

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 10, March 15, 1979

Present: Barnes, Britton, Clark, Hawkins, D. Jenness,  
Kramer, Lyons, Morell, Ring, Seigle, Waters

Guest: Mailhot

Chair: Hawkins

AGENDA: 1. Gay Liberation Conference  
2. National Committee Leave of Absence  
3. Keil Letter

1. GAY LIBERATION CONFERENCE

(Finkel, Jayko, Maggi, and Rose invited for this point.)

Jayko reported on conference for gay rights held in Philadelphia February 24-25, which called October 14, 1979, march on Washington.

Discussion

Motion by Barnes: To reverse any attempts to get NOW units to endorse march at this time;

To not print any Militant article on conference until Political Committee discussion is completed;

To not take any organizational responsibilities in local coalitions for proposed march at this time.

Carried.

Agreed to continue discussion at next meeting.

2. NATIONAL COMMITTEE LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Seigle reported on request by Thomas for release from all assignments for a medical leave of absence and that he be transferred from Atlanta to at-large status responsible to the Political Committee.

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

(over)

3. KEIL LETTER

Seigle reported on proposed reply to Keil letter.  
(See attached.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the proposed reply to Keil.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

FEB 12 1979

February 11

Dear Jack,

Enclosed for your information is a draft of a document on Cuba which I am preparing to submit to the SWP DE. Any comments that could clear away debaters' points, such as on facts, might help the discussion.



14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
February 13, 1979

David Keil  
New York

Dear David,

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of February 11 and your article for the SWP preconvention discussion bulletin entitled "Our Choice in Cuba." We will publish it in the bulletin as soon as we open the discussion.

If the discussion in the Political Committee and National Committee is an accurate gauge, I'm confident that the preconvention discussion on Cuba will not revolve around debater's tricks. It will be marked by responsible attention to factual accuracy and clarification of political line and program.

Comradely,

Jack

FEB 14 1979

New York  
February 13, 1979

National Office

Dear comrades,

This is in response to the request relayed to me by Mary Roche that I put in writing what I told Rich Robohm over the intercom concerning Jack Earnes's February 13 letter replying to my February 11 note to him. This note of mine read in full as follows: "Enclosed for your information is a draft of a document on Cuba which I am preparing to submit to the SWP DE. Any comments that could clear away debaters' points, such as on facts, might help the discussion." (Emphasis added.)

I was not submitting a document for publication. I will submit the document, in final form, when the discussion bulletin opens.

One purpose of the note and enclosure was to inform Jack about the draft, which I have also sent to some comrades who would have some of the same opinions as I on Cuba. Another was to request correction of possible factual errors so that the discussion on Cuba can avoid unnecessary arguments over minor factual questions. One such factual error which has been pointed out to me is the sentence on page 14 of my draft, which states incorrectly that part of a Militant article had been omitted from an IP/I reprint.

Comradely,

*Dennis Kelly*

14 Charles Lane  
New York, N.Y. 10014  
March 16, 1979

David Keil  
New York

Dear Comrade Keil,

Your letter of February 13 raises a serious question about one of our fundamental organizational norms.

In your letter, you say that you have privately circulated copies of your document, "Our Choice in Cuba," to "some comrades who would have some of the same opinions as I on Cuba."

In the discussion that Al Budka and I had with you last week, you confirmed that you had sent copies of the document to several comrades, including both members of the SWP and members of other sections or sympathizing groups of the Fourth International.

The party's organizational principles prohibit the private circulation of discussion articles and other forms of political activity outside normal channels.

Because of the importance of this organizational principle, I would like to explain clearly the views of the Political Committee.

The resolution "The Organizational Character of the SWP," adopted by the 1965 convention, in the section headed "Factionalism and Party Unity," explains:

"A properly conducted discussion of internal political differences contributes to the good and welfare of the party. It facilitates the hammering out of a correct political line and it helps to educate the membership. These benefits derive from the discussion provided that every comrade hears all points of view and the whole party is drawn into the thinking about the questions in dispute. In that way the membership as a whole can intervene in disputes, settle them in an orderly way by majority decision and get on with the party work. This method has been followed by American Trotskyism throughout its history and has resulted in an effective clarification of all controversial issues.

"Concentration on private discussions of disputed issues, on the other hand, tends to give the comrades involved a one-sided view and warps their capacity for objective political judgment. Inexperienced comrades especially are made the target of such lopsided discussion methods. The aim is to line them up quickly in a closed caucus, and prejudice their thinking before they have heard an open party debate. When

(over)

dissident views are introduced into the party in that manner groupings tend to form and harden, and the dissenting views tend to assert themselves in disruptive fashion, before the party as a whole has had a chance to face and act on the issues in dispute."

If we were to abandon this approach, and resort instead to the practice of circulating "drafts" to people who share--perhaps--"some" of the same opinions, the framework of democratic discussion within the party would break down.

Opinions on disputed questions, or unfolding events, would be formed and elaborated without the benefit of the thinking of the entire party. This would lead to an intensification of factionalism and cliquest tendencies, as groupings grew up and solidified based on private political consultations. Like-minded comrades, or groupings composed of personal friends, would tend to consult each other on line questions. This would disrupt the constant process of striving to achieve maximum political homogeneity in the party, and instead maximize centrifugal tendencies and disequilibrium in party functioning. Like-minded people, or circles based on personal friendships, can more easily go off the track if they make the mistake of depriving themselves of the corrective influence of the entire party.

Moreover, the membership as a whole would be deprived of its right to participate actively and fully in the thinking through of line questions, and in their ultimate decision by majority vote at the party convention. All the membership as a whole would see is the end product of circulated "drafts," edited and refined by an arbitrarily selected group of comrades.

As you know, in the SWP we do everything we can to make possible, and to encourage, the most thorough and open discussion leading up to our conventions. During the preconvention discussion period, we bend the stick as far as we can in the direction of subordinating other considerations to achieving a thorough airing of conflicting political views that exist in the party. This is all the more reason why every member has the responsibility to present their point of view to the whole membership, in a democratic way.

Circulation of "drafts" to arbitrarily selected individuals has nothing in common with the normal process of leadership collaboration and discussion that is the responsibility of the elected leadership bodies of the party to carry out. The Political Committee, elected by the National Committee, discusses drafts of reports and resolutions in preparation for taking them to the National Committee. The National Committee, in discharging its responsibilities to the party as a whole, discusses draft reports and resolutions that are to be presented to the party membership. This process, which takes place within the elected leadership bodies, facilitates the process of building a

homogeneous party and leadership.

You indicated in your letter that the reason you circulated your document privately was in order to eliminate errors in it, to make the best possible article.

But the goal of a preconvention discussion is not to begin the discussion with a finished position. If that were the approach, then the whole preconvention discussion would be merely a ritual, a mockery of real proletarian democracy. Different groupings in the party would merely hone their polemical blades, and measure the value of the discussion by how many points they could score against the other side. People would be lined up ahead of time, on the basis of circulation of "drafts" or other private discussions. This would tend to freeze positions, prevent a real discussion, and limit the participation of the entire party in the discussion.

Needless to say, this is exactly the content of the "preconvention discussions" held by petty-bourgeois organizations where permanent internal groupings hold the "real" discussions among themselves. In these outfits, the membership exercises no control over the permanent groupings or over the discussion, internal life is reduced to the level of a factional jungle, and real party democracy is nonexistent.

If you want the opinions of others on your position on Cuba, you can submit your ideas directly to the preconvention discussion. If the limited number of comrades that you sent your article to might point out mistakes, what about the rest of the party membership? They might have some good ideas too. You would benefit from hearing what the party as a whole has to say about your position on Cuba. And the membership as a whole has the right to participate fully in the discussion.

Your right to present your views to the party membership is not in question. You have submitted, over the past five years, a number of contributions on Cuba to the discussion bulletin. Each of these has been made available to the entire membership. We assume that you will continue to submit such articles, and the comrades who are interested will continue to purchase and read them.

You may not agree with the organizational principles adopted by the 1965 convention. If that is the case you are free to raise a challenge to them during the preconvention discussion. However, until such time as the 1965 organizational resolution is amended or superseded, all comrades are bound to abide by it as a condition of membership.

This means you must cease any private circulation of documents. The place for such discussion is in the discussion bulletin.

Comradely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Seigle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Larry Seigle  
for the Political Committee