

POLITICAL BUREAU MINUTES.....16 December 1968

Present: Full: Robertson, Nelson, Cunningham  
Alts: Seymour, Small(late) Staff: Rogers, Gordon  
Other: Joel S.(NYC Organizer)  
Absent: Full: Henry(exc.) Staff: Martin  
Meeting convened 8:45 p.m.

- Agenda: 1. General Information and Correspondence
- 2. Personnel and Organization
- 3. Factional
- 4. Educational Proposal

1. General Information and Correspondence:

- a. Greek Trotskyists: Both the Grant group (English Militant) and the SLL carried accounts of the severe and brutal repression of Trotskyists in Greece. Several were arrested on 12 September and subjected to severe atrocities. They are still being held. They are the anti-revisionist Trotskyists, probably the same group which attended the April 1966 IC Conference. Both the Grant and Healy groups have set up defense committees. Money and statements of solidarity should be sent to the Grant committee: Aid Greek Workers Committee, 197 Kings Cross Road, London, W.C.1.
- b. Uruguayan Trotskyists: 26 Posadists were seized by the police in Uruguay. This is very serious because Uruguay and Chile have been the only two countries in South America with any semblance of bourgeois democracy, and the Posadists had been a legal party there previously. Half of those seized in the round-up are Argentines, who face deportation. Deportation back to Argentina would be very serious, and Chile has refused to take them. This may mean essentially the destruction of the Posadas movement in Latin America, as Uruguay was their headquarters, with their mass base in Argentina.
- c. Socialist Current: A letter from Comrade Leon D. has raised a question about the SC supplement on Biafra. The analysis in the pamphlet may be overdone, but we note that we support self-determination of the Ibo nation, which now faces virtual extermination. However, there is no reason to believe Biafra's leaders and government are any better than Nigeria's. Thus we do not give Biafra any political support, uncritical or critical, but we give military support to the Biafran side. Likewise, we give no political support to the Arab governments or those guerilla movements which are essentially under their domination, but we by all means support self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs. Such an oppressed population has rights; the tragedy is that they are used as pawns in a reactionary way.
- d. Lutte Ouvriere: 6 November issue carries report on NYC teachers' strike which is simply, vulgarly anti-strike. LO sees the struggle as a fight between black militants and overt racists. The article may well have originated from the U.S. by the Ellensites. Certainly the line would be strange in French terms, where the teachers' union is a stronghold of the left-wing groups and which has represented the intersection of the radical intelligentsia with the working-class movement. We

should write LO, reproaching them very sharply for having come out, to our knowledge for the first time, with a flatly anti-working-class position.

- e. YSA Convention: Comrades Small and Helen went from NYC to the Convention, held in Chicago. About 400 attended. The political level of the YSAers was extremely low and included simple hero-worshippers of "Che". The Convention itself, although "open", was completely controlled and, in terms of debate and decision-making capacity, a sham. We sold about \$12 worth of literature and distributed several hundred leaflets, with no evidence of any immediate return except for one potentially good contact in the Boston YSA. Disc: Nelson

## 2. Personnel and Organization:

- a. Bay Area: Stan G. has resigned from the Bay Area local, essentially for personal reasons and demoralization.
- b. New Orleans: Tom K. is resigning for urgent personal reasons. It is expedient for us to act on this in advance of its being handled by the SRB, which has jurisdiction, as discussed previously with the New Orleans local organizer.

Motion: To accept the resignation of Tom K. Passed

- c. Houston: We have received an application for membership from Douglas B., endorsed by Comrade Ramon. This will be handled by the SRB. The applicant is a leader of a local SDS chapter. The Houston O.C. has picked up in activity and has several contacts. The comrades there are feeling isolated and need to be integrated into the national organization.
- d. Detroit: We have received an application from Helene R., who has just completed a several-week visit to NYC. She is of urban working-class background and quite new to politics.

Motion: To accept Helene R. as a candidate member. Passed

- e. Membership: We have at last count 56 members. This represents a decline from our high point of about 75 members at the time of the Founding Conference.
- f. New England: The projected trip by Robertson has been stalled by the inability to get a driver's licence in time. Of the three people he had intended to see there, two will be in NYC in January, the other over Christmas.
- g. Southern Tour: More detailed plans for Robertson's tour have been discussed with Joe V. The tour will probably be in March or April.
- h. Ithaca: Comrades George F. and Judith M. report they are definitely leaving Ithaca in June. They plan to visit NYC briefly in early February. We recommend tentatively that after leaving Ithaca they spend the summer in New York and then, if acceptable to them, go South. Disc: Seymour
- i. Resolution: The first meeting of the drafting committee for the main political resolution for the National Conference is scheduled for this Wednesday. Disc: Cunningham
- j. Libby S.: Comrade Libby has begun her 10-day detention in Alameda County prison as a result of her arrest in an important campus demonstration at Berkeley. Her total fine and legal expenses are estimated at \$460. The Bay Area local has taken responsibility to raise this money.

Motion: We recommend that our comrades and friends each contribute \$10 towards Comrade Libby's political-financial obligations.

Passed

Motion: To send Comrade Libby greetings from the PB.

Passed

k. National Treasurer: Comrade Small has done quite a good job in his brief term. He can no longer keep the assignment as he will shortly be taking over the NYC organizership.

Motion: That the job of National Treasurer be temporarily subsumed under the tasks of the National Chairman.

Passed

1. Globe Distributors: We will need someone to take over the processing of orders, now done by Comrade Charlotte.

### 3. Factional:

- a. Jerry E.: Robertson has been having an amusing running correspondence with him. His letters are valuable to us as Jerry is really an undigested anarchist, voluble, emotional and unguarded. The latest source of his grievance is his outrageous accusation that we were trying to steal his money because we told him we would hold up the repayments of his loan (proceeding at \$50 a month) until he returned to us something of ours, a draft set of local minutes. He finally complied, muttering he'd love to take us to the bourgeois courts. We might stencil the exchange, as it is very funny and quite instructive, full of Jerry's howling political blunders, and provides a case study in the mind of an Ellensite.
- b. 28 Oct. letter to Joe V.: This letter, signed by Stoute and Janacek, carries Ellensism forward. In addition to developing further some of Ellensism's tenets (including a tortured explanation of why it isn't really necessary to have a political line) the letter contains two funny contradictions: (1) They refer glowingly to Turner's Memorandum on Negro-union work and explain it was the alleged refusal to implement Turner's line that caused the faction fight. This raises the question: why did they dump Turner without a murmur (if he was so good)? (2) They explain they had to split because the fight was wasting time, preventing them from carrying out their essential priorities. It also turns out from this letter that the vital work they had to do was to intensively study Marx's Capital. In that case, why was it necessary to leave the SL in order to study Capital; this is not normally construed to be incompatible with membership. What these contradictions constitute--the real reason these people followed their course out despite such trivial "reasons"--is a flight from struggle, from Trotskyism, from politics.
- c. Ellens-Stoute "unionism": Ellens and Stoute protested they couldn't do N.O. stenciling because of union work and meetings. Now that we have comrades who have been in this union for several months, we are in a position to know that: those all-important "compulsory meetings three times a week" were tame, voluntary exercises for the union bureaucracy. Only two meetings total are compulsory for union applicants. Stoute never paid union dues and Ellens was dropped for non-payment--i.e. essentially they never joined the union!
- d. Newsletter: 7 December issue claims the Workers League was "the only organization which gave principled and critical sup-

port to the struggle against school decentralization and the break-up of the union organization". As usual, this is a complete lie, as the SDS Labor Committee, the SL and (uncritically) the Socialist Party all supported the strike. Evidently the Wohlforthites write different "facts" for domestic and for foreign consumption. Such methods can be attractive only to those who believe that lying is the road to increasing the consciousness of the working class.

- e. Bulletin: 2 December issue has done something almost unique among self-styled Trotskyists--they have called another Trotskyist group, the SL, literal agents of the capitalist state. In particular they claim the SL deliberately fingered Sherwood to the Canadian authorities when we denounced the Workers League for covering up for draft-dodging, thereby using his real name. The accusation cannot be taken seriously, as Sherwood was previously a public political person, as much so as he could manage to make himself. But the fact that such an accusation, reminiscent of Stalinist methods, was made in print is telling for the Wohlforthites. If we believed in using the bourgeois courts for such issues, as does Healy, we could collect substantial damages for libel. An additional point to be made is that one must take responsibility for one's political acts. Sherwood in fleeing the country was only contemptible, but the WL seized on his defection from the SL and hailed him as a political hero. The WL's accusation is similar to the Stalinists, who charged that Trotskyists who were exposing their right-wing manipulations in the trade unions were "red-baiting" them as CPers. We will reply publicly to the WL's accusation by making the political points regarding the gross implication of such accusations, and preparing material on the grubby details of the Sherwood case per se to be obtained on request. Parenthetically, we note that Turner has added his name to the Sherwood defense propaganda, thus endorsing the implication that the SL witch-hunted Sherwood--at a time when Turner was a leading SL member! Disc: Nelson, Gordon
- f. Turner: We note that the local, on the initiative of the National Chairman, has accepted Hugh F.'s resignation without prejudice. Turner is another matter. He has richly fulfilled our expectations, and rather quickly: having left the SL denouncing us as "student-oriented" he immediately joined the SDS Labor Committee, an entirely student group; having denounced our Negro Question line as "racist" he has gone to bed with the Workers League, whose line is to ignore black oppression! While the Turner case seems to us to simply merit expulsion, the Sebestas have inquired about the question, while Steve S. writes us: "You should be informed that both Dave [Rader] and myself are preparing statements in opposition to the P.B. handling of the Turner issue." (letter dated 5 Dec.) We propose, therefore, in view of the questions existing in the organization, to postpone final action on Turner to a special Commission at the National Conference. Until then, Turner's suspension becomes complete and remains in force. Disc: Cunningham, Nelson, Robertson, Cunningham, Seymour, Nelson, Seymour, Rogers, Cunningham, Nelson, Robertson, Small, Robertson

Motion by Robertson: The PB believes Turner should be expelled for his admitted "regular" discussion of internal SL matters with a contact of the Workers League hostile to the SL--i.e. his son Howard--as well as for other acts of indiscipline such as his admittedly willful non-payment of dues. However, in view of the questions existing in the organization, we propose to table final action to the National Conference. We note that Turner has publicly lied about "being expelled"--he resigned. Passed

4. Educational Proposal: Bill G., our member-at-large in the Boston area, has sent a letter (appended) to the PB proposing "an internal cadre education program", after consultation with Rader and Rick C. This would involve Bill's Xeroxing important articles from academic journals, educational articles by comrades, excerpts from inaccessible Marxist writings, etc., which would be mailed to the comrades. The project would be handled from Boston, with financial assistance from the N.O.

This looks to be a very valuable idea. We particularly appreciate that it will not involve an additional burden on the N.O., which has had its personnel cut in half by the faction fight and split. With our decreased forces and facing a difficult situation, the education of the comrades in Marxism becomes additionally important. The proposal will also increase contact of isolated comrades with the national organization, which has become even more of a problem since the decrease of N.O. personnel available for correspondence, etc.

It is not a good idea for Comrade Bill to use his own money for this. We want the educational program to be not a personal thing but an organizational activity. In addition, the financial burden would be too much to be deducted from his pledge--even if we run only 100 copies, a 25-page article would be \$50. Bill should continue to send in his pledge to the N.O., and the N.O. will assume the cost of the Xeroxing. We note that it will be necessary for him to immediately secure a P.O. box for Spartacist, Boston.

Motion: (1) To give Bill G. an enthusiastic go ahead to initiate his proposals; (2) The financing will be done by the N.O.; (3) The comrades in New York and elsewhere should assist in sending in suggestions and materials; (4) All materials printed as part of the educational program should be in bulletin form, called Marxist Studies and numbered. Each bulletin should include a standard disclaimer of SL responsibility for the views contained. Passed

Motion: To appoint Bill G. as Editor of the Marxist Studies series, in accordance with the above motion. Passed

Meeting adjourned 11:40 p.m.

Attachment, PB Minutes of 16 December 1968

[Boston, Mass.]  
9 December 1968

Spartacist PB  
New York

Dear Comrades:

Over a period of months, Dave R. and I have been discussing the possibility of developing an internal cadre education program, the following proposal is the result of our discussions.

Basically, our ideas would involve an extension of the present Marxist Bulletin series and the collection of articles from Labour Review, What is Revolutionary Leadership, except that costs would be held down by distribution to SL members only. The program could begin by xeroxing<sup>1</sup> relevant articles from academic journals, or pamphlets. Every month a short article providing essential historical or theoretical background for cadre could be mailed to each member.<sup>2</sup> Hopefully, comrades would send in recommendations for reprinting.

Secondly, theoretical work of SL members could be printed for internal circulation. An instance of this is the article on Marcuse, which could be made immediately available to cadre instead of their waiting for such articles to be printed in the paper.

Thirdly, as the program develops, reprinting of short articles from the collected works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg (even if they have to be translated) which are not presently available could be undertaken. As concrete situations develop, classic theoretical formulations which help explain these situations could be made available. (Trotsky on "Centrism", in Spartacist is an example).

Fourthly, a comprehensive cadre educational program should be developed. Reading lists on historical and theoretical subjects should be developed, with the emphasis being on establishing basic reading lists on the Russian Revolution, Marxist economic theory, and especially on the social and political history of the United States working class movement. These should make use of the classic Marxist theory and the latest academic research (of course, only that which approaches scientific competence.) Initially, general bibliographies could be distributed to cadre, later, regular "courses" could be developed. A final goal for the program would be a monthly or quarterly bulletin in the form of an annotated bibliography which would give cadre orientation on latest developments in the history and theory of the revolutionary working class movement. (Initially, this could be a special service for the editorial staff of Spartacist.)

<sup>1</sup> I have consulted a commercial copier whose rates are \$1.17 per fifty copies or \$2.00 per hundred copies of the same shot.

<sup>2</sup> Mailing would be no financial hardship, because of mailing privileges where my wife works.

Fifthly, a party library combined with an efficient mail loan service should be started. Many absolutely essential background works are very expensive, i.e., Nettl's Rosa Luxemburg, or often unavailable in outlying areas. Eventually a party school offering courses in Marxian political economy, history of the U.S. working class movement, and other important subjects could be established.

We realize the New York office is taxed to the limit with its duties as a local and national office. The question of assuming a new task is obviously not to be considered. We feel that with a little financial assistance from National Headquarters (for instance, if it would be possible for me to apply my monthly pledge or part of it, as necessary, to this project) we could make a modest beginning in the direction outlined above. The most feasible starting point would be the distribution of articles, point one. I've enclosed Deutscher's article on Trotsky from the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences as an example.

Of course, we'd appreciate any suggestions you have for articles or book chapters that would be relevant to this project. We hope that you will give this proposal prompt and serious attention, so that we can initiate the program in the near future.

Fraternal greetings,

Bill G.