskyist revolutionary. They felt a need to train one's own revolutionaries and not just pick off disgruntled or dissident individuals. There later were big splits in this group which became VO. The last collapse came after a big strike in 1947 and the group was reorganized in the early 1950's by a core of three. VO has an attitude of proletarianization; the approach to the working class has to be taught to middle-class revolutionaries, to teach them how to function as working-class leaders. Young comrades must be educated to an intimate knowledge and understanding of the attitudes of workers. Workers' attitudes cannot be changed by the same means as are successful in recruiting intellectuals. Comrades must learn how to discuss a worker's problems or convince him on a factory level that they have something to say. The methods of functioning worked out by VO are a result of these principles and experimentation, testing out specific organizational forms. (1) Organization is around a specific work project; the basic cell functioning is around the work assignment. Weekly meetings are held in which the work is discussed in detail. This is the unit which makes the decisions. (2) People are organized according to their different levels of development. They have found that the functioning of comrades who have been active for 10-20 years is more lax. There are high standards of activity and performance for the young, new, enthusiastic members. (3) They consider it very important to work in a conspiratorial manner. The VOers have had members assassinated by the state and much physical violence, from the Stalinists especially, but also the cops and fascists.

There are three levels of bodies: cell meetings (all VO members), circles (including candidate members) and discussion circles (including sympathizers, who are both new people on the way in and permanent sympathizers). A technique for recruitment are "permanences", which are meetings with contacts at cafes. Some workers who are not otherwise involved in the organization help in the production of the specific factory bulletins. Classes are given high priority. Candidate members give a class once every three weeks. One big class for Parisian contacts is held every week. Many aspects of routine functioning (sales, putting up posters, production of leaflets) are not ordinarily discussed at cell meetings unless specific problems come up. Contact work is given very heavy priority. Members are expected to meet with each contact 1 or 2 times a week for at least an hour, and discuss political reading, political problems, even personal problems, with them. Progress of this work is discussed in detail at the cell meeting. The VOer will devote a lot of time to working with a contact, preparing suggestions for reading and reading the books himself, etc., but only if the contact is willing to do reading or otherwise shows effort and interest. Each member goes to a bi-weekly meeting consisting of all the workers in his plant who are involved in putting out the factory bulletins. These meetings consist of the work on the bulletins and general discussion of the events of the week. General membership meetings are held monthly. The Secretariat meets weekly. An Exec-

utive Committee (expanded Secretariat) meets monthly. The Editorial Board (leading body) meets weekly. It consists half of people elected by the individual cells, one representative for each; the other half are people who have been co-opted for technical skills on the paper. The three leading people sit on this body automatically. The main responsibility of the Executive Committee is the integration of new members. The monthly general membership meeting discusses all the basic political questions. The Secretariat was recently divided into technical and political sessions.

Disc: Robertson, Ellens, Mark T., Gordon, Nelson, Glenn, Robertson, Janacek

Summary by Ellens: VO essentially expects to grow in a revolutionary situation. They have a perspective of picking up people from dissident groupings and recently got a chunk from "Pouvoir Ouvrier" and also from "Socialisme ou Barbarie". They expect splits within the CP and the three Maoist groupings. The press is non-factional because they feel the paper must be to show a revolutionary policy toward events and situations. Since all the groups are small and insignificant for most of the population, polemic with these groups is unimportant. Individually with contacts, both in discussion and in pamphlets, these questions are taken up. The milieu is the overwhelming domination by the CP. There are very few workers who are not already leftists; the overwhelming majority are either CP or SP or on the periphery of either. This is related to the degree of clandestinity. This is the only way to build groups of workers in factories; otherwise, any worker who opposes any aspect--even a small one--of CP policy loses his job. In the CGT (CP-dominated trade union federation) VO members function not as open VOers but as open oppositionists. Incidents of terrorizing and harassment by the Stalinists are common. They feel they must have attained a certain force in order to take on the CP openly, otherwise they cannot overcome the fear of factory workers and contacts.

Their international perspectives have not been worked out in too much detail. They had hoped for more response to Class Struggle. They have frequently asked for an exchange of articles; Cliff has been the only response so far. They have not yet decided whether to accept an article from him or not. They are quite comradely about having the ideas of other groups known and discussed by their members. As each cell gets one voting representative on the Executive Committee, the cells are generally organized in such a way that there will be one person of CC level in each cell. If there are more, one will be elected; the other has the right, like any other member, to attend these meetings. The group is very much Paris-centered, but the decision-making cells include out-of-town comrades. All industry and all political life in France are centered around Paris. For "internal class struggle" (e.g., trying to lead a strike) they feel they need the force to back up promises to the workers. They did lead a

struggle and occupied Renault in 1947 and this destroyed their organization. They do not have full-time functionaries; this is seen as a matter of principle. The old timers function almost exclusively internally.

3. General Information and Correspondence:

- a. Class Struggle #8: One article, "Black Revolt in the U.S.A.-- A Hope for All Humanity", is left-Pabloist. They see an automatic vanguard party springing into existence from below as a result of objective pressures.
- b. New Zealand: Note received from Gager. It does not seem possible to get out the New Zealand letter, projected for a long time, before Robertson's tour.

Motion: To table the rest of this point to next meeting. Passed

Meeting adjourned 12:55 a.m.