

Report on the 3rd National Convention of the DuBois Clubs

by Les E.

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The W.E.B. DuBois Clubs held their third national convention in New York, September 8-10, 1967. It marked the lowest point in their three year history.

Although The Worker reported first 400 and later 350 as the attendance at the convention, the real figure was far less than that. The convention opened with a public forum designed to round up a crowd for the rest of the sessions. Relatively big name speakers were scheduled, such as Rev. James Bevel, Julius Lester of SNCC, Grace Mora Newman, attorney William Kunstler, and Stanley Faulkner.

Both Bevel and Lester attacked the DuBois Clubs in their presentations, Kunstler did not show up, and only 275 attended. The major political report was delivered at 11:00 p.m. Friday night by Jarvis Tyner. It was not discussed then, or at any time during the convention.

Saturday the real convention began. Scheduled to start at 9:30, the session was convened at 11:00 a.m. when 58 people, including observers, had shuffled in to hear the organizational report, given by Bob Heisler.

Heisler reported: "We have...seen a decline in the past year in the number of functioning clubs.

"There are many reasons for this decline. For the past six months we have not in effect had a functioning National Office. No consistent publications, political or ideological leadership came from the National Office. Many clubs, thinking that the NO had closed down, either folded up or stopped functioning regularly."

Heisler explained that "severe disagreements" made it "impossible for the National Office to function." He did not say what the disagreements were.

Heisler announced that Chicago, the National Office's "host city," did not have a sufficient base to sustain the office and that it had been moved to New York.

Workshops were held on Labor; New Politics; Black Liberation/Freedom Movement; Vietnam/Draft; the Woman Question; and the International Movement.

When these concluded, "strata" workshops were begun to discuss Campus; High School; Ghetto Organizing and Trade Unions. These were to reconvene Sunday morning to draft resolutions for the plenary session to follow, but no one showed up and they were all cancelled.

In the plenary session there was discussion on the organizational report and the workshops on the Woman Question, New Politics, Black Liberation and Labor. The other workshops were never discussed, including the one on Vietnam and the antiwar movement.

At the highest vote of the convention there were 104 DuBoisers present and voting, plus about 25 observers, mostly from other organizations. Anyone claiming membership in the DuBois Clubs was made a "delegate" and could vote, which meant that although it was a national convention, the New York clubs had a mechanical majority.

At the founding convention in San Francisco in 1964, 350 participated. The second national convention, in June 1966, was attended by 150. At that time we observed that the clubs had been able to consolidate a relatively capable and nationally representative leadership. It was plain at the present convention that the DBS leadership team had collapsed.

Heisler reported that they had a three-man full-time staff in the NO: Franklin Alexander, national chairman; Hugh Fowler, executive secretary; and Jim Peake. Alexander and Fowler did not show up at the convention and were not re-elected to the leadership. No explanation was made.

The convention voted to undertake a totally unrealistic series of campaigns, such as: 10,000 must be signed up to refuse the draft; there will be a student strike at a group of key colleges and high schools; mass picket lines should be organized in front of auto dealers; honorary membership cards in the YAW will be distributed on campus.

One important project they set themselves was nationwide campus referendums on the war this fall. These are aimed to become multi-issue vehicles for a drive to back a "New Politics" candidate in 1968.

They presented the fiasco at the NCNP convention as a great victory for "black-white unity" that lays the basis for a third ticket in 1968. This is their major orientation.

The Vietnam workshop passed a resolution which was never reported to the convention which said: "There are different ways to oppose the war. Draft resistance and electoral politics have priority. We support October 21 but it does not have priority." It was carefully explained that the word "support" was just a cover so they wouldn't be attacked, but that the DBC would do nothing to build October 21.

The new national officers elected were: Jarvis Tyner, national chairman; Gene Tounour, executive secretary; Carolyn Black, field director; Carmen Ristorucci, publications; and

Bob Heisler, education director.

There was a general spirit of depression and demoralization among the DBCers. This was accompanied by a defensive hostility toward our comrades who were there, and an attempt to prevent our literature table from being set up.

While the convention demonstrated the national weakness of the DuBois Clubs and their decline over the last year, it also marks an attempt to revitalize the skeleton that is left. The DuBois Club plans to concentrate most of its leadership and energy on the New York area and hopes to make gains by organizing around the "Peace and Freedom" ticket in '68.

Their failure to understand that the war in Vietnam is the single most important radicalizing issue in the U.S. today, and their refusal to support and build the single issue, united front antiwar formations isolates them from many newly radicalizing youth.

Their class collaborationist, black-white unity line for the Afro-American struggle cuts them off from the most conscious black militants.

The NCNP convention made it clear that the third ticket perspective will not be an easy one to realize. In the meantime, we have our socialist campaign well underway and we should be especially conscious of appealing to any DuBois Club members or sympathizers we come in contact with to support Halstead and Boutelle. How successful they are in revitalizing the DBC will depend in part on how successful we are in influencing their supporters with our class struggle politics in the electoral arena as well as in the antiwar movement and the Afro-American struggle.