

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, No. 12, March 28, 1968

Present: Dobbs, Kerry, Sheppard, Jones, Novack, Shaw

Chairman: Dobbs

AGENDA: 1. Antiwar

1. ANTIWAR REPORT

Jones reported (see attached report).

Meeting adjourned.

REPORT ON THE CHICAGO CONFERENCE by Lew, March 28, 1968

A conference called to discuss possible antiwar action at the Democratic Party convention was held in Chicago, March 23-24. In its preparation and organization, the conference was secret and unrepresentative. It established "a new coalition" based on a multi-issue platform including support to "independent" electoral activity. No decision on action at the Democratic Party convention was made.

The conference was actually initiated in December, shortly after the October 21 action. At that time a sub-committee of the National Mobilization Committee (NMC) officers were delegated to make arrangements for a conference to discuss possible antiwar action at the Democratic Party convention. This sub-committee was parlayed by Dellinger and Greenblatt into an ad hoc formation which then proceeded to organize the "new coalition" secret confab.

The establishment of this coalition represents an attempt by Dellinger, Greenblatt, and those around them to consolidate a bloc with the so-called "new left," especially SDS. Previous gropings toward such a bloc were noted in the April 15 demonstration when this same group attempted to impose the Central Park draft card burning as part of the official program. Also, the preparations for October 21 were characterized by an attempt to consolidate this bloc.

The CP supported efforts to arrange this conference and the "peace and freedom" coalition it established. They saw an opportunity to establish a competitor to the antiwar movement which could lend itself to their electoral plans.

Our attitude throughout these maneuvers was to urge all to throw themselves into building April 27 into the largest international protest yet. It made little political sense to chase this group, trying to fight and maneuver with them over a demonstration that may or may not occur six months from now. Such a course would have sharply cut into the April days of protest.

Approximately 200 people attended the Chicago secret conference. Two conferences, one black and one white, had been projected. However, when only 20-25 blacks, all of a CP orientation, appeared, the black conference dissolved into the white.

Of the 175 whites present the overwhelming majority were from the SDS milieu. These were of three types -- the would-be SDSers, including Dellinger and Greenblatt; the graduate SDSers (Rennie Davis, Lee Webb, Paul Potter, Clark Kissinger, Tom Hayden); and the present leadership of SDS (Mike Speigel, Kathy Wilkerson, Bob Pardun). The CP had a sizable fraction of over 35, including black CPers. Others in attendance were moderates favorably inclined towards the Democratic Party: Jack Speigel of Chicago, Cora Weiss of WSP, Irving Beinin, Abe Weisburd. The Robert Scheer wing of the California Peace and Freedom Party was heavily represented.

Politically the conference broke down into three groupings -- those who are befuddled by the 1968 election situation and are generally opposed to massive antiwar action (they constituted the majority); those who support the Democratic Party and perhaps this year a Peace and Freedom ticket; and a small group who mistakenly believed this was an antiwar conference.

The "new coalition" established itself under a platform passed at the conference. It read in part, "We call for an election-year organizing campaign to be carried into cities, towns, and counties across America. Our purpose is to generate massive popular support against the war, the draft, imperialism, racism, repression, poverty, and unrepresentative government." Further, ". . . we need to recognize the need to develop independent electoral alternatives based on radical programs and centered in local organizing."

A common motif of the conference was the idea that the '68 elections and the question of who is to be nominated are key issues to do "organizing" around. Yet, reflecting their own confusion, the possible candidates and general political situation were never once discussed. The SWP campaign was pointedly ignored.

At the beginning of the conference a motion was passed stating opposition to Kennedy and McCarthy. But, by the conclusion a second motion was passed over minor objection for this new grouping to work with and relate to those supporting Kennedy and McCarthy.

The general mood of the conference was to reject Kennedy and McCarthy and yet express great fear that they may be co-opted by them. This thought was expressed so often, one got the impression that, in fact, there was an unconscious desire to be "co-opted."

The conference, as shown in these examples, represents the floundering of a section of the radical movement in the face of a bourgeois antiwar challenge to Johnson. While at this point not coming out openly in support of either Kennedy or McCarthy or Peace and Freedom, they have begun to take steps that lead inevitably into that camp. Even Dellinger, who as an anarchist supposedly opposes any electoral activity, stated his "great interest" in the Peace and Freedom Party in California.

As a consequence, not much can be expected from this "new coalition." Entirely dependent on bourgeois politics they will thrash around in the coming months, effectively cutting their own influence and authority.

So unsure of itself was this group that they put off any decision on action at the Democratic Party convention until June, when yet another conference will make final decisions. It was necessary, they felt, to wait until the California primary in June is over, and the political situation clearer for them; that is, it will be clearer whether they should support Peace and Freedom, Kennedy-McCarthy, or duck the entire issue.

The secret conference established a three man committee "to bring into being a coalition responsible to real constituencies." This committee is composed of Dave Dellinger, Rennie Davis, and Vernon Grizzard (an SDS type from Boston). An office has already been established in Chicago. Clearly, this new group is dominated by the "graduate" layer of SDSers and Dave Dellinger. At this point it is more or less an adult SDS, but without the campus milieu that SDS has to work in.

The present leadership of SDS has taken no stand on Dellinger's new formation, although the present generation of SDSers tend to oppose a Democratic Party convention demonstration in favor of "local organizing." The March 29-31 SDS national council meeting will undoubtedly discuss their attitude towards these issues.

The CP, of course, fully supports the creation of this coalition, as it represents a new beginning for a policy they have perpetually pushed in the antiwar movement. Their political influence and organizational control, however, are at this point minimal. There can be little doubt, though, that the CP will make a full effort to support it.

Another new group, the Youth International Party (YIP) plans a "festival of life" in Chicago at the time of the convention. Organized by Jerry Rubin, Abbe Hoffman, Keith Lampe, and others, this new group ("the Yippies") represents a totally regressive development. It seeks to politically organize the here-to-now unorganized hippies. It represents the political organization of a sick, escapist milieu. This new organization can only be viewed as an opponent and its "festival" as degenerate.

What authority Dellinger's secret coalition will have in the antiwar movement remains to be determined. At minimum it will undoubtedly mean the demise of the National Mobilization Committee, which at this stage represents little more than a shell which Dellinger and Greenblatt could use for their own purposes.

One thing is clear, though. This conference foreshadows an impending dispute in the antiwar movement over the 1968 elections-- a dispute that is primarily between the CP and us.

Revolutionary socialists do not support this new group. Moreover, while wearing the clothing of an antiwar formation, Dellinger's new group is not an antiwar group. As reports sift back to local groups on the Chicago conference these facts will probably have to be made clear. Affiliation to this group by antiwar organizations should be opposed, although there is nothing wrong with sharing information with it.

The primary job of the antiwar movement is to throw everything it has into the April protests. A fight or dispute over this conference or the Democratic party convention should be avoided by the antiwar movement at this time, in as much as it would hamper and undercut the upcoming and perhaps largest wave of antiwar action.

Following the April days of protest, the antiwar movement will have ample opportunity to settle differences and chart a course of action.