

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 58, December 2, 1976

Present: Barnes, Berman, Breitman, Garza, D. Jenness, Lovell,
Lund, Lyons, Miah, Seigle, Sheppard, Stapleton, Thomas,
Waters

Guests: Jaquith, Rodríguez, Wohlforth

Chair: Berman

AGENDA: 1. Plenum Agenda, Reporters, and Organization
2. Death Penalty
3. Michigan Free Speech Fight
4. Texas Raza Unida Party suit
5. Membership Drive
6. Subscription Drive

1. PLENUM AGENDA, REPORTERS, AND ORGANIZATION

Barnes reported on the proposed agenda points and
reporters for the plenum:

World Congress Indochina Resolution
Reporter: Feldman

World Congress Europe Resolution
Reporter: Horowitz

IMT Self-Criticism on Latin America
Reporter: Barnes

Structure and Organization of Party Leadership
Reporter: Waters

Party-YSA Relations
Reporter: Seigle

Women's Liberation
Reporter: Jaquith

Political Situation and Party Tasks
Reporter: Miah

Steel
Reporter: Heisler

Election of Political Committee
Reporter: Barnes

Schedule and organization of the plenum attached.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

2. DEATH PENALTY

(Baumann, Clark, Hart, Perez, and Sedwick invited for this point)

Sedwick reported on meeting of National Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

Perez reported on scheduled executions in several states and actions in opposition to the death penalty.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report and the general line of proposed Militant coverage.

Carried.

3. MICHIGAN FREE SPEECH FIGHT

(Williams invited for this point)

Williams reported on arrest of three YSA team members at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant for distributing literature at a speech by Daniel Schorr, and on plans for political and legal defense of the comrades.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report and projected coverage in the Militant, and to make the defense a campaign of the party nationally.

Carried.

4. TEXAS RAZA UNIDA PARTY SUIT

(Zárate invited for this point)

Stapleton reported on his meeting in Crystal City, Texas with José Angel Gutierrez and Armando Gutierrez of the Texas Raza Unida Party. The meeting was at the request of the RUP leaders to discuss the possibility of them filing a suit against the FBI, CIA, and Texas state government. The Raza Unida Party is under heavy attack by the Democratic administration in Texas, and they see the suit as a possible means of strengthening their defense against the attacks. Stapleton offered whatever help could be provided on the basis of the SWP's experience with our suit and campaign against government spying. The Militant will be providing additional coverage of the government campaign against the RUP.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

5. MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Seigle reported (see attached).

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

6. SUBSCRIPTION DRIVE

(Baron, Fields, and McArthur invited for this point.)

McArthur reported on evaluation of the fall Militant subscription drive.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

PLENUM SCHEDULE--JANUARY 6-9, 1977

Thursday, January 6

- 10:00 - 10:15 Organization of Plenum (1/4 hour)
10:15 - 12:15 World Congress Indochina Resolution Reports
Reporters: Feldman, Jones (1 hour each)
12:15 - 1:45 Lunch (1 1/2 hours)
1:45 - 3:15 Discussion, World Congress Indochina Resolution
(1 1/2 hours)
3:15 - 3:45 Summaries, World Congress Indochina Resolution Reports
(1/4 hour each)
3:45 - 5:45 World Congress Europe Resolution Reports
Reporters: Horowitz, Jones (1 hour each)

Friday, January 7

- 9:30 - 11:00 Discussion, World Congress Europe Resolution
(1 1/2 hours)
11:00 - 11:30 Summaries, World Congress Europe Resolution Reports
(1/4 hour each)
11:30 - 1:00 Lunch (1 1/2 hours)
1:00 - 3:00 IMT Self-Criticism on Latin America Reports
Reporters: Barnes, Jones (1 hour each)
3:00 - 4:30 Discussion, IMT Self-Criticism on Latin America
(1 1/2 hours)
4:30 - 5:00 Summaries, IMT Self-Criticism on Latin America Reports
(1/4 hour each)
5:00 - 7:00 Dinner (2 hours)
7:00 - 8:00 Structure and Organization of Party Leadership Report
Reporter: Waters (1 hour)
8:00 - 9:30 Discussion, Structure and Organization of Party
Leadership (3 hours total)

Saturday, January 8

- 9:30 - 11:00 Discussion continued, Structure and Organization of
Party Leadership
11:00 - 11:30 Summary, Structure and Organization of Party
Leadership Report (1/2 hour)
11:30 - 12:15 Party-YSA Relations Report Reporter: Seigle (3/4 hour)
12:15 - 1:00 Discussion, Party-YSA Relations (1 1/2 hours total)
1:00 - 2:30 Lunch (1 1/2 hours)

(over)

PLENUM SCHEDULE/2

Saturday, January 8 (continued)

- 2:30 - 3:15 Discussion continued, Party-YSA Relations
3:15 - 3:30 Summary, Party-YSA Relations Report
3:30 - 4:30 Women's Liberation Report Reporter: Jaquith (1 hour)
4:30 - 6:30 Discussion, Women's Liberation Report (2 hours)
6:30 - 7:00 Summary, Women's Liberation Report (1/2 hour)

Sunday, January 9

- 9:30 - 10:45 Political Situation and Party Tasks Report
Reporter: Miah (1 1/4 hours)
10:45 - 1:15 Discussion, Political Situation and Party Tasks
(2 1/2 hours)
1:15 - 2:15 Lunch served (1 hour)
2:15 - 2:45 Summary, Political Situation and Party Tasks Report (1/2 hr.)
2:45 - 3:30 Steel Report Reporter: Heisler (3/4 hour)
3:30 - 5:00 Discussion, Steel Report (1 1/2 hours)
5:00 - 5:15 Summary, Steel Report (1/4 hour)
5:15 - 6:15 Election of Political Committee
Reporter: Barnes (1 hour)

ORGANIZATION OF THE PLENUM

Motion: To approve the following procedural recommendations:

1. That in cases of procedural disputes, discussion be limited to two speakers, one for and one against, and that each speaker be limited to two minutes.
2. That general discussion be limited to eight minutes per speaker and that no one speak twice until all who wish to speak have already done so.
3. That the Presiding Committee consist of the members of the Administrative Secretariat. (Barnes, D. Jenness, Jones, Miah, Rodríguez, Seigle, Sheppard, and Waters.)
4. To designate Bombaro, Myers, Roberts, Roche as secretaries.
5. To invite as observers: Control Commission members, heads of national departments, members of the youth NEC, local, branch, and organizing committee organizers, and special guests.
6. To give voice to organizers and department heads who are not members of the National Committee during discussion of the Structure and Organization of Party Leadership Report.

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
December 6, 1976

TO NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS, ORGANIZERS AND RECRUITMENT DIRECTORS

Dear Comrades,

The campaign to win 300 new provisional members by January 1 continues to proceed right on schedule. With information obtained from 63 out of 68 branches for the month of October, we took in 64 new provisional members, bringing the total for the drive to 199. (August--63; September--72; October--64.) If this rate holds for the rest of the drive, we will go over the 300 goal.

We are still having a problem getting the monthly survey forms in promptly from the branches. This causes a long delay in getting the information compiled and sent out. (We need monthly reports from every branch, even if the branch hasn't taken in any new members, to get the national total.)

Attached are excerpts from three reports from branches on recruitment activities and progress.

Comradely,

Larry Seigle

Larry Seigle
National Office

Comments on Recruitment

From Melissa Singler, Cincinnati:

This is a short report on our last two public events, and a short report on our regional conference.

Regional Conference

Our "Fall Scenario" outlined a series of campaign events, including Willie's tour, culminating in a Regional Conference on Nov. 5-6. The Conference was a very good success with representation from Cincinnati, Wilmington, Dayton, Columbus, Athens, Cleveland (the team), Louisville, and Lexington. About 60 or so people attended, including several Arab and Eritrean students. We had a campaign wind up rally on Sat. night, Nov. 6--with speakers from Cincinnati, Louisville, Lexington, Detroit, Cleveland and the YSA Regional Organizer. From it, 2 people asked to join the YSA--one from Cincinnati and one from Kentucky. A couple of others became very interested in the YSA and probably will join.

It would have been good for us to have our computer print-outs in time for the Conference--but we didn't, so we'll have to get these people to some other events.

Forum: What is the SWP

This forum was based on the fact that many people had called or written saying basically that same question--what is the SWP? So, we decided to have an experimental forum on the topic. We explained in the branch that we didn't have any idea if people would come and that no one should feel badly if it was a bust. We got 5 comrades to be on a panel taking up different aspects of party program:

The SWP's History and Our Vision of a Socialist Future

Why the SWP is Internationalist

The SWP and the Black Liberation Struggle

Why we think the women's liberation movement is revolutionary

The SWP and the Trade Union Movement

At 7:45 with no one present but the 5 panelists, I reminded everyone not to feel bad if no one showed. However, shortly we had one of our biggest forums to date assembling. With the speakers there were 21 present--11 independents plus 2 YSA comrades and 2 long-time contacts--that is, 15 non-SWP people. It was very good--and the discussion after the presentations was long and interesting. Out of the meeting we recruited 1 brand new person who just came to see "What Is The SWP" and one long-time (5 mos.) contact. Since we had just recruited another person the day before, this brought our new provisional members to 3 for one week (not bad!).

Everyone in Cincinnati heartily agrees that other areas should try forums like this--it gives a chance for people interested in the party to come to a forum on that topic where they can ask questions specifically about the party, some aspect of the program they care about, etc.

Informal Forum on Marxism vs. Maoism

Our main opponent here are the Maoists, who have influenced a good number of people against Trotskyism and toward Maoism. We wanted to begin to break thru this with some serious discussion on the two methods of thought--especially in relation to the international students in the area. The Maoists have also convinced the feminists that "real Marxists" don't support feminism--so we are battling away on that front also.

We decided to have an informal "house-type" event where we played a tape of the debate between Roberts and Davidson on Maoism. We urged the Arab and Eritrean students, and a number of other contacts we have who are influenced by Maoism--to attend.

By the time the tape started, the house was full--with 24 people present--almost all contacts or independents. Only about 6 comrades attended since we knew that the house would be too crowded if all of us came.

After the tape, we held about an hour discussion (everyone stayed--4 hours!). The discussion opened up the path to future discussion on Trotskyism with these people and especially with the Arabs.

From Carole Coates, Louisville:

The Louisville SWP has recruited nine members (as of November 3) since the Organizing Committee was established last June. All but one of these recruits are very active.

Our recruitment work has not been limited to occasional mailings and brief, though regular, telephoning of contacts. When we become aware that a contact is especially close, we schedule a "recruitment dinner" with one or more comrades. These dinners are scheduled not only for imminent recruits but also activist contacts who we feel may be brought closer through in-depth discussion.

We have also found that inviting ourselves to contacts' homes for an evening of socialist discussion is the most effective way to break down barriers and convince contacts that we are serious about our politics and about them.

This personal approach has already netted us two of our provisional members and has established positive working relationships with a large number of other contacts, especially

those who are leaders in Louisville's school desegregation struggle.

It is also interesting to note that three of our members were recruited as a result of national literature they received. The stories follow:

Debbie M. took a Bill of Rights for Working People home. Her husband, Mark, read it and mailed a request to join to the N.O.-- and he did and has been one of our most active members. Within two months Debbie also joined.

Our newest provisional member received a Militant and some campaign literature at a Statewide ERA rally last March. This fall she sent in a sub blank and request to join. Ruth was accepted as a provisional member last night.

The most interesting story is still unfinished. It's the story of a Post Office mail clerk who read several Militants on their way from New York to area subscribers. Since he didn't know the local address he requested it from the N.O. The next thing he did was slip a note into our box while at work saying he'd like to discuss joining. He came to our election night Victory Party and is having dinner with two comrades next week to discuss joining.

From Anne Springer, Adams-Morgan Branch, Washington, D.C. Local:

Since Sept., our branch has recruited 13 provisional members. We have recruited 1 in Sept., 4 in Oct., and 8 so far in Nov. The composition of these recruits is 3 women, 1 Black man, 1 Black Latino, 8 men, including one from the YSA. 1 woman is a trade unionist (NREIU), 2 were in the periphery of the YWLL when we recruited them, 1 was a member of NAM.

Our branch consisted of 16 members in Sept., 2 assigned to Local or national work, 1 on an indefinite leave, 4 assigned to YSA, and 9 to branch work exclusively. The previous composition of the branch included 2 Blacks, 3 women, 5 trade unionists.

The branch began in May, 1976 when we secured a storefront location in an area about 50% Black, 20% Latino, and 30% white. In the same area are storefronts of the CP and the Maoists. Tendencies which orient to this area include the CP, October League, YAWF, Workers League, PL, and others. We are able to keep the bookstore open on a regular basis and sell between \$400-500 a month.

All of our new recruits were recruited to a greater or lesser extent through the campaign. Particularly important was the

tour of Peter Camejo, who spoke at a rally of 160 (over 110 independents) in our community. Important in recruiting these people, however, were discussions in the bookstore, forums, an election eve campaign rally, recruitment dinners and socials, and a contact class series.

I want to pose some of the conclusions I have come to on this work from our experience. Some of these seem very obvious, although there have been some debates on them here in D.C.

1) We have found it essential to be visible in the community, and the storefront location has been very important in this effort. We have sold 25-30 subs from the bookstore, and many of the people who came to campaign activities first learned about us from the bookstore. Other visible activities included a forum series. Another branch in our area decided not to have forums, feeling that their forums were only attracting a few independents. Our EC also discussed discontinuing forums at one point because only 3-5 independents had shown up making the forum 18-20. Comrades stated that these weren't "real" forums. We had to educate that part of our goal was to be visible, to become known in the community, and that this was part of the process. The largest forum we have had was 45 people on China, and this bolstered comrades confidence. On election eve we had an open house; there had been discussion of having a local openhouse outside of our community, but we said that even if we didn't have the telephone hookup, we wanted contacts to be able to come to the campaign headquarters in Adams-Morgan on election eve. The result was about 65 people and we talked to five people that we recruited in November.

The conclusion that I have come to is that activities may be modest, or perhaps not with the total professional quality that we carried them out in the bigger branches, but the most important element is for the community to see the SWP active, taking up issues and ideas, ready to discuss, and that this conception of the work has been instrumental in our recruiting from the periphery of the YWLL and NAM.

2) The other area which we have developed is the new way we think out recruitment. A new idea that we never used before was the recruitment dinner. We organized dinners in which the whole branch participated, and invited everyone who we thought was interested in joining the party. The dinner was free, everyone donated food or brought drinks, and we set aside the whole night. There was no dancing or loud music, just great political discussions. At one dinner we recruited (that is we convinced people to make the concrete decision to say they would become provisional members) 3 people, at a second dinner 5 people. This gave people the opportunity to meet comrades, discuss their questions, and concerns, but was more fun and informal than a class. We followed this up with a contact class, but fewer people came and no one actually joined from the classes we held.

Another factor which was important was the recruitment director involving the entire branch in this work. Every comrade was asked to call names to come to campaign events or social events; every comrade was asked to come to the recruitment dinners. As we began recruiting people, comrades began to take them on sub teams to teach them to sub, restructured their reports in branch meetings to become more educational and really began thinking out the integration of the new members.

One other factor was learning to explain the concept of provisional membership to contacts. I feel that this is something that we are learning about. The way that I have found successful is to talk about the necessity of socialism, the role of the Democratic party, and our differences with the CP (which is important here). Then I say if you want to work with our movement and find out more about us, join. People say I don't know enough about your history or your stand on this or that or what you do in this movement or that. We are always open to discussion and we have had classes and we always sell a prospective member Prospects for Socialism, but we have learned to come back with, Join--that's how you will learn what we're about. You will see how we make decisions, you will come to our meetings and work with us and if you don't like us at the end of three months, you don't have to join as a full member. Also another explanation is that if you come to forums or on sub sales or work with us on the campaign, then you should join, come to the meetings, and see how the discussions and decisions about what you are doing with us are made. That really convinces them. We have also made the decision not to let people come and see the meetings before they join, because we say that is provisional membership--coming and seeing how we function.

I feel that all these things have contributed not only to the success of recruitment in the branch, but to the teamlike and enthusiastic attitude of our members--we have sold 336 subs so far towards a goal of 250.

However I also feel that we are beginning to face some problems at this point. One is simply integrating 13 new people and continuing to recruit new people who are around us with a branch of 9 people assigned to party work. Another is the ability of the organizer who is not full time of keeping up with the work of a branch of 29, 22 of whom are functioning in the work of the branch now.

We have had a number discussions in the branch, and have come up with the following organizational decisions. A leading comrade is assigned to recruitment, another comrade was assigned to organize an educational series for new members and short pre-branch educationals. An assistant organizer was assigned to coordinate this area of work and to give regular reports to the EC, giving special attention to talking to new comrades who

miss a branch meeting or who want a special discussion about questions of an organizational or political character.

However these organizational attempts to integrate new members do not solve the problem of the branch size. One of the initial gains of our branch was to utilize comrades who had been inactive or semi-active for a number of years. We do not want these comrades to go back to their previous role, nor do we not want to develop the new comrades in terms of giving them responsibility in the branch. I don't think we want to put on a full time organizer, but it is difficult to organize a branch of 30 part time. We could divide, but many of the provisional members live in this community, and if we transfer out many of the older comrades, then we have difficulties in working with the provisional members, who already outnumber the more experienced comrades who are assigned to the branch. These are issues we are grappling with now. I don't know if we are going to integrate all these new members or not, but we are doing our utmost to see that they do not leave the party because they are not developed or educated.