

POLITICAL BUREAU MINUTES.....22 August 1968

Present: Full: Robertson, Henry Alt: Small Other: Mark T. (NYC Org.)
Staff: Gordon, Dave C., Rogers (late, exc.)
Absent: Full: Nelson (exc.), Turner (exc.), Stoute (susp.)
Alts: Ellens (susp.), Janacek (exc.) Staff: Martin
Other: Syrek (full CC)

Meeting convened 7:20 p.m.

- Special Agenda:
1. Minutes
 2. Personnel
 3. SPARTACIST #12 and Press Plans
 4. Workers League
 5. Internal Situation
 6. Electoral Statement
 7. Czech Crisis

1. Minutes: Minutes of 11 March, 25 March, 1 April, 22 April 1968 have been stenciled.

2. Personnel: Bill G. of San Diego has been a candidate member for over the required 3 months. He has been in contact with the Bay Area local and gave a talk at the SL Educational Weekend. He has sustained his financial obligations to the national organization, is very well spoken of. Disc: Dave C., Mark T., Robertson, Dave C.

Motion: To accept Bill G. as a full member.

Passed

3. SPARTACIST #12 and Press Plans:

- a. SPARTACIST #12: Authors of the articles were: French Revolution--Dave C., edited by Gordon; Columbia--Gordon, with abridged document by Manuela Dobos; SSEU--Nelson, edited by Janacek; New Orleans--Joe V., edited by Janacek; obituary--Dave C. Disc: Mark T., Robertson, Dave C., Mark T., Henry, Robertson
- b. Press Plans: Assuming the internal discussion has abated somewhat, now would be a good time to bring out a pamphlet on Hungary, containing reprint of Mage's two articles and Henry's article from SPARTACIST #8 with a Preface, possibly on Czechoslovakia. Disc: Dave C.
- c. SPARTACIST #13: The following articles have been suggested and are at various stages in the process of completion: Czechoslovakia; a union article; critique of Marcuse by Bill G.; Biafra by Turner; electoral statement; review of Mage's doctoral thesis by Mark T. Disc: Dave C., Mark T.

4. Workers League: Helen C. intends to quit Workers League and join Spartacist. In addition to a general panorama and some specific documentary material, we have also gotten some important specific information about the Workers League. They are going into a purge period; will have a National Conference in November. Wohlforth is upset with the group he sent out to the Bay Area to purge Earl Gilman, as they are getting out of line. They want a low grade and thoroughly autonomous youth organization; the Wohlforth group seems to have insoluble structural youth problems, as they have gone through several youth attempts in the last couple of years. The Goldsteins would like to work on the Panthers,

have asked Wohlforth to let up on his one-sidedly fierce attacks on the Panthers in the Bulletin. Wohlforth accuses them of wanting to support Cleaver for President instead of the SWP, which they deny. They are evidently getting together with Gilman; the purgers and the purgee are finding agreement on an anti-Wohlforth basis. The Goldsteins think Wohlforth's "theoretical masterpiece", The Theory of Structural Assimilation, is garbage and disagree with the WL's China line on the grounds that the Maoists are one wing of the bureaucracy and it is wrong to support some bureaucrats against others. They express interest in working in the Committee for a Labor Party along with us. They have some sympathy in the New York WL, as Terri Van Ronk was in Calif. for a while and supports the WLers there, while Irving and Susan Hochberg, long-time hard-working and devoted members, also have criticisms. Disc: Gordon

5. Internal Situation: It appears that the internal discussion has been aborted by the apparent de facto splitting of the Minority. Arguments advanced privately by them in support of their willful provocative attitude toward discipline is that the discipline of their tendency stands higher than SL discipline and they have "more important" things to do than carry out SL assignments. They also advanced the conception that discipline is meaningless except in a mass party. This is similar to the old social-democratic conception of the vanguard party as becoming necessary sometime "later", associated with Hal Draper.

Last Tuesday was the fourth consecutive time that Ellens and Stoute did not turn up for their assigned work session in the N.O., despite numerous previous warnings that further indiscipline could not be tolerated. They sometimes gave fictitious excuses for why they couldn't make it and sometimes just said they didn't have to. Finally telegrams were sent Ellens and Stoute suspending them; telegrams were: Ellens, Stoute--"You are suspended from all internal affairs for willful indiscipline. Robertson"(20 August 1968).

We also admonish Syrek, who while he (unlike Ellens and Stoute) does not have a 12-week history of having come into the N.O. a total of just three times for a twice-weekly assignment, has since his declaration of solidarity with the Minority been following frighteningly fast on this undisciplined course towards his own party work. It is important to distinguish between (1) people who are not very active, who can be maintained as members so long as they meet the acceptable minimums of membership obligations, and on whom we bring pressure to raise their consciousness and level of activity, and (2) people who deny the principle that the organization must insist on a monopoly of every comrade's political life and that to whatever extent each comrade is active, his line and field of activity is absolutely determined by the collective and not by the individual's determination of what is "more important". Since we don't know what the Minority has been doing, they may be being completely inactive or, more likely, working night and day on their own, secret, factional, non-party activities. The latter is less than no excuse.

We do not have internal discussion with people who are not members--who will not be bound by the results of the discussion and the organization's decisions and who in the meantime will not meet even the minimums of discipline. This is not only vitally important as a principle (as its abandonment negates democratic centralism) but in the practical, concrete situation. In 1940 the SWP Minority (Shachtmanites) seemed to refuse to carry out assignments, but they could have been coddled longer because the SWP was a bigger organization. In the Robertson letter to White last October (before any factional situation was even suspected) the point was made that any serious factional discussion would rather seriously paralyze most of our other activities. We cannot allow sabotage to paralyze us completely. (See written exchange between Ellens-Stoute and Seymour: E-S "Statement to NY Local" of 7 August and Seymour's reply of 9 August.)

Robertson phoned Turner last Friday, before Turner left for vacation, urged him to get his faction members to carry out their assignments, warned him that if Ellens and Stoute didn't get back into line they wouldn't be around when Turner got back from vacation. Turner said he understood, couldn't speak for the others, himself intended to stay in the SL to fight for his ideas.

Robertson feels that he as a comrade with sufficient experience in communist politics should have recognized the Ellens faction as a conscious wrecking conspiracy about six weeks earlier. Ellens did a good job. Despite consistent evidences to the contrary, we were taken in for a long time by her disingenuousness. If we had held them to sour people it would be one thing but she picked up Jerry, who has energy, Espartaco, who have talent, Syrek, which means a press if they want it, maybe Larry on the West Coast, who is unstable but has a good theoretical mind. This also gives them a pipeline to Seattle, a local which has never really acted like members or been integrated into the organization. Ellens picks up guilt-ridden petty-bourgeois people on their weaknesses. Having picked up these people, they have the basis for something they do not now want--a national political movement; they want only to disappear.

Motion: That the PB recognizes the temporary suspensions of Ellens and Stoute in connection with their repetitive, willful and provocative refusal to carry out their assignments despite repeated warnings. The conditions of the suspensions are that Ellens and Stoute lose all the rights and privileges of membership while retaining the obligations, until such time as they affirm in writing the recognition of the necessity to carry out SL assignments and discipline. In view of their previous failure to do this work despite having made a prior declaration that they would do so in a written statement, we will expect them to demonstrate their willingness to function as members of the SL by performing their obligations satisfactorily for four weeks, after which time the suspensions will be lifted.

Passed

Motion: We note that Comrade Syrek has since his declaraction of po-

litical solidarity with the Minority refused to carry out his assignments and full mobilizations of the organization. We admonish him not to follow in the footsteps of Ellens and Stoute. Passed

Regarding Turner, he is in an unenviable position. He fronted for Ellens, a conscious wrecker; he denounced until the last moment as a willful "red herring" our observations of the link between the Minority and Voix Ouvriere. Nevertheless, Turner has continued to meet the organizational requirements for membership. However, we feel it is politically incumbent on him to explain to his organization why he lent his role in the organization and his name to this gang of wreckers and why he broke with them. While he is not required organizationally to make such an explanation, he should do so if he desires to regain respect in the eyes of the members.

If the Ellens wing has indeed definitively walked out of the organization, the remnants of the Minority constitute no threat and therefore the Majority might anticipate dissolving its caucus and discussing all matters in dispute within the organization freely with all members. Furthermore, if Ellens has quit, it becomes incumbent upon all comrades with internal documents in preparation or anticipation to produce them very promptly while strong motivation still exists. Otherwise much of the educational value of this factional struggle will be lost by the premature termination of the struggle.

Disc: Small, Mark T., Dave C., Mark T., Henry, Mark T.

Summary by Robertson: The Minority argues that Robertson can't himself suspend a CC member. Actually, regarding indiscipline, one's membership on higher bodies implies a higher level of responsibility and performance. A primary principle of a Bolshevik organization is that if an action is required there is a body which can take it, even if it has to be one non-CC member to do it, and the National Chairman clearly can if necessary. Any disciplinary action can be appealed; we are perfectly prepared to offer Ellens and Stoute a trial, but of course they won't want it, as their indiscipline has just been a way of walking out. We had already planned to bring charges against Ellens at the next PB meeting for a previous violation of discipline--last week's incident where she refused flatly to show up for her assigned work session. We had originally intended, in order to keep all the Minority in the organization until the completion of the discussion, to have the charges on that incident heard by a national conference, i.e. to have disciplinary action deferred until then, but by this last act of indiscipline Ellens and Stoute have made this impossible.

Splitting now without even having had access to all the members of the organization and a national conference seems an irrational act on the part of Ellens, but since about February we have not seen her real political face and so really can't judge her motives.

6. Electoral Statement:

Motion: To accept the article written by Comrade Small as the basis for a statement to appear in a Special Election Supplement to distribute for Labor Day, on the assurance that it contains the main political points developed over the last year, e.g. labor party, PFP, McCarthy, Wallace. Passed

7. Czech Crisis: Our Bay Area comrades had a perfectly good line projected by Larry for a public meeting held 30 July, before the invasion. The ISC had a leaflet which is good in that it made clear the inability of the incumbent Czech bureaucracy to defend the country, but drew provocative conclusions--to call upon individual citizens to resist the Russian troops. We do not call for a massacre if the military situation isn't good. Marx said before the Paris commune rising that it couldn't win, but once the battle had been entered into he raised all demands to try and make it win. There is the possibility of revolutionary defensism: the Dubcek regime must go--in order to better defend the country. The Russians have a political problem and have chosen to try a military solution. As state caps, the ISC cannot understand any difference between the Russian Army and the Nazi Army and the implications of the New York Times interview with a Red Army officer, who said approximately: "We were ordered into Czechoslovakia. We were told there was a counter-revolution here but we don't see one." A much better line toward the Russian troops would be not to bait them and refuse to sell them food but rather to fraternize with them, argue about the intervention, ask them why they aren't in Viet Nam helping fight the imperialists. The call for a general strike raises the question of who calls it--i.e., raises dual power.

One of the reasons the Russian bureaucracy has responded is that the Czech bureaucracy has put itself in a position in which it couldn't attack "popular democracy" and had dismantled the internal mechanisms of repression in order to successfully attack the conservative wing. Having done so, it stood vulnerable rather like a turtle without its shell. They raised proposals to intensify the exploitation of the masses without having any means to curtail the masses' opposition to such proposals.

There are enormous implications for the Stalinist movement--the Italian and French CP's have broken, and Gus Hall here.

The Healyites hold that Liebermanism and such produce bureaucrats as capitalists themselves, rather than setting the basis for capitalist penetration through a counter-revolution or a coup d'etat. VO, if they adhere rigidly to their theory, will have to support the invasion; socialism by bayonets is an unfortunate tactic but one must support a degenerated workers state against a capitalist state.

Meeting adjourned 9:00 p.m.