

X: Tom L

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Monday, December 3, 1979

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed please find the promised internal report on the recent events in North Carolina.

Aside from what is in here, we are doing some of the normal things a normal branch should do. We voted to keep our sales at the same level as during the campaign, and to continue to ask comrades to sell at least twice a week. We think we have found a headquarters, and if we can work out a few technical things with the landlord tomorrow, we will sign the lease and get to work on it. Next Sunday we are having a "What Is Socialism" educational for a number of our industrial fraction contacts, and the following weekend Petsy is coming in to do our educational conference. So things are going well and everyone's spirits are good.

See you all at the plenum.

Comradely,

Becky
Becky

P.S. Please send Tom a copy of all this.

INTERNAL REPORT ON RECENT EVENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Klan activity has been on the increase in the Piedmont for just over one year. The following are some of the incidents that have taken place:

--The Klan sponsored an "educational exhibit" in the main branch of the Forsyth County Public Library in Winston-Salem. It was picketed by a number of groups, including the NAACP.

--The Klan sponsored a showing of Birth of a Nation at the convention center here. Amid threats from some groups (we don't know if it was the RCP or WVO), the police had to provide protection to complete the showing.

--The Klan picketed the Winston-Salem mayor's house because he refused to declare a "White Pride Day" for the city. That same evening, David Duke spoke at a rally held at the Ramada Inn in a suburb of Winston-Salem.

--The Klan sponsored a demonstration in China Grove, N.C. in July. It was broken up by counterdemonstrators armed with bottles, bricks and pipes. The counterdemonstration was led by the WVO.

--The various Klan factions and the Nazis held a meeting in Louisburg, N.C. in August to form a United Racist Front. It now appears that one of the actions discussed there was the attack on the November 3 WVO rally.

--The Nazis have also become more active in the state. They opened a statewide headquarters in Raleigh just after the branch left there.

--The Klan has opened a public headquarters in Winston-Salem. It is just a house with a big sign out in front that says "Be-aware of the Dog." The only way we know it is a headquarters is that the address and phone are listed in the phone book.

--One of the Klan factions, the one led by Virgil Griffin, has announced that it plans to run a full slate of candidates in the next elections. This is the faction that was involved in the murders.

--The Anti-Defamation League says there are about 1,000 members of various Klan factions in the state, an increase of 25% in the last 18 months.

In trying to assess the increase in the size of the Klan, I took a look at some of the newspaper coverage on its activities during the sixties, the last period of big Klan and organized racist and right wing activity, and compared it to this period. It is true that there has been a significant increase in Klan activity over the last eighteen months. But it doesn't in any way approach the development in the sixties.

On a national scale, there were about 60,000 organized Klansmen. Today there are about 8,000 (again, these figures are from the Anti-Defamation League). Whereas most of the Klan's membership in the ~~sixties~~ sixties was in the South, today there are many more in the North.

In Winston-Salem and Greensboro, the Klan was ~~not~~ not the only or the most significant organized racist group. A whole number of doctors, business owners, politicians, etc. formed a group here called the "Patriots of North Carolina, Inc." It was this group that led opposition to the civil rights movement here, and that encouraged the Klan's violence. Both groups operated very openly, ~~by~~ passing out literature and encouraging vigilante actions against the civil rights movement. The Klan burned a lot of crosses, threatened a lot of people, and held a number of demonstrations at various periods, coinciding with the student sit-ins and attempts to integrate area business. The involvement of area businessmen was prominently publicized.

Evidence of middle class ~~and~~ and employer involvement in racist activity is not widely publicized today. The only open indication that companies may be involved is that two of the Klansmen arrested in the murders were textile workers (one at J.P. Stevens), and Virgil Griffin is an employee of the Stevens Company. This doesn't mean that the companies aren't involved, only that they still don't feel free to acknowledge it. They have still not been able to create an atmosphere where they can openly do this.

We know that some companies have been involved in redbaiting of the organizing drives and company spying. Cone Mills in Greensboro admitted that it had kept a close eye on members of the WVO who worked there, and Vickie Saporta was redbaited by the ~~Kl~~ Lexington, N.C. Chamber of Commerce.

We should also note that while there has been more Klan activity and an increase in Klan membership, these groups are still met with a lot of hostility among the bulk of the population.

2. Klan Murders of CWP members

The Communist Workers Party (formerly Workers Viewpoint Organization) has been ~~xxxxx~~ active in the Durham-Greensboro area for several years. Its major spokesperson is Nelson W Johnson, who came out of the student struggles at A & T.

We do not know the size of the CWP's membership. Most of them are Black, however.

Members of the group are based at Greensboro A & T, Duke University in Durham, and they had colonized the Cone Mills plants in Greensboro and Haw River about two and a half years ago.

The ACTWU locals in these plants were quite strong throughout the fifties and sixties, but declined in the seventies after ACTWU lost the dues checkoff. By the time the WVO went into the union, its membership had declined to 300. Now it is down to fifteen at the White Oak plant in Greensboro (2400 workers). The locals were put into receivership by the international union after the WVO took them over, and most of the WVO was driven out of the plants by the company.

In the months preceding the shootings, WVO had mounted an anti-Klan campaign that was its major public activity in the area. It participated in a number of anti-Klan demonstrations in the area, including the one at the convention center here. The Press has implied that the WVO may have burned down a church where the Klan held most of its meetings in Winston-Salem. In July, the Klan demonstration in China Grove was met by the counterdemonstration organized by the WVO. According to a WVO leaflet the demonstrators were armed -- with bottles, bats, bricks and pipes -- to meet the Klan.

As the anti-Klan campaign evolved, the WVO also mounted vicious attacks against any of the groups that it may have worked with along the way, including the black preachers, the NAACP, and the RCP. These were related to disagreements about how to organize the counterdemonstrations.

In the period leading up to the November 3 demonstration, the WVO issued a number of open challenges to the Klan and Nazis to show up and fight it out. These included a press conference organized in Kanapolis, N.C., and the sending of an open letter to one of the Klan leaders defying him to bring in his troops.

In the aftermath of the murders, the response of the police and press has been twofold: mount a campaign to make it appear that this was nothing but a shootout between two extremist groups (with more attacks against the CWP than the Klan), and intimidate any anti-Klan forces that might move to respond to the shootings.

Sensing the distaste of the majority of the population for the murders, the press coverage was aimed at exposing the CWP's "infiltration" of the unions. This led to further victimizations of CWP members. One member in Durham who worked at a public health center was fired (but was rehired when the employees protested).

More serious was the attack against a CWP member in Collinsville, Va. She was removed from her position as a shop steward at the Bud plant there, which is organized by the Teamsters Local 22, when rightwingers demanded that she be tossed out of the union.

Two anti-Klan actions that had been planned for the week following the CWP's armed demonstration were called off as a result of police intimidation. One was a demonstration that had been called by ~~a~~ forces around SCEF (CP-ML) and groups in the state that had been involved in the Wilmington 10 defense. The other was a church service, where one of the invited speakers had ~~x~~ been Christopher Scott, the major spokesperson for Teamsters Local 391. The church service was called off when the police met with the ministers and offered to show them files of the organizers of the demonstration, who they said were long-time communists and who could be expected to plan a violent demonstration. The demonstration was called off because of a lack of response from the Black community, which the organizers said was directly related to the redbaiting by the police.

The only responses thus far were a meeting called by the A & T student government at which Skip Robinson from the United League was the major ^{speaker} ~~service~~, and a church service on the murders last weekend. Fifty people, including 10 CWPers, attended the meeting. The church service was bigger, but it was turned into part of the whole cover up, because the major speakers were the mayor of Greensboro and the local Black congressman, both of whom called for an ~~ended~~ end to violence and communist activity in the area.

We do not know of any other planned activities here in the future.

In the aftermath of the Klan murders, and tied to the government's stepped up war drive against Iran, our fraction at the Bahnsen Co., which is organized by the IAM, came under a rather serious redbaiting attack. This is a plant of 500 workers where Cooper, our candidate for governor, works. At the time of the attack, we had five comrades in the plant, only two of whom were off probation. All of the comrades were generally known as radicals, though only Cooper and one other comrade were known to be members of the SWP to most of the workers in the plant.

The redbaiting began shortly after the campaign was announced. Some workers were upset by a misquote by Cooper in a local paper that he thought the "Iranian people have the right to kill the hostages." Others were thinking that we were just like the CWP.

A core group of five or six right wingers, most of them from one department where one of our women comrades works, began a campaign to establish the idea that the comrades had no right to work in the plant. There was at least one company supervisor involved in this that we know of. The campaign escalated rapidly to the point where one comrade was threatened.

We first had two comrades, the one who had been threatened and one other one on his shift, call into the company and say that they would not report to work that day because they had been threatened because they were members of the SWP election campaign committee.

Then we met with one of the shop stewards who, although he did not agree with our ideas, was a former civil rights activist and had talked a lot of politics with us. He took the initiative of setting up a meeting between management personnel, himself for the union, and Cooper. He did this as part of the normal activity of a shop steward because there is a clause in the contract that no worker shall be discriminated against because of his political beliefs.

We laid out the following position to the company:

- 1) We had a constitutional right to our ideas, and the right to work in the plant free of threats and harassment.

2) Company supervisors and lead men should not be involved in any way in encouraging violence against us, and a meeting should be called of all employees to make this clear.

3) We would abide by company rules against soliciting, but if our opinions were asked we could voice them, and if we were asked for literature we had the right to give it out.

The company agreed to lay out the above points but only to supervisors, foremen and lead men. The company tried to make the case that we had brought this on ourselves by saying what we had about the hostages. We pointed out that this was not our position, that we intended to demand a retraction from the newspaper involved, but that what was involved here ~~was~~ our democratic rights.

The company met with the supervisors, lead men and foremen and according to all reports, took a very hard line on this. One of the meetings had been attended by the secretary-treasurer of the ~~xx~~ union, who reported that the company played it very straight in the meetings.

The meeting strengthened those who agreed with the idea that we had the right to be in the plant, and infuriated the right wingers, who then began to try and whip up sentiment for a walkout. This failed, reportedly because the Black workers in the department where it was being organized held a meeting and decided against a walkout, both because it was against the union contract and because they thought we had a right to be in the plant. (Interestingly, although there was a general heightening of racist tension in the plant around this, the rightwingers did try to pull the Black workers into it).

That weekend the fraction held meetings with some of its key contacts, who said that if we laid low and waited it out, they thought we would have a good chance of riding the storm out and staying in the plant. For the time being, this is the case.

The Black workers in the plant have told some of the comrades that the right wingers have not given up the idea of getting rid of us, only that we have them backed up against the wall right now, and they are discussing what else they can do. Some of their future plans seem to be aimed at keeping us out of the union.

None of our comrades is in the union, although all are off probation now. Applications for union membership must be voted on by the membership. The union president decided that our applications would not be voted on until January, and we agreed with this. This is because the ~~contract~~ contract is up next month and also elections are coming up. None of them wants to get into the middle of a fight over this. Hopefully, this waiting period will give us a chance to pull more workers closer to us and get them ready to fight it out for us if necessary.

What kind of a fight we have on our hands may well be directly tied to what happens in Iran. The majority of workers in Cooper's department had supported his right to be in the plant, including those workers who disagreed with his ideas. Last week, however, about three-fourths of the workers started wearing white arm bands in solidarity with the hostages. The tension was quite high around this, and some of these workers began weakening in their position for his democratic rights. (None of the Black workers wore the arm bands, and a few whites didn't).

Our perspective for the period between now and Christmas is to lay low, slow it down, and ~~meet~~ meet with those who are close to us a lot.

It is worth noting that our fraction drew some important lessons from this. Briefly:

1) We have to get rid of the conception of "coming out" as socialists, and linked to this, any conception that probation is a barrier to political discussions, or that we have "personal relationships" before "political relationships." Our comrades ~~for~~ feel that we have to talk politics from the very first day if possible, letting workers know where we stand as we get to know them.

Although this had been the general framework for our work in the plant, some comrades had still hesitated and these were the comrades who came in for the first and worst redbaiting, because people weren't sure where they stood and could charge that they were "infiltrating" or trying to hide something.

2) We have to overcome our ~~our~~ hesitation about talking politics to white workers. This is absolutely the only way we can hope to break some of them (a big section of them) away when we have to wage a fight like this.

The tendency to be more comfortable with Blacks~~s~~ comes from the deeply ingrained anti-racism in our party, and also from the fact that because of the civil rights struggle, Blacks as a rule are more open to new ideas.

The women comrades also tended to be more comfortable with the Blacks in the plant, because they are the only women and found it easier to talk politics ~~with~~ with them.

However, we have definitively pointed to this as an error. While white workers may not have a background in something like the civil rights struggle, they have been affected by the radicalization. Our job is to educate them, even if its a lot more difficult. By not talking to them, or by talking only to the Blacks, we open up ourselves to all kinds of changes and hostility that we could have easily cut across.

On a more general level, if we can't talk to white workers we may as well not be in the South, or for that matter, we may as well get out of the profession of being revolutionaries, because we won't make it without a big segment of white workers.

3) The importance of real collaboration in a situation like this is a matter of life and death. Its not simply a matter of checking with others before you do something. Its a broader question of assessing the total picture in a plant like this, where the development can be very uneven.

For example, we had one comrade who worked in the department where the right wingers had the most strength, and they put a lot of pressure on her. We had to listen to what she had to say, without thinking that she was being overly hysterical or anything like that, because it was the best way we had of knowing what was going on.

But we couldn't base what we would do on her information along. In other parts of the plant workers were confused, but we were finding that by talking with them we could convince them of our democratic rights.

There are also real differences among the comrades in the fraction themselves and in their talents and capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, that make it imperative for each comrade to listen carefully to what everyone thinks and has to say. The women comrades, for example, have a more difficult time getting themselves taken seriously by the men, and they are having a harder time because of discrimination on the job. This has to be taken into account in our assessment -- without any implication being made that they are less competent because they may have a more difficult time of it. Some comrades are more able to talk politics on the job and therefore have an easier time defending themselves openly. We have to use collaboration in the fraction to help everyone learn to do this to the extent that they can.

And of course, this goes the other way too -- we can't listen only to the bad things and base ourselves and our conclusions on the worst variant. Its a question of assessing the forces that are in motion and making judgements on that basis.

4) The fraction isn't the branch and can't make the decisions of the branch. If we had pulled out of this plant, the repercussions for our work overall would have been tremendous. The fraction couldn't make that decision, only the branch could.

In general, we drew a very positive balance sheet of our performance in this experience. We got on the right track and stayed there, with only a few hesitations along the way. The above lessons do not indicate any big deviations in the fraction -- only some lessons that we drew when some of the weaknesses in our functioning came to hit us full in the face in the middle of a crisis. We are now well on our way to implementing them.

In conclusion, I should say that the effect of all this on the comrades has been very good, in the sense that they have come out of it more hardened for the next round, and not at all demoralized. We are planning to give everyone extended leaves at Christmas because some of the plants will ~~be~~ be shut down, and then will come back for the next go-round.