

POLITICAL BUREAU MINUTES.....6 May 1968

Present: Full: Robertson, Nelson, Turner, Stoute(late)  
Alts: Ellens, Janacek Staff: Gordon, Cunningham  
Absent: Full: Henry(exc.) Staff: Martin(exc.)  
Meeting convened 8:35 p.m.

- Agenda:
1. Minutes
  2. General Information and Correspondence
  3. Personnel and Organization
  4. Poor People's March
  5. Press
  6. National SDS Convention

Motion: To permit Janet C. to remain in earshot of this meeting to work on party affairs. Passed

1. Minutes: Minutes of 4 March are out. We will wait until next meeting to approve them, as the comrades have not had the opportunity to read them yet.
2. General Information and Correspondence:
  - a. Crawford: We have received another letter from Edward Crawford, who is now business manager of Labour Worker, the Cliffite weekly. He has sent us the names and addresses of all their U.S. subscribers. Regarding Crawford, he is now a member of an opponent organization but remains in personal and political sympathy with us. We might send him excerpts from our PB minutes, especially from General Information.
  - b. 27 April anti-war demonstrations: When demonstrations were first called, NYC Parade Committee estimated they would get a million people to march, although later estimates were smaller. The New York Times count was 87,000. But if this smaller march represented only the hard core of the "peace" movement, it was a very peculiar core--a veritable sea of McCarthy buttons. One of the many results for us will be some internal pressure on the SWP once they get past the intense activity of their presidential campaign, as most of their many new recruits were won on the basis of the YSA's being successful "anti-war movement patriots".
  - c. Columbia Univ. strike: Differs from Berkeley FSM in some important respects: Columbia administration and student body are both more right-wing, FSM had longer and deeper history and a more united leadership. It was the behavior of the cops at Columbia--a real storm-trooper bust--that crystallized any kind of response to the original sit-in action. The cops beat up professors, a rabbi, newsmen, student onlookers, as well as radical demonstrators. Columbia issues are inherently more radical, as some of the questions involve the black ghetto in which the school is located. Entire situation is disorganized, as the militant leadership are not very serious radicals and SDSers whose minority stunt escalated into a student strike through the actions of the cops. We got out a Spartacist leaflet somewhat hastily.
  - d. Military Rights: Robertson was interviewed by a reporter for Esquire magazine who is doing the cover story for the August issue, on radical opposition in the Army. He had heard of

our people in the Army, but the story will probably center on Andy Stapp, whom the reporter admires.

3. Personnel and Organization:

- a. Iowa: We have received an application for membership from Helen C., of Iowa City. She is 21 years old, a friend of Nick and Kat D. She will be living in a rural area in Ill., plans to move to NYC at the end of the summer. Her application is endorsed by Nick and Kat.

Motion: To admit Helen C. as a candidate member of the SL. Passed

- b. Membership: A mental tally of membership shifts since the plenum indicates that despite the loss of the Ross grouplet our gains balance our losses more or less equally.

- c. Trips: A number of locals will be visited soon by comrades from NYC. Nelson may speak in Ithaca; Robertson will give a talk in Phila.; Nelson and Turner will be going to a Midwest city soon to meet with an important trade union contact. We should set up a place where our comrades can meet with interested people, as we have several hundred names and addresses from the area. In addition, comrades from Ithaca and Phila. have visited NYC over the past few weekends.

- d. Ross grouplet: The NYC local suspended the Ross grouplet at the last local meeting on the basis of the following motion:

Motion by Turner: Bob Ross, Sandra Newman and Sam Smith have, simultaneously with the announced existence of their faction, violated the discipline of the Spartacist League and departed from its ranks.

They have ignored the decisions of the Executive Committee of the local pertaining to the preparation for the April 27th anti-war demonstration.

They have participated in the adventuristic petty-bourgeois-Maoist conglomeration, the "Anti-Imperialist Feeder March" which was clearly designed to seek a confrontation on the streets with New York cops.

They have refused to abide by the decision of the Executive Committee that contact on April 27 with this body be limited to the distribution of the Spartacist supplement, and refuse to attempt to justify their actions before the local. They have boycotted the local meeting, the supreme obligation of membership, claiming that their fraction discipline has priority over local discipline. Newman and Smith, with the encouragement of Ross, have abandoned their posts in and responsibilities toward the Militant Labor Civil Rights Committee, and refuse to appear at meetings, either of the MLCRC or the SL fraction.

By these refusals, they violate the decisions of the Political Bureau and the plenum of the Central Committee of the SL, which seeks to give primary consideration to building transitional organizations in the trade unions, to unite black and white workers around a transitional program.

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By their refusal to meet with the MLCRC fraction, they nullify the decision of the local that a motion by Ross at the April 10th meeting be tabled to the following meeting, in order, first, to enable the fraction to discuss it, and brings its recommendations to the local.

They have organized their faction surreptitiously, and attempted to involve sympathizers and members of the local in secret meetings, instead of openly and clearly indicating its existence and its political basis, and attempting to win adherents by open political struggle, despite the rules of the organization, which afford full party rights to factions.

Ross, Newman and Smith are, therefore, also in violation of the minimal norms of conduct to be expected from any member of an organization purporting to be democratic centralist.

Ross, Newman and Smith are, therefore, summarily suspended from membership in the SL, and are called upon to return, in a disciplined way, to the organization.

(Adopted unanimously by the NYC local committee, 24 April 1968)

e. Organizational Methods Report: Rose J.'s report was circulated at the last PB meeting. It represents a cohesive boiling down of the reports sent in by Rose during her stay in France, and conveys the spirit behind the organizational practices as well as the practices themselves. It will be circulated with or prior to this set of PB minutes in order to: (1) promote consideration nationally and by the locals of what practices, if any, would be applicable to the SL; (2) to invite discussion and comment.

Presentation by Ellens: The purpose of this method of functioning is to enable workers to become politicized and become cadres of the organization, recognizing that workers are not politicized in general the same way as intellectuals are. The daily functioning of the cadres is geared to recruiting and developing workers to become in the future a Leninist party, as they do not consider that they have sufficient roots in the mass to term themselves a party now. Clandestine methods are used to enable people in touchy personal situations to function in the organization and, in times of stress and repression, to enable the organization to continue a public existence. These methods are also necessary because of the tough Stalinist bureaucracy in the trade unions, so that workers will be able to struggle against it without fear of victimization. The early Bolshevik organizations in the U.S. never had the cell as the basis of organization and did not have an integral link between workers and students. Political control by the organization of its members is very important for Leninist functioning; this can be quite useful for us. The report goes into the development of cadre and attitudes, and the organization of people around different levels of commitment, the idea being that a new person gains political know-

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ledge in direct work and at the monthly political meeting of all members. The weekly meetings are concerned with the actual activities of the people, which must be related to what can perform, and serves also as a training and testing ground. It is important to avoid the attitude prevalent in the JCR (U.Sec. youth group) and others--the attitude on the part of brand new members that they know as much as anybody else. We have to make Marxists out of people, work them over as individuals, because even if they have read a lot they don't automatically see things in a Marxian way. There is certainly no blueprint for us to tell us how we might go about applying these things. We must make the recruitment of individuals a group effort.

Disc: Turner, Nelson, Robertson, Gordon, Turner, Robertson, Gordon

Summary by Ellens: The structure of having separate cells for members and candidate members, which some comrades term "hierarchical", is not intended to prohibit new members having ideas; one reason for it is to develop the newer members so that they become really qualified to participate in the political life of the organization. The democracy is a very real and participatory kind of thing. They do have a central committee although it isn't called that. Representatives to it are elected one from each cell but the membership in the cells is organized so that there will be one central-committee-level person in each one. If there is more than one, he can participate as an observer in the meetings, as can any member. All outlying areas are controlled by the center and have representation on all leading bodies. The lack of paid functionaries results partly from the ease of getting a part-time job, and a full-time job is in the unions and so is political work also. They don't want to have a coffeehouse leading group unrelated to the mass base and out of contact with union work, which comes from not having a job. They do not have a theory of stages. Since the Algerian war a large situation of struggle has not existed in the country. Although they are geared to the recruitment of individuals they have oriented to groups and have recruited chunks from other organizations. The political life within the organization is very active. The organization has about 300 members, about 300 candidate members and a large periphery--hard to estimate exactly but semi-public meetings (by invitation only) in the capital city get 800-1000 people. They have a different approach to the press, geared to a different situation and needs. This is why, except for the theoretical organ, they have less of a "line" press and less polemic than we do. The weekly paper has a circulation of about 50,000--a mass organ. The theoretical organ has a circulation of 5,000. They agree that there is no "family of Trotskyism" but feel responsible to the young members of other organizations who consider that they have joined a Trotskyist organization and don't know better. The clandestine approach is considered important because people need to learn these methods. There are lots of all-talk groups around; it is necessary to go back to Leninist fundamentals. The qualities which make them a politically

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good organization come from the demands made on members--if you want to be a member you must function in a cadre way. Everybody recognizes that the quality of their human material is very good; this is because of the demands which are made on people; you get what you demand. We should be modest and learn from them how to develop cadre from the mass. Regarding the line on East Europe, Cuba, China, etc., they feel that dual power is on the agenda at all times, but if there is no substantial working class they don't feel too hopeful. The line on the Negro question which was wrong was a result of a lack of information on the situation here as it really is.

4. Poor People's March: The march will be substantial in size, conventional in approach. Philadelphia comrades have expressed interest in intervening. We should request Joel to draw up a draft for a propagandistic intervention. Whatever comrades go down should make contact with Comrade Maedee. Disc: Janacek, Turner, Stoute, Robertson, Stoute, Janacek, Robertson, Ellens
  5. Press:
    - a. May Supplement: There are some defects, compared to the previous issue--for example 4 typographical mistakes in only 4 pages--because of the haste with which the issue was produced in order to be on time for anti-war demonstrations around the country. We also had space-count and paste-up problems which resulted in cutting some important whole paragraphs at the last minute. We sent out a mailing alerting the locals that the shipment was coming, and the bundles were received in time. We have received money from sale of 100 copies in Puerto Rico. This supplement was more expensive than usual because of the large number of copies produced; except when we are planning more-or-less free distributions to mass demonstrations we can get by with a press run of 5,000. Technically, it is very important for our credibility as a bi-monthly that the supplements be in appearance as exact a facsimile as possible of a 16-page printed issue. We must break in more skilled labor for IBM composition. For the future, we will keep a close eye on technical and editorial quality, but comrades must realize that standards for a more frequent press should not be perfection, but political correctness.
    - b. June Supplement: At present, plans are still to get out a June supplement covering the articles projected at the last PB meeting. After that our press schedule will depend only on the availability of finances. We will want a regular 16-page issue as soon as possible so that we can both cover certain kinds of articles not suitable for a supplement and mail the supplements with the regular issue to our subscribers. We must keep pressing the point that now money equals press, but at the same time keep in mind that there is no obvious financial slack in the organization and comrades have been paying in money, generally, at a good rate. Disc: Cunningham, Janacek, Ellens, Stoute, Cunningham, Janacek, Gordon, Turner, Robertson, Ellens, Stoute, Robertson
- [Janacek left 11:10 p.m.]
- c. Marxist Bulletins: M.B. #3 Part I (Split with Wohlfarth 1962)

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is now in print, although somewhat marginally. We have only the copies which were run originally from the original stencils, with preface added. We are restenciling the ruined stencils in order to make a press run which will provide us with enough copies for distribution to the locals and general public sales. As soon as we can get the money we want to produce our international pamphlet ("Towards Rebuilding the Fourth International") and also a pamphlet containing Shane Mage's and Comrade Henry's articles on the Hungarian Revolution, with a preface on the current Czech events. Disc: Cunningham, Robertson, Ellens

6. National SDS Convention: Tabled to next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 11:25 p.m.