

POLITICAL BUREAU MEETING No. 2, October 5, 1978

Present: Barnes, Britton, Clark, Dixon, Hawkins, D. Jenness, Sedwick, Seigle, Stone, Waters

Chair: Seigle

AGENDA: 1. Steelworkers Convention
2. Winpisinger, Fraser Statements
3. Membership
4. Recall Election in Cleveland
5. Report on Discussions With New York IEC on CP Critical Support Proposal and Philadelphia Branch on Rizzo Referendum
6. Arson Attack on Chicago City Office

1. STEELWORKERS CONVENTION

(Lovell and Rose invited for this point.)

Britton and Rose initiated discussion on USWA convention and where the fight to democratize the union stands.

Discussion

Agreement to urge leaders of right to ratify effort to mount a rank-and-file campaign for membership ratification of contracts leading up to next Basic Steel Industry Conference. Agreement to run interview with leading comrades in steel on our assessment of convention and perspectives for strengthening the union.

2. WINPISINGER, FRASER STATEMENTS

(Lovell and Rose invited for this point.)

Rose reported on recent union statements and news releases and the upcoming October 17 conference called by UAW President Fraser, which express the growing political impasse of top union officials.

Discussion

Agreement on Militant coverage explaining the meaning of this development and outlining a class-struggle alternative.

3. MEMBERSHIP

Stone reported on proposal to readmit R.S. as an at-large member in Spokane, Washington.

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

(over)

Stone reported on the recommendation of the West Side Chicago branch that M.L. be readmitted to the party.

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the West Side Chicago branch.

Carried.

Stone reported on the recommendation of the Indianapolis branch that B.J. be readmitted to the party.

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Indianapolis branch.

Carried.

Stone reported on the recommendations of the Minneapolis branch that B.P. and D.W. be readmitted to the party.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendations of the Minneapolis branch.

Carried.

Stone reported on the recommendation of the Boston branch that C.H. be readmitted to the party.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Boston branch.

Carried.

Hawkins initiated discussion on Mohammed Oliver's application to rejoin the party in Boston.

Discussion

Motion: To send a letter to the Boston branch outlining our thinking about Oliver's application. (See attached.)

Carried.

4. RECALL ELECTION IN CLEVELAND
(Schwarz invited for this point.)

Barnes initiated discussion on Cleveland election in August to recall Mayor Kucinich and the position of our party in support of recall and the Communist Party's opposition to it.

Discussion

Agreement to incorporate discussion in forthcoming article on CP's 1978 electoral activity.

5. REPORT ON DISCUSSIONS WITH NEW YORK LEC ON CP CRITICAL SUPPORT PROPOSAL AND PHILADELPHIA BRANCH ON RIZZO REFERENDUM
(Schwarz invited for this point.)

D. Jenness reported.

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

6. ARSON ATTACK ON CHICAGO CITY OFFICE

Dixon reported. (See Militant, October 13.)

Discussion

Meeting adjourned.

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

October 17, 1978

Don Gurewitz
Boston

Dear Don,

The Political Bureau received the copy you sent of Mohammed Oliver's request to rejoin the party. Syd also reported to us on the executive committee and branch discussions of Mohammed's request.

We discussed Mohammed's letter and Syd's report at a recent Political Bureau meeting. We believe that Mohammed's application for membership raises some important questions about the criteria for membership in the party, and about the party's attitude toward religion and other reactionary superstitions and institutions. We want to share our thinking on these questions with you.

Mohammed writes in his letter: "It is my understanding that the party's concern--at least its major concern--regarding SWP members' participation in religious organizations is that the party not be associated with the proselytization of these ideas. The party wants to argue against these ideas. So, a member of the SWP would be disloyal were he or she to propagate them.

"However," he continues, "while the party doesn't want priests, churchgoers are a different matter. If I were to halt my participation in the public activities of the Sufi Order, my situation would be like that of the churchgoer. The party wouldn't be associated with the Sufi Order and I wouldn't be disloyally attempting to win people to a philosophy other than that of Marxism.

"So," he concludes, "by limiting my activity in the Sufi Order to the non-public functions--classes primarily--it appears that the major obstacle to my rejoining is removed."

These three paragraphs reflect deep disagreement on Mohammed's part with the party's attitude toward religion and all churches.

Mohammed, a long-time, publicly known leader of our movement, quit the party in 1976 because he had consciously embraced an ideology and a world view totally alien to scientific socialism. His public activity in the Sufi Order was merely the most flagrant expression of this rejection of Marxism.

As he himself pointed out in his letter of resignation, his conversion to religion constituted a "deep political difference with the party." That evaluation is much more accurate than the statement in his application for readmission that "My politics have remained the same despite my resignation from the SWP."

A religious, mystical, or superstitious outlook on the world is essentially hostile to Marxism, which is based on a consistent and thoroughgoing materialist conception of the world. It is hostile to the proletarian movement which has a clear, objective, and hard-headed view of the class struggle.

That is why Marxists reject and actively combat the influence of all forms of superstitions and mysticism, from organized religion to such claptrap as astrology. We must be especially alert to combatting such ideas inside the revolutionary workers party, where they serve as a psychological and political obstacle to revolutionary understanding and action.

The obligation to expose and counter these reactionary movements and institutions is not a small question for our party. And it will become an even more important question as the crisis of capitalism intensifies pressures on the working class. History teaches us that societies in crisis spawn all kinds of religious cults, mystical societies, and other escapist enterprises.

In "Ten Years After May 1968," (Intercontinental Press/Inprecor, June 12, 1968), Ernest Mandel pointed up the rise of such ideological currents following the May-June events in France:

"...when the downturn followed the upsurge, when it became obvious that the victory of the revolution, and even a new May 1968, was not at hand, many of those who took part in May 1968 refused to accept the 'return to normal' to which the working class in its immense majority is condemned...

"This attempt to 'jump over the problem' can take very diverse forms--sinking into the subculture and a transient existence; retiring to small villages in the mountains; trying to 'do your work in a way that fits in with revolutionary conditions'; or even, more commonly, 'living your own life instead of being politically active.'

"...what is involved is a real retrogression of consciousness, even if it is sometimes camouflaged by ultra-radical political talk. What is involved, in fact, is an abandonment of militancy and anticapitalist activity....

"This phenomenon has always accompanied the phases of temporary setbacks in the revolutionary upsurge. We saw it after the 1905 revolution in Russia, after 1923 in Germany, not to mention after the bloody defeat of the Paris Commune."

In forging their party into a revolutionary instrument and winning the leadership of the Russian workers and their allies, the Bolsheviks had to carry on an unflagging campaign against such ideologies and against such reactionary institutions as Czarism and the Orthodox Church and such degenerate figures as Rasputin.

The same holds true for revolutionary socialists in the most advanced capitalist countries, especially the U.S. Here, due to uneven and combined development, the workers movement is among the least theoretically advanced. Only by arming ourselves and the workers movement with the most advanced proletarian theory can the party hope to lead our class to victory.

We would be in sad shape in waging this ideological war if we included in our party experienced cadres and leaders who believe and practice the opposite of what the party stands for.

Mohammed's proposal that he practice his religion only in "non-public" ways misses the point entirely. It is not a question of civil liberties or freedom of religion "in private." We defend freedom of religion unconditionally. We oppose any effort by any government to restrict it. We defend Mohammed's right to practice the Sufi religion.

But here we are concerned with protecting the right of the party to uphold and defend its program against all alien and reactionary influences. What if some experienced member or leader of the party said, well, I agree with the party and want to be active but on the condition that "in private" I can vote for capitalist candidates, or "privately" hold membership in a society that advocates the theory of socialism in one country, or some such reactionary ideology? We would of course explain that such actions are incompatible with party membership.

The party stays out of comrades' private lives. This is a cherished principle with us. However, there are some areas of "private life" that are also public, social--therefore political--that the party does have something to say about. Here we are not especially concerned with views but with acts.

We discussed this at some length when the delegates at the last national convention adopted the Political Committee report on the findings of the Control Commission regarding personal violence. (See SWP Internal Information Bulletin No. 7 in 1977, September 1977.) There we explained that the practice of beating up one's companion, or using violence and intimidation as a method of operation, though done even "in private," was incompatible with membership in the party.

There we were not concerned with someone's private view that he or she might want to slug someone, but with an act of violence. The convention unanimously agreed that such acts were not a "private" matter, but acts which ran counter to party norms and program and excluded one from party membership.

Some comrades may ask, What about a new contact coming toward the party, who still goes to church or is confused about religion? That would be a different case. With Mohammed it is not a question of a new recruit bringing with him or her some religious or superstitious baggage in the process of being jettisoned by experience and explanation. In such a situation, a sensitive and intelligent approach would dictate working with the new member over time to convince her or him of the incorrectness of those ideas. (A job that would be made much more difficult if leaders or experienced cadres in the branch "privately" practiced religious mysticism.)

In Mohammed's case we are dealing with an extremely experienced and astute political leader who has rejected Marxist materialism for anti-Marxist superstitions. It is not a question of inexperience, naiveté, or lack of knowledge. He has made a conscious choice in favor of mysticism and thrown his lot in with a milieu organized around those ideas. His direction of motion has been away from the scientific doctrines of the proletariat, not toward them.

At the time Mohammed resigned, the party made it clear to him that we were sorry to lose him. He was a talented, capable, and valuable cadre.

We are in complete agreement that it is worth some effort on our part to try to win him back, and we are glad to learn that the branch is taking an interest in this. However, we think that it should be made as clear as possible to him that the only basis on which he can belong to the SWP is by abandoning his religious practices. Unfortunately his letter of application for readmission is a step back from his letter of resignation, and indicates that he understands less today the serious political difference his religious practices constitute than he did when he left.

That is why we don't think it is useful to consider his collaboration with the party as any kind of trial period in preparation for his rejoining. This is especially important in light of the party's turn to industry. The working class is surrounded by such mystical claptrap and bombarded with such non-scientific ideas--on television, in the newspapers and magazines, in literature, etc. We must make it clear to those coming toward us that we stand on an entirely different ideological basis.

If and when Mohammed decides to embrace Marxism and the revolutionary party and to reject mysticism and the Sufi Order-- and that can only be when he has convinced himself of that decision, not just when he appears to want to make that decision--no trial period, other than provisional membership, will be necessary. He knows the party very well and the party knows him and holds him in high regard. However, as long as he remains involved in the Sufi Order, no amount of collaboration can overcome the obstacle he has placed between himself and the SWP.

Of course, we agree that we should maintain as close relations with Mohammed as possible, viewing him as a sympathizer, involving him in work with us in campaigns the party supports, sales, etc.

Please let us know your reaction to these considerations once you have had a chance to discuss them.

Comradely,

John Hawkins

John Hawkins
for the Political Bureau

COPY

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COPY

Mohammed Oliver
[address in original]

19 August, 1978

Don Gurewitz
SWP, Boston Local

Dear Don,

I would like to rejoin the party. This letter will hopefully provide you with the information you need before acting on this request.

It is my understanding that the party's concern--at least its major concern--regarding SWP members' participation in religious organizations is that the party not be associated with the proselytization of these ideas. The party wants to argue against these ideas. So, a member of the SWP would be disloyal were he or she to propagate them.

However, while the party doesn't want priests, churchgoers are a different matter. If I were to halt my participation in the public activities of the Sufi Order, my situation would be like that of the churchgoer. The party wouldn't be associated with the Sufi Order and I wouldn't be disloyally attempting to win people to a philosophy other than that of Marxism.

So, by limiting my activity in the Sufi Order to the non-public functions -- classes primarily -- it appears that the major obstacle to my rejoining is removed.

My politics have remained the same despite my resignation from the SWP. In these times of ever-intensifying class struggle, the need to act on one's political beliefs becomes more and more obligatory. To fulfill this duty I'm now willing to give up some cherished activities. Actually, it's a small sacrifice to make to have the privilege of being in the SWP and participate fully in the remaking of our world.

If you have any questions or want me to come in for a discussion, just give me a call. I hope that this modus vivendi is one that party can live with.

Faithfully,

s/Mohammed Oliver

JUL 1 - 1971

SWP
510 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Mass. 02215

SWP National Office
New York

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a copy of the letter which Mohammed Karimi (Norman Oliver) submitted upon resigning from the Roxbury branch. Also enclosed is a transcript of the report which Mac Warren, Roxbury branch organizer, gave to the branch on behalf of the executive committee in motivating the EC's recommendation that Mohammed's resignation be accepted. Although this is somewhat late, both Mac and I thought this report should be sent to you for your information. I would like to add that this report prompted a very rich and educational discussion in the Roxbury branch, from which all the comrades - new and old - learned a great deal.

Comradely,


Susan LaMont
City Organizer

JUL 1 1974

Text of Mohammed Karimi's letter of resignation

In recent months, I have developed a deep political difference with the party. As you know, Marxism is founded on the rejection of religion. Marx and Engels began their criticism of the world with a thorough-going criticism of and rejection of religion. I disagree with this basic tenet of scientific socialism.

For a long time, I have tried to reconcile my essentially religious world view with that of Marxism. My success in doing this was due only to the fact that I never really acted on my beliefs.

However, recently I've become committed to a religious movement that has made it impossible for me to gloss over this contradiction. Through my discussions with comrades, reading, and a lot of thinking on my part, it's clear that I cannot be a member of the SWP and a Sufi at the same time.

It is for this reason that I am resigning.

This is the only tenable situation for either myself or the party. In resigning I do not intend to remove myself entirely from political activity. As a sympathizer of the SWP, I hope to do everything I can to aid it and its work. My resigning is done so as to make clear the position of revolutionary Marxism on religion to both those in and outside of the SWP and to allow me to freely exercise my beliefs.

Fraternally,

Mohammed Karimi

(over)

Report given by Mac Warren to Roxbury branch on resignation of
Mohammed Karimi, May 11, 1976

Mohammed's resignation raises three important questions. They are: why joining this group, the Sufis, is incompatible with party membership; what the party's position on religion is; and what is our attitude toward radicalizing young workers who will come around the party who still may have religious beliefs.

The party as a Marxist organization has a position on religion. As Cannon said, "We Marxists are by definition hostile to each and every form of religious superstition. We believe with Marx that religion is the opium of the people and we are not Marxists, not genuine socialists, if we do not say so openly, regardless of whether our opinion is popular or not. Our business is not to save souls for another world, but to tell the truth about this one." This is the general attitude of the party toward religion. In the cases of Mohammed, he was a leader of the party. He has run for office for the party many times. For him to continue to be in this group and in the party would have meant that the party's position on religion would have been compromised.

This group, the Sufis, carries out public activities, basically recruitment activities. Mohammed would have been placed in a position of choosing which organization to try and recruit the contacts he makes through his political work to. Does he get some independents to go to the branch meeting and to the activities of this group? Does he choose between the two?

The party is not sectarian on the religion question. We work with preachers in the mass movements. We get new members who join and still have religious superstitions. But we don't share leaders of the party with religious organizations. That is, the public face of the party has to be consistent with our political position. We say that religion plays a role of pulling the masses from struggle. If that's the case, we can't have our members, and especially our leaders, recruiting people to an organized religion. In the final analysis, religion is reactionary. We have to prepare our party to be able to deal with the role religion plays in society, even though this is not a question we have had to deal with too much recently. That can't be done with leaders of our party leading religious organizations.

As Mohammed pointed out in his letter, Marx and Engels began their criticism of the world with a thoroughgoing criticism and rejection of religion. This rejection of religion is one of the foundations of Marxism. At the same time, we will support the right of anyone to have the freedom of worship. Cannon described our attitude toward freedom of religion in Notebook of an Agitator: "The First Amendment to the Constitution is our amendment; and we must defend it tooth and nail against all aggressions, whether secular or religious. It seems to me not accidental at all that the authors of the Amendment linked freedom of worship with free speech and free press in the same sentence. Thereby they clearly indicated that religion is to be considered a matter of opinion, in which each individual is free to choose, and by no means a revelation binding upon everybody. Moreover "freedom of worship" implies also freedom of non-worship. That's the freedom I am exercising and I would surely hate to lose it.

But we as Marxists reject all forms of superstition and mysticism.

The third question is now does the party approach a new comrade who still has religious beliefs. This is different from a party leader who has lead the party over a period of time joining an organized religion. For instance, there is a man, Tommy, who comes around the hall when I am here. He's an older Black man. He comes in and talks to comrades. It's possible he might want to join the party at some time. He talks about the good things the party stands for and he also talks about God. He might even go to church. I think if Tommy were willing, he should be brought into provisional membership. And the correct attitude to take toward Tommy would be to not initiate all kinds of heavy discussions with him about religion, but to try and involve him in the activity of the party. The fact is that people who come around the party with these superstitions will know what the party's position on religion is. I think Tommy will do what I did. He will probably go on the offensive. He will ask questions about the party position. What we should do in the most nonsectarian and patient manner is explain our position and encourage him to do some reading. And it is through discussion, reading and practical work of the party most people like Tommy will be won over to our position. That most likely will be the case with someone from the Nation of Islam or even the Sufis.

With the party's turn, we will be recruiting more and more young workers who will have some religious superstitions. The approach I laid out is the correct one: to have the attitude of "taking these comrades on" or "teaching them a lesson" would serve to drive them away, not integrate them as active party members. It wouldn't be super-revolutionary or anything to do with what's revolutionary.

Loosing Mohammed is different from someone who joins the movement and leaves a short time later. He was a respected and loyal member of the party for years. He made many big contributions to our party. But the pressures of being a revolutionary are greatest when you are leading other revolutionaries. The external forces of reaction are always there and these pressures take their toll on some of us. What we have to do is recognize the loss, pull our forces together and move forward. Comrades have dropped out and come back again. But this movement is based on a collective leadership, a cohesive organization.

In closing, I would like to read you something which Trotsky wrote in Problems of Everyday Life: "In their activities, revolutionists are limited only by external obstacles and not by internal ones. That is, they must train themselves to evaluate their situation, the material and concrete reality of their entire arena of activity, in its positive and negative aspects, and to draw the correct political balance sheet . But if the revolutionists is internally hampered by subjective hindrances to action, is lacking in understanding or will, is paralyzed by internal discord, by religious, national, ethnocentric, or craft prejudices, the he is at best only half a revolutionist.

"Comrades, there are already too many obstacles in the objective conditions for revolutionists to allow themselves the luxury of multiplying the objective obstacles and frictions by subjective ones. Therefore, the education of revolutionists must, above all, mean their emancipation from all legacies of ignorance and superstition, which are frequently preserved even in very 'sensitive' consciousnesses. And therefore, we show irreconcilable opposition to anyone who dares to suggest that mysticism or religious sentiments and frames of mind might be compatible with communism.

"you know that not long ago one of the prominent Swedish comrades wrote about the compatibility of religion not only with membership in the Communist Party, but even with a Marxist world view. We consider atheism, which is an inseparable element of the materialist view of life, to be a prerequisite for the theoretical education of the revolutionists. Those who believe in another world are not capable of concentrating all their passion on the transformation of this one."

Mohammed will be continuing to work with the party. He wants to make a weekly contribution to the party. We should not have the attitude that he deserted the party for religion, therefore we should smash his illusions in religion. As I said before, he was a cadre. He understands clearly what he is doing. To try and take Mohammed on on his religious beliefs would only mean that comrades would be driving him farther away. We should be friendly and comradely with Mohammed the same as he was in his letter and with somrades since I got the letter. With this type of approach I think it's possible that we will continue to have the friendly type of relationship we have with Mohammed now.