

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 33, September 19, 1975

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Camejo, Clark, A. Hansen, Jenness, Lovell, Seigle, Sheppard, Waters

Chair: Lovell

- AGENDA:
1. National Organization of Women Convention
  2. NSCAR Steering Committee Meeting
  3. Portugal Campaign
  4. ISR Special Political Resolution Issue
  5. Membership
  6. San Jose Branch
  7. Campaign around Chicago Legion of Justice Expose
  8. Wohlforth

1. NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN CONVENTION

(L. Jenness invited for this point.)

L. Jenness reported on NOW convention planned for October 24-27 in Philadelphia and our participation.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

2. NSCAR STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

(Bailey and Hildebrand invited for this point.)

Bailey reported on NSCAR Steering Committee meeting held September 13 in Boston.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. PORTUGAL CAMPAIGN

Sheppard reported on proposals to branches to step up party campaign in defense of the Portuguese revolution and on internal bulletins on Portugal to be published.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report (see attached).

Carried.

4. ISR SPECIAL POLITICAL RESOLUTION ISSUE

(Lund invited for this point.)

Lund reported on proposal to publish political resolution as special 16-page November issue of ISR with extra copies printed for broader distribution.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the proposal.

Carried.

5. MEMBERSHIP

Jenness reported on proposal to accept J.G. into membership in the party as an at-large member in Toledo. (See attached correspondence.)

Discussion

Motion: To accept J.G. into membership as an at-large member in Toledo.

Carried.

6. SAN JOSE BRANCH

Jenness reported on request of San Jose organizing committee that a branch be chartered in San Jose.

Discussion

Motion: That the Political Committee authorize the at-large members in San Jose to constitute a party branch in that city.

Carried.

7. CAMPAIGN AROUND CHICAGO LEGION OF JUSTICE EXPOSE

(Stapleton invited for this point.)

Stapleton reported on recent testimony of Legion of Justice member and our response (see Militant Vol. 39, No. 35, Sept. 26, 1975).

Discussion

Agreement to give national focus to our offensive against Legion of Justice with weekly Militant coverage and agreement on proposed suit in Chicago.

8. WOHLFORTH

Breitman reported on recent discussions with Tim Wohlforth.

Discussion

Agreement on Wohlforth writing reviews of Trotsky writings for our press

Meeting Adjourned.

14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
September 20, 1975

TO ALL MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

At its meeting of September 19, the Political Committee decided to step up the party's campaign in defense of the Portuguese revolution.

All branches are urged to hold forums on Portugal, to help get the facts out, explain the meaning of the workers upsurge and the central political issues involved. The positions of the SWP should be contrasted to those of our opponents on the left in the U.S., who have all without exception taken wrong positions in the heat of the events themselves.

Some branches have already scheduled such forums. Barry Sheppard will be speaking at a city-wide forum in New York, at the Newark forum, and at a city-wide Chicago forum.

Other national speakers may be available. Branches can check with the National Office. Should it turn out to be impractical to arrange for a national speaker, branches should schedule local speakers.

It may be possible to set up debates on this question. While we have no interest in debating the various sectarian grouplets, it would be useful to debate supporters of the CP line.

Our press will continue to cover the developments in Portugal in a major way. Further Internal Information Bulletins are also planned that will contain more material reflecting the positions of groups in and around the world Trotskyist movement. A recent letter from Fred Feldman, for the National Education Department, indicated that an outline for a class series on the events in Portugal is being prepared, which will be useful in setting up classes on the Portuguese events.

Comradely,

*Barry Sheppard*  
Barry Sheppard  
National Organization  
Secretary

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September 9, 1975

Barry Sheppard  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Barry,

This is a report on my visit to Toledo last weekend where I talked with John G., a leader of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) who wants to join the SWP. John and I and his wife Cathie, who is also interested in our movement, spent about 12 or so hours talking together.

I was very impressed with both these people. John is a political person who has considered himself a socialist for some time and has read some socialist literature. He has been active in FLOC for the past four years and is now a full-time research director for FLOC and one of the main leaders of the group. As a result of coming to our convention, he wants to join the SWP and wanted to know how to go about applying. As he put it, he's through looking around at different radical groups to see which one he likes best. He says he's sure that a revolutionary party is needed and that the SWP is the right party to build.

Cathie is an activist in FLOC who is also interested in socialism. She was able to spend only one day at our convention so she did not get as clear a picture of what we are all about. (John was there the whole time.) She indicated she wants to read more and find out more about us before making a decision about joining.

Both John and Cathie were active in the antiwar movement and student struggles of the 1960's. Previous to the convention they had met some party members and had subscribed off and on to the Militant. They had both read Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution and one of the things that excited them most about our party was the idea that we represent a continuity of revolutionary struggle back to the Russian revolution and Marx and Engels. John was also very excited to learn that we traced our roots in this country to the IWW and the early CP. Since returning from the convention John has been reading books about us including the Transitional Program, Socialism on Trial, and the History of American Trotskyism. He is very excited about the whole new political world opening up to him. From what I could see there was no particular position of the party that he knows about now that he disagrees with. He indicated that he had generally followed the debate on Portugal and learned from it. The one day Cathie was at the convention was the day of the Portugal discussion and she said that what with the various accents and Marxist lingo she had trouble following it. She also said the Militant coverage on Portugal confused her on certain points. I didn't get a chance to discuss with her what questions she had on this.

In addition to John and Cathie there is a Chicana in Toledo who is a member of the YSA. She is newer to politics and knows less about our politics than either of the G.'s. She joined the YSA at the May 17 march on Boston. John and Cathie plan to get together with her and

begin studying some of our literature. They also said they would do whatever they can to help her and the regional YSA organizer to build a YSA in Toledo. This will be limited due to the YSAer's schedule and newness.

I discussed with John and Cathie the nature of the YSA as well as the SWP and told them about our recent practice of not recruiting at-large SWP members and the reasons for it. I asked them what their reaction would be to joining the YSA and concentrating on building the YSA in the period ahead. John was quite definite in saying he would feel uncomfortable about joining the YSA. He said he is more familiar with the party and that he has not been a student or youth activist for many years. Most of the members of FIOC tend to be older people with most of the main leadership being in their late 20s. John is 28. Cathie, who is 25, said she would also feel more comfortable joining the SWP. I did not try to convince them to join the YSA as opposed to the SWP.

As it stands now, there are no other members of FIOC besides these three who know enough about us or agree with us enough to consider joining. But John thinks that there are many people who might be interested. He says that as soon as people find out he is a member they'll start asking him about the SWP and he hopes that through personal discussions, suggesting readings to people and perhaps a study group that he'll be able to interest some of his friends in the party.

The leadership of FIOC is a close-knit group of people who have been working together for some time. From everything John says they sound like an unusually serious group. Many have been devoting most of their free time to FIOC for four years and more and some are full time staffers. The leader of the group is Baldemore Valasquez. Baldemore, or "Baldy" as they call him, attended our convention for a day or so and is friendly to the SWP. He is in his late 20s, is from a migrant workers family and has been organizing farmworkers and working to build FIOC for a number of years. He is a charismatic figure and is well known in the area. At least at this time Baldy is not interested in joining the SWP and John said that the likelihood is that he will not be interested in joining. I did not meet Baldy since the day I was there he had some kind of seizure and was taken to the hospital. There are 15 or so more leading activists in FIOC, both Chicano and Anglo, who John says consider themselves either radical, or anti-capitalist or sympathetic to socialism. John has no idea who of these might want to join the SWP. He thought the best thing to do was just to begin talking with others on a personal basis about the party and see what develops.

Given John's relationship with FIOC and the fact that it is completely unclear who else in FIOC would be interested in the SWP, it seemed wisest to take the whole thing very slow. The perspective John has is to continue to devote most of his time to FIOC. His position as a leader of FIOC would necessarily limit what he can do publically on behalf of the SWP. The only new thing he would be doing would be talking informally with people about the SWP and this he is going to do cautiously. John commented that despite his in-

ability to represent the party publically, he wanted very much to be a member since he thought this would help him in terms of convincing others to join.

We discussed the importance of John making it absolutely clear by his actions that he had no intention of making FIOC into some kind of SWP-related group. It was thought best for this reason to now slow down on things such as having SWP speakers address FIOC and instead encourage any FIOC members who are interested to go to Cleveland or Detroit to hear SWP speakers. Over time there will also be the possibility of sponsoring SWP or YSA speakers in Toledo separate from any FIOC activity.

The way I left things with John was as follows. I said I would write the N.O. about his application for membership and told him the N.O. would discuss out what to do. In the meantime I told him he and Cathie should feel free to go over to Detroit (which is much closer than Cleveland) to branch meetings and find out more about the party. He proposed that maybe he could join in Detroit as a solution and I told him I'd raise it as one possible idea. I also told him that I'd try to come back to visit again after he'd had time to see how things were working in Toledo. In the meantime he's going to keep in touch with the comrades in Cleveland and keep reading and talking with his friends.

Now that I've given you this report, maybe I should say a few words about my thinking about what we should do. John's request to join the SWP poses the question of whether to continue our present policy of prohibiting recruitment to the SWP in the region. My inclination is to want to accept John as a member and to make a change in our policy. It seems to me that if what we said at our convention is true concerning recruitment to the SWP then we have to expect that such recruitment will take place in terms of the region.

At the same time, I have hesitations about changing the policy. I think our original reasons for deciding to prohibit at-large recruitment are still valid in most cases. For example, I still tend to think it's not a good idea for YSAers active in the YSA in the region to join the SWP. This is because if they join in an area where there is no SWP branch or perspective of building one, joining the SWP has no real meaning except in the sense that it might allow them to get certain party mailings. Their arena of work would remain the YSA and their SWP membership would only serve to make them "special type" YSAers. It would still probably tend to be harmful to a YSA local to create these distinctions between YSAers. For example, despite the fact that many leaders of the Bloomington local look to the SWP as their organization and are serious leaders of the Trotskyist movement, there would be a problem with them joining the SWP because their arena of activity is the YSA and we have no perspective of building an SWP in Bloomington. At the same time, given their seriousness and political maturity, I think its important for the YSA leadership in Bloomington to have a lot of contact with the SWP.

Another advantage that would be lost if we began to recruit at-largers to the SWP would be the fact that this policy discourages

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free-lancing. Prohibiting at-large recruitment also tends to discourage SWPers who live in cities where there are branches from moving elsewhere and it provides encouragement for serious YSAers to move to areas where there are party branches.

So I feel quite torn between the different alternatives. On the one hand my inclination is to accept John into membership, since this is his request and because the particular type activity he is involved in requires collaboration with the party. Also, the YSA is still very much of an abstraction to him, given the fact that it was the SWP convention he attended. I also think we will see more people coming around like John, and it's obvious that at some point we will have to change the policy. On the other hand, there is no evidence as yet that we'll see a big rash of such applications and the best vehicle for building the movement in the regions remains the YSA.

One solution to the problem might be to decide what to do on a case by case basis. That is, take in at-large applicants where they have a perspective of building the SWP and not take in people whose arena of work is the YSA. In this way the party could control somewhat the question of where we build party branches. In a smaller campus town situation even older people coming around could be encouraged to help build the YSA whereas the opening would be made for us to recruit party members in places like Toledo where a party branch would be appropriate. Of course, this would open the way for the establishment of new small branches which might in some cases come into being and then disappear. At one point in our discussion, for example, John asked if it weren't true that you needed five members to make a branch and he commented that maybe it would be possible for him to build one in Toledo. On the other hand, if, say, John and any friends he recruited wanted to move from Toledo, then the branch might disappear.

Another advantage to taking things on a case-by-case basis would be the fact that given the small number of people in the region interested in joining the SWP, the whole question of how this would develop and the ways of dealing with it are still a little abstract to us. By going case by case, we could work it out as we go along.

One question that will be raised as we recruit SWPers in the region is the fact that of now, the party has no regional apparatus. Some arrangement will have to be made for party members to work on a regular basis with active at-largers. As things stand now this is done through the N.O., but with more at-largers or with a more active one like John, this would be inadequate.

I'm assuming that these questions will be discussed out by the party leadership and that you'll get back to me with your thinking. It seems to me that no matter what is decided that the party will have to pay more attention to regional work in the period ahead, that we should continue to visit places where there are large YSA locals with experienced leaderships and that we should do more trail-blazing as a party into big cities. The YSA N.O. may have some insights into questions such as that of recruiting leaders in locals such as Bloomington to the SWP.

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It will probably be a good idea for me to go back to Toledo again, and also most likely to Cleveland or Detroit, to continue this discussion with the comrades there and to talk further with John about his perspective.

Comradely,

/s/

Betsey Stone

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14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
September 20, 1975

Betsey Stone

Dear Betsey,

The Political Committee discussed and concurred with your recommendation that we accept John G. as a member-at-large in Toledo. We've notified him of this decision.

As you indicated in your letter to Barry this represents a shift from the party's previous policy of not taking in members-at-large. In recent years members-at-large were comrades who had joined a party branch and then transferred to a city where there was no branch. Except in cases where we have asked comrades to move to cities with the perspective of building a new branch, we have discouraged comrades from transferring to at-large status.

In considering John's application for party membership we started from several facts. One, he is involved in important political activity in Toledo and has friends and contacts there. Two, Toledo is an important industrial city where we would like to establish a branch at some point.

These facts along with the assessment of John's seriousness by you, Frank L., and others who have met him suggested to us that we view this situation from the standpoint that it could lead to establishing a small branch in Toledo. As John pointed out to you, only five comrades are necessary according to the Constitution to establish a branch. (If you recall, we only had six members when we first set up the Atlanta branch.) There's no question that we're going to have some branches in the coming period that are different from branches as we've known them in the past couple of decades.

This is why we proposed membership-at-large rather than membership in either the Cleveland or Detroit branches.

This, of course, means that we will have to give national attention to this situation and should consider asking two or three comrades to transfer to Toledo.

I think that we can expect to face more opportunities like this in the coming period and the discussions we had at the convention have prepared us to respond to them with confidence. It's true that we will take in some members-at-large that don't pan out, but this is outweighed by far by the necessity to be alert to every possible opportunity for party recruitment and expansion. When such recruitment occurs in places like Toledo, we should seriously consider it as a possible step toward a branch in that city.

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Of course, each application for membership from persons not living in localities where we have branches will be considered carefully and decided upon by the Political Committee.

As you correctly point out in your letter, the Toledo situation is quite different from that where YSAers in small campus towns may apply to join the party as at-large members.

We don't have any immediate perspectives of establishing branches in such places as Bloomington, Indiana or Madison, Wisconsin, so at-large party members would actually have an awkward situation in relationship to the YSA local.

It's true that some YSAers in these locals would become party members right away if they were to move to cities where we have branches and in some cases large YSA locals even carry out functions that normally would be expected of branches. We, of course, have recognized this and have made adjustments like giving PC approval to YSA locals running candidates under the name of the SWP.

It's good that you will be visiting Toledo soon. It's also important that both the Cleveland and Detroit branch leaderships understand our perspectives.

Comradely,

/s/

Doug Jenness

for the Political Committee