

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION (CHICAGO)

by Ray Follette

This is a report of my impressions of the Committee for Independent Political Action development to date (January 21, 1966.)

A call was issued under date of December 10, 1965 for an all day conference January 15 at McCormick Place. 29 names were on the call, many of which I recognized.

A planning committee met December 29. Minutes of the meeting show that 25 persons were present. Committees were set up to formulate convention rules and draft a constitution. An agenda was prepared: Speakers in the morning and workshops in the afternoon organized on the basis of congressional districts.

On January 10 a second planning meeting was held. This was the first meeting I attended. 60 to 70 persons were present. The majority were older persons; the ratio was 6 older to 4 younger. Present were Sid Lens and Jack Spiegel, Fred Fine (formerly of CP), Irving Birnbaum (chairman of meeting), Henry Wineberg apparently associated with Fine; an SDS group, including Lee Webb, Todd Gitlin, Bob Ross, and others; also Earl Silbar and Steve Baum from the Chicago Committee to End the War; Lawrence Landrey, Nahaz Rogers and others from ACT; Monroe Sharp from SNCC; a few people from a west side Community organization (Negro). Others at the meeting appeared to be either students or Hyde Park liberal ex-CP elements.

The discussion polarized around two opposing groups and viewpoints. Much heat and acrimony developed, which was remarked upon by many of those present.

The older liberal-radical group centered around Sid Lens. They composed the leadership of the committee already set up. They wanted to go to the conference with a definite organizational structure plan based on congressional districts, with a constitution all ready for adoption, and with ideas to begin electoral activity in a hurry. They seemed to envision an electoral committee of a coalition character which would run candidates in selected congressional districts.

I had the impression that Lens is contemplating a personal candidacy on the lines of his 1962 "peace candidate" campaign, but bigger. Lens referred to the spectrum of views about working in or out of the Democratic Party. Although he has always favored an independent party, he said, in the present period he finds it

necessary to appeal to a broad range of supporters -- "the middle class housewife in Skokie as well as the radicals like Silbar. There must be room for both NAACP and Landry, for both SANE and Lens (!)" He looked for direct affiliation by existing organizations and protest groups.

The opposing view was pushed by the SDS group, supported by most of the young people present, as well as by the Negro protest groups (ACT, SNCC). The SDS called for a "grass roots" political movement to be built from the ground up. (This is in line with their "multi-issue community organization orientation.) They wanted to emphasize wards and precincts rather than Congressional districts. While they see peace and the Negro struggle as major issues, they do not see a political organization building on these issues at this time. They want to work in the precincts without prior political assumptions, to learn the local needs, encourage broad participation, offer a variety of community services. They would begin electoral activity by trying to elect precinct captains. In effect they want to beat the Democratic machine by building a duplicate, but opposing structure. Congressional contests would be organized as temporary combinations of smaller units.

Monroe Sharp of SNCC, Silbar, Landry and Rogers supported the SDS approach. (Landry has his own paddle in the water; he is engaged in community activity to try to get their own precinct captains within the Democratic orbit.)

Neither grouping paid much attention to program; neither had any real objection to operating within the Democratic party, although they accepted the idea of operating outside, if necessary. The important thing was to oppose "the machine".

Four electoral contests are coming up in the period 1966-67: the Congressional primaries this spring, the Congressional elections Nov. 1966, the aldermanic elections, Feb. 1967, and the mayoralty elections, May 1967. No decisions were taken, but it was implied that some action would be desirable in all of the contests.

The evening was consumed with wrangling over organizational questions, which in reality expressed the opposing general outlooks.

I felt that Lens and Company were fearful of the younger element. A YSA comrade who attended agreed with me on this. Most likely they are afraid of the younger people getting out of hand and alienating the "moderate" wing of the electoral coalition they hope to build. At the same time, they need the SDS and other young people for leg work, etc.

A majority supported a motion for the conference to:

1. Postpone adoption of a constitution.
2. Orient workshops to discuss ways to organize at the precinct and ward level.
3. Establish a temporary continuations committee, which would initiate discussion and organization. It would organize a constitutional convention in two months, at which time the discussion and organizational experience would be evaluated.

However, the Lens group was adroit enough to have all conference arrangements referred to the same pre-existing constitution committee.

I came out with the feeling that there was not much of promise for us in the CIPA, but proposed to our EC that some of attend the conference.

The conference held on January 15 was attended by about 350 persons. It was organized pretty much as the Lens group had projected, speakers in the morning and in the afternoon workshops organized on Congressional districts followed by plenary adoption of organizational measures. Lens even gave interviews to the press in the morning about what the conference was going to do, along his own lines, of course. The final recommendations, however, came out to be a compromise.

The floor discussion indicated a good deal of confusion about the nature of independent political action. Most people seemed to make no real distinction between working in or out of the Democratic Party. There was a good deal of enthusiasm however, and a pretty good turnout of young people and Negroes.

The Congressional district workshops discussed the possibilities and methods of organizing in their districts and each selected two delegates to be added to the original conveners of the conference to make up a new continuations committee.

My district workshop had a small representation, only eight of us, four white and four Negro, corresponding in residence to white and Negro sections of the district. Bob Lucas, President of CORE, attended from my district.

I think our discussion was similar to that of other districts in that: Organizational work was emphasized. No attention was paid to program. No definite candidates were projected, although it was generally assumed that Dick Gregory would be a mayoralty candidate.

Possible Democratic "independent" candidacies were acceptable to most of those present, in varying degrees. I raised the question rather gently, of whether a Democratic candidacy was in reality independent political action. The others seemed startled by the question, and spent some time knocking it about.

They had selected Bob Lucas and another Negro man, a dissident Democrat, as the two district delegates. When they learned where I lived, it turned out they knew about Bogan High School and the explosive public meeting our community group had organized on the issue. They were impressed by my involvement. Bob Lucas and the others then insisted that I replace him as one of the district delegates to the central body, on the grounds that this district was mainly white and they needed a good white representative. I figured that I could go along and drop out later if nothing pans out.

The final plenary session adopted organizational proposals that were a compromise between the Lens and the SDS views. SDS obtained postponement of the adoption of a constitution, setting up a temporary continuation committee, not a permanent administration, which would initiate organizational work and discussion, and would call a constitutional convention in about two months; and the encouragement of organization on community level.

The Lens group obtained representation on the continuations committee on a congressional district basis, in addition to the original conveners, and authorization for the committee to support Congressional campaigns.

My overall impression of the conference was that confusion on the question of "independent Democratic" politics prevails. There were enough new young people and new Negro elements who are sincerely interested, but confused, to warrant some attention by us. I think it inevitable that they will participate in the Democratic primaries to some degree, we may have to watch them through this experience.

I am the only comrade on the continuation committee -- "by a fluke". A Negro contact is a delegate from another district.

A few days later, on January 18, I attended the first meeting of the continuation committee. The composition was again a coalition of the old liberal-radicals with a minority of Negro protest groups and SDS and anti-war committees.

Lens pushed through a motion to make each district financially responsible for its own campaign, not able to call on the other districts or the central body to help meet obligations. I got the

impression that he is clearing the way for his own candidacy, and did not want to have to divert funds to other candidates.

Committees for finances and for a news bulletin were set up.

Sylvia Fisher, a CP-periphery type, introduced a proposal for a full-time paid professional organizer, and had recommendations for a sub-committee to select this person. There were loud objections to her bureaucratic handling of this, and it was agreed eventually that all members would help in interviewing potential organizers, with a decision to be made next week.

Again there was no discussion of program or specific candidates. However, a number of persons implied that there would be participation in the congressional primary race. Meetings are being organized in several wards and districts, and actual organizational work is being referred to them, rather than the central body.

The Lens-SDS dispute was subdued, at this meeting, but I noted a new difference arising. The SDS is asking for a city-wide forum setup for speakers, educationals, panel discussions. Others, especially the Negro groups, seem very impatient with any discussion of "ideology", but want to get right on with organizing "the man in the street." They feel that this takes precedence over any question of program or specific candidates.

Discussion was disorganized, and points were generally referred to future meetings. The general feeling was one of frustration and lack of accomplishment.

List of Conference Sponsors:

Dr. Robert Havighurst	Bob Lucas	Dick Gregory
Lucy Montgomery	Father William Hogan	Sidney Lens
Paul Booth	Rev. Harry Anderson	Timuel Black
Rev. Bill Briggs	Richard Rothstein	Pat Devine
Lee Webb	Irving Birnbaum	Henry Wineberg
Earl Silbar	John Kearney	Shirley Lens
A. A. Rayner, Jr.	Florence Scala	Rev. R. Knudsen
Ira Silbar	Lee Leibik	Jack Spiegel
Rennie Davis	Ron Tabor	Dr. Quentin Young
Paul Lauter	Todd Gitlin	Prof. David Bakan

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT OF CIPA

by B. Webber

Composition of conference audience: many ex-CPers, and other liberal-types. Among the younger people, 15-20 from SDS-JOIN project, a few from DuBois club, some from various anti-war committees, and many University of Chicago students, mostly SDSers or unaffiliated.

The general tone of the floor discussion was with emphasis on work within the Democratic primaries. However a couple of people discussed what real independent political action meant, and received some applause. This was quickly countered by CPers, who said we must take a realistic view, and not be caught up with idealism.

In the afternoon in the workshop of the 1st Congressional district, which includes Hyde Park, and the University of Chicago area, several UC students expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of emphasis on program, etc., and one made the point that he could not support a candidate who was not opposed to the phony war on poverty as well as the war in Vietnam. This discussion did not lead anywhere however. Most of the other workshops followed the format that Follette outlined.

At the second plenary discussion, Dick Gregory rambled for 15-20 minutes. He did say that he had not yet worked out a platform / program for his mayoralty campaign, and would not think much of any organization that gave him support without having seen his program. He also said that in any case, he did not want CIPA to be on record at this point as supporting his campaign, because he thought the ends of the organization were more important than this, and did not want it charged that CIPA was organized just to support his campaign.

At the EC meeting January 23, we decided that Follette should continue to attend the next few continuation committee meetings to see how things develop. We will also try to make contact with SDS to see what they have in mind, with the possibility that maybe we can drive a wedge further between this group and the Lens elements. At this point, we're still probing however, and will make a decision about a course of action as we see how things shape up.

Proposals of Pre-Conference Committee
Adopted at CIPA Conference, January 15, 1966

1. The name of this organization shall be the Committee for Independent Political Action.
2. The organization shall temporarily be run by the Continuations Committee until a more permanent organizational structure is established.
3. This committee shall consist of 1 representative per Congressional district and 1 representative for every 50 persons or fraction thereof, as well as the 25 working members of the Pre-Conference Committee. The elected members are: 1st district, Larry Horvell, Si Williams, 2nd District, Bob Ross, Ed Riddick, Bernie Wexler, Len Bishop, 3rd District, William Randall, Howard Packer, 4th District, Joshua Alves, Norman Jantz, 6th District, William Thomas, Sigmonde Wimberly, 7th District, Claude Kinard, Sylvia Woods, 8th District, Emma Johnson, 9th District, Todd Gitlan, Fred Palmer, John Montgomery, Larry Knoble, Unassigned District, Sam Friedman, William Miller. The pre-conference committee members are: Dr. Robert Havighurst, Dick Gregory, Paul Lauter, Sid Lens, Irving Birnbaum, Henry Wineberg, Monroe Sharp, Lawrence Landry, Lee Webb, Katie Booth, Jesse Lemish, Sylvia Fischer, Ralph Rappoport, Margarie Rosenberg, Florence Scala, Fr. William Hogan, Jack Spiegel, Rev. Knudsen, Bob Lucas, Pat Devine, Richard Rothstein, Rev. Bill Baird, Fred Fine, Ruth Cummings, Shirley Lens, Brenetta Howell.
4. The Continuations Committee shall meet frequently on a regular basis to carry on the necessary functions of the organization.
5. The functions of the Continuations Committee shall be :
 - a) to encourage the growth of the temporary CIPA Congressional District Organizing groups established at this conference , and to work to establish such groups in additional areas. Such temporary organizing groups are to investigate and pin-point the specific community issues of their area, and organize CIPA ward and precinct groups around these issues wherever feasible.
 - b) To stimulate debate and discussion on structure, political strategy and action programs within the Continuations Committee and CIPA organizing groups through workshops, meetings and the publication and distribution of working papers.
 - c) To encourage the active participation of community organizations, church groups, civil rights organizations, trade unions and other established groups .. that we can interest in our programs and goals.
 - d) To carry on such functions as press-relations, the stimulation of research and analysis, fund-raising, enlistment of sponsors and the establishment of a central office for CIPA.
 - e) To actively support

with technical advise, funds and manpower the various action projects and Congressional District groups. f) To prepare a Constitution for CIPA and work towards a CIPA convention to establish our permanent, formal organization for independent political action. Such convention to be held in approximately two months.