

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 3, September 26, 1975

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Camejo, Clark, Hansen, Jenness, Lovell, Shaw, Sheppard, Thomas, Waters

Chair: Shaw

Visitor: Lyons

- AGENDA:
1. Guests
 2. NSCAR Perspectives
 3. Black Muslims
 4. Seattle Election Campaign
 5. Spanish Political Prisoners
 6. Blanco Tour
 7. Membership

1. GUESTS

Motion by Barnes: That Lyons attend Political Committee meetings during the three weeks she edits the Militant while Seigle is on vacation.

Carried.

2. NSCAR PERSPECTIVES

(Bailey, Hildebrand, and Miah invited for this point.)

Miah reported on situation in Boston in respect to busing and the teachers' strike, plans for the NSCAR conference, and our participation.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. BLACK MUSLIMS

(Bailey and Miah invited for this point.)

Jenness reported on recent discussions with members of the Black Muslim organization.

Discussion

Motion: That the national office ask branches to learn more about the Muslims and try to make our press available to them (see attached).

Carried.

4. SEATTLE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Jenness reported on Seattle election campaign for city council and branch efforts to step up campaign in coming months (see Militant, Oct. 3, 1975).

Discussion

Agreement on weekly Militant coverage of Seattle campaign for city council and to consult with Seattle comrades on additional national assistance (see attached).

5. SPANISH POLITICAL PRISONERS

(Benson and Kelly invited for this point.)

Benson reported on impending execution of political prisoners in Spain and international protest activities. Reported that we are cooperating with other groups to try to hold picket lines in several cities in U.S.

Discussion

Agreement: To focus Militant coverage on the campaign to free Spanish political prisoners.

6. BLANCO TOUR

(Benson and Kelly invited for this point.)

Kelly reported on USLA's campaign to win visa for Hugo Blanco.

Discussion

7. MEMBERSHIP

Jeness reported on recommendation of Newark branch to readmit A.P. into membership in the party.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Newark branch to readmit A.P. into membership in the party.

Meeting Adjourned.

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
September 30, 1975

TO ALL NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Attached are two reports from Cleveland on some discussions the comrades have had with the Black Muslims there. Comrades in Chicago also report a similar friendly response.

Since the death of Elijah Muhammad earlier this year there appear to be some shake-ups taking place in the Nation of Islam. They've shown more interest in some cities to political activities such as supporting the Hurricane Carter defense case in Newark and supporting a Black Democrat for mayor in Philadelphia. For the past decade Muhammad Speaks has occasionally run articles on our election campaigns. In July and August of this year three articles appeared focusing on our suit against government harassment.

The Nation of Islam is the largest Black nationalist organization in the country, but at the present time we have little knowledge about what is happening inside the Muslims, what shifts are taking place, if there are trends moving to the right or to the left, etc. But the discussions with the Muslims in Cleveland indicate that we should probe this further, have discussions with their members, get our press into the hands of as many of their members as possible, and test out collaboration in antiracist activities, etc. Probably the best way to do this is to talk to their salespeople. NSCAR is asking their national office to send representatives to the conference in Boston.

Branches that are not yet subscribing to Muhammad Speaks, which they claim is the most widely circulated Black paper in the country, are encouraged to order a subscription. The address is: 2548 S. Federal Street, Chicago, Illinois 60616. A one-year subscription is \$18.20.

Reports on activities of and discussions with Muslims in your area should be sent to the party national office.

Comradely,

Doug Jenness
Doug Jenness
National Office

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Cleveland, Ohio
September 22, 1975

Dear Barry:

We have been noticing a new friendliness among Muslims that we meet -- primarily as we meet them selling Muhammad Speaks all over Cleveland. Instead of the brusque or "Go somewhere else, white Devil" attitude we used to encounter, their salespeople have been friendly, have asked to sell us papers, have bought or accepted copies of the Militant and have traded sales-talk. We alerted comrades to be friendly, take time to talk, etc., whenever this occurred.

About two weeks ago, this attitude increased with several sellers of Muhammad Speaks inviting us to attend a Sunday meeting of the Muslims at their temple. We discussed this in the exec and decided to contact the National Office before actually proceeding any further. This we did and Doug felt we could keep up the contact and see exactly what else they wanted.

Last Wednesday, Mike Alewitz as the YSA Organizer and myself as the branch Organizer, went out to one of the two Muslim mosques in the city. We took a packet of leaflets, campaign material, a selection of Black liberation pamphlets from the bookstore, our tape-library list, and copies of our press. We met with Brother Love X who was extremely friendly -- exchanged copies of newspapers with us, and was pretty open. He seemed to know just who we were, saying that their paper had carried articles on us lately. However, he also said that they had sent someone to speak to us, giving the CP address. Since they had not visited us, we assume they went to the CP headquarters. He said that although they could not come out for a new philosophy now, we should understand that they felt that socialism was the only answer for America's Black population. He said they were interested in learning about socialism from us. We offered a number of things -- being low-key on our approach. We asked if they would be interested in being on a panel at the Militant Forum, he said yes. We offered to talk with them individually, or in groups (classes). He said that they were planning some classes of their own and that they would like us to help on them. We said yes. We invited them to our September 27 campaign rally (as observers) and they were open to the idea of attending. We offered to take a small bundle of Muhammad Speaks in the bookstore. He said, "You have to understand that we could not sell a lot of your paper right now" -- but seemed to leave the door open to them taking a bundle of Militants.

This Sunday, four SWPers attended a Muslim meeting at their Mosque No. 18 in Cleveland. Those in attendance were myself, Bob Bresnahan our mayoral candidate, Mike Alewitz for the YSA, and John Staggs our recruitment director. The reception was unbelievable. Not only were four whites allowed inside, but they introduced us as four dignitaries from the Socialist Workers Party --

calling attention to my status of SWP Organizer and Bob's status as mayoral candidate. They had Bob say a few sentences of thanks for inviting us.

After the meeting, Brother Love X and Robert X took us outside. Love took pictures of us for an article they want for Muhammad Speaks -- he took one of Bob alone, as the candidate. Robert was "assigned" by Brother Love X to set up a meeting with us at our headquarters for an interview for their paper.

During the meeting itself, we noticed a few things. They kept referring to "the second resurrection" now taking place in the Muslims. This seemed to mean -- from what was said -- that they are going to be doing some things differently now. Just what this means is unknown. They talked about how they were doing new things now -- and would be more involved in things that affect the Black community.

Another interesting thing about the meeting was the effect Women's Liberation has made on the Muslims. Throughout the meeting there were direct or indirect references to women's rights and the problem of male supremacy. Once, the Assistant Minister, in calling on people from the audience said, "We'll call on one woman and then one man and then one woman and so forth, we don't want to be accused of. . . ." and he gave a laugh and smile at the end. Women in the audience said approving things at this. Another time this same Minister said something like, "We understand how this society has used racism, ignorance and sexism." And, again, "Just because a speaker is a woman doesn't mean she doesn't have something to say -- let's listen."

We now intend to make sure the interview, to be held at the SWP HQ, comes off; to try and be sure they are at our September 27 campaign rally, to get a sub to Muhammad Speaks (they deliver, so we have weekly contact in that way), and to try and set up a forum with them on a panel. We'll also send comrades to future Muslim meetings, and see about those classes they wanted help on.

If you have any more ideas, please give them.

Comradely,

Melissa Singler
Cleveland Organizer

Report from Bucky Kahn, Cleveland SWP

(received September 27, 1975)

On September 23 myself and Cathy Sedwick, representing the Cleveland SCAR had a 45-minute meeting with the Muslims at the Muslim headquarters. The two people we spoke with identified themselves as the Director of Public Relations and the first Assistant to the Minister.

We began the meeting informing them of what SCAR is and what activities we are involved in, both in Cleveland and nationally. They expressed a real interest in the issues we were fighting around, which generated a very rich discussion on what strategy was necessary to effectively counter racist attacks. We then focused the discussion on the early civil rights movement to help explain a mass action perspective. They said that they agreed with us on the need for mass action but that only solved the problem on an "immediate level." They then spoke on the need to change racist attitudes in the "long run." And they asked us how do we plan to deal with that.

We then explained the dual oppression of Blacks in this country, how Black and white workers can link up, and the need to completely change the state and the institutions of the state to completely eradicate racism. Once again, they said they agreed. In this discussion, using a Marxist analysis, I used the formulation ruling-class. They agreed with that formulation and used it themselves.

Many times in the meeting they said they were in agreement with us, not only on our political positions, but also on the method necessary to obtain them. However, their comments reflected a dualism throughout the meeting. At particular points they would revert to religious rationale on how to change people's minds, which they postulate as the main problems, and therefore "counter institutions" were necessary.

They asked us what we would like them to do. We informed them of our activities. They said they would be very interested in speaking at our first campus meeting October 2 on the subject of unemployment in the Black community. They will discuss the speaking engagement with their organization and call us this Friday to confirm.

After we concluded the discussion on SCAR, I asked them if we could discuss their organization for a moment. They were very receptive and enthusiastic towards questions about the Muslims. I then asked them how they felt about Malcolm X, and his contributions to the Black liberation struggle. They were very friendly but somewhat guarded and made their formulations carefully. They said that Malcolm X was a great man, made a tremendous contribution, but the political positions Malcolm X had "were too far ahead of the people's consciousness at the time." At that point we ended the meeting. It was a very relaxed, cordial meeting and they expressed the desire for continued discussion.

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14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
September 30, 1975

Ken Shilman

Seattle

Dear Ken,

I presented a report to the Political Committee based on the information you gave me over the phone about Pat Bethard's campaign. Everyone agreed with your initiatives to make a major campaign around this and for the Militant to cover it every week.

I'll first summarize the facts I reported and then indicate the suggestions of comrades on the Political Committee.

Pat won nearly 18% of the vote on Sept. 16 for the city council position she was running for and thus won a place in the run-off election on Nov. 4. The factors involved here were that her only opponents were an NCLC candidate and the incumbent, endorsed by both the Democrats and Republicans. The election is formally non-partisan. The SWP fielded five candidates for the five positions that were open on the council. All candidates are elected at-large.

Sam Smith, the incumbent, is the only Black on the city council and won most of his support from Seattle's Black community (Seattle is 8-9% Black). However, according to your report there are many Blacks, especially radical-minded ones, who don't like Smith.

You indicated that Pat's credentials include being an elected officer of her AFSCME local, a leader of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, a member of NOW, and a member of the King County Central Labor Council. She has friends and acquaintances in the AFSCME leadership whom she is trying to convince to endorse her campaign.

In addition to your branch headquarters which is near the campus and which you plan to use as a campaign office, you've opened a small campaign office in the Black community which will be the base for trying to win Black support and make contacts.

You indicated that one of the tactical questions you are attempting to deal with is the fact that we are fielding a white candidate against the only Black member of the city council, and there are no Black comrades in either the party or the YSA in Seattle.

September 30, 1975/page 2

The main thing is to find very concrete ways of demonstrating the contrast between Pat's program for Black citizens of Seattle and Smith's. In her speeches and literature Pat should show clearly the difference between her and Smith on such questions as busing, discriminatory layoffs, the recent cop killing of a Black youth, discrimination against Blacks in receiving loans, etc. If Smith's positions on these and similar questions are not available either in literature, newspaper articles, or city council votes, a local Militant reporter should call him and ask his position so that he can be quoted.

As an incumbent city councilman on a city council that's been trying to prune its budget, Smith may not have such a good position on the question of cuts in social services, etc.

The point is that Pat should present herself as the candidate with a program in the interests of Blacks as well as women and labor. You may find it useful to publish a separate piece of literature on the Black struggle.

If Smith has a particularly bad position on an important question, Pat should hammer away at it, repeating and repeating the arguments on it.

Although it isn't possible at this time to transfer Black comrades to Seattle, I'll be talking to you about ways that you think we can utilize Black spokespersons for the party to help maximize our impact through this campaign.

The experiences that you have as you experiment with new approaches, which reflect the turn we made at the convention, should prove invaluable to other branches that are initiating local campaigns for 1976.

Comradely,

/s/

Doug Jenness
SWP National Office