

SPECIAL POINT ON SWP NC PLENUM AGENDA

March 1, 1970

Weinstein: Comrades, I'm making a motion. I just handed it to the presiding committee. I told them what was going to be in it, and I just handed it to them so they would have a chance to see it in writing. They agree with the substance of it.

I'll read the motion, then I have some comments to make. They explain why I'm making the motion. The motion is: "To transcribe and make available to the National Committee 1) the material in the discussion and summary on the Political Report concerning an independent Chicano party and 2) the remarks under this special point."

Now, let me explain why I'm making the motion. I explained this to the presiding committee, and that's why they recommend to you that I have an opportunity to present my point.

I'm very critical of the procedure in connection with the discussion, the introduction and the discussion of this whole question on our attitude toward the call for the formation of a Chicano party.

I want to start with what you observed yourself, at the plenum, and point out what I think is wrong with the procedure. And then I want to go back a little bit. You had a section of the political report dealing with the Chicano movement. In that section, there was what I consider to be an ambiguously worded sentence, which was the heart of the proposal to put the party on record calling for the formation of a Chicano party; and I'll repeat it as I took it down, (and maybe a word different here and there), and that is: "that we should have the perspective of urging the formation of an independent Chicano party."

Now, I listened very carefully to the presentation made by Jack on this section, and on this proposal. It became clear in the discussion that it was a concrete proposal. It became clear in Jack's summary that we were being asked to vote on this question.

I don't think that it's in our style and our method of operating to make that kind of a presentation to the comrades at a plenum without preparing the comrades in advance. I think arguments should be given as to why the party should take a new position. I think it's a new position. The arguments preferably should be in writing, so the comrades have a chance to study them. Notwithstanding, the minimum is that there should be arguments. I asked for the whole discussion to be transcribed because I maintain that there is not, in my opinion, a serious presentation of arguments in favor of our call for the formation of a Chicano party. I think it's a departure from what we consider to be guidelines, what we consider to be the principles of our movement. My criticism is directed against

the outgoing Political Committee -- since Jack Barnes was reporting in the name of the Political Committee. I think it's important that when the Political Committee makes a recommendation of this nature, that it explain why this either does not conflict with the principles held by the party, or that new conditions have arisen that in this connection make a principle inoperative. They are duty-bound to take that matter up. They did not do that, in my opinion, either in the presentation, the discussion, nor in the summary.

Now let me go, for a moment, into the background of this thing, in which the whole question of procedure is involved, which I think is erroneous. I think it's a very erroneous way of proceeding. It's not conducive to the best way of reaching a decision by the National Committee, or the party. The way this whole thing arose was in the form of our California candidates speaking publicly and calling for the formation of a Chicano party. I only became aware of this indirectly by hearsay. I was never informed.

I became aware of it indirectly by hearsay, and when I raised some objections, my objection was taken note of. My first objection was to the organizer of the San Francisco branch. Some of our candidates were speaking and calling for a Chicano party. I raised my objections to the organizer. She said, well you seem to have a point, and I'll take it up, check it out. I was under the impression, she said, that that's our position. I heard no more for several weeks. Then I heard again that our candidates continued to advance the slogan. I raised it then with the chairman of the California campaign committee, Comrade Lew Jones. And I explained my point of view. He said he too would take it up. He was of the opinion that there was no problem, no necessity for any discussion, any approval, or any other procedure to take place, that it was permissible to go ahead with this line, but that he would take it up, check it out.

I heard no more for several weeks, until my wife, Sylvia, who is on the branch executive committee, came home on a Tuesday night and told me that we were putting out a piece of campaign literature, a major piece of literature, in which there is the call for a Chicano party. I objected again. I was called the following night, on Wednesday night, by comrades who urged me not to indicate that there was any disagreement on my part with the procedure, on the grounds that a procedural discussion would obscure the political question.

I agreed that a procedural discussion on a political question does obscure the central issues, the substantive issues, that are involved. But I explained to the people who called me, Andrea and Lew, the organizer and the chairman of the state campaign committee, that I had no other alternative, because already part of the criticism of my objection, was that I hadn't said anything about a leaflet that was distributed by Los Angeles in their election campaign two years ago. Even if I was aware of

the fact that there was the call for a Chicano party in Los Angeles, that doesn't mean that because I didn't object that that is established party line. That's not our way of proceeding. I was also reminded that in a campaign brochure, or a perspective on the campaign put out by Joel Britton, somewhere in December or January that there was the proposal that the California campaign call for a Chicano party. I was unaware of that. I had looked at the thing, and I went back and I looked it over and I found that there was half a sentence in a pretty lengthy report on our campaign perspectives. Now, even if I had seen this, it doesn't mean that I consider it a valid method of establishing a political line on a political question.

I was asked not to raise any objections. I did raise an objection. I did not ask the comrades in the branch to vote against issuing this brochure since it was already printed. But I explained to the comrades that I couldn't speak on the substantive issue at that time because there wasn't even a motivation. I simply discussed procedure with the comrades, and explained why I thought the procedure was incorrect. The comrades there voted to go ahead with the campaign brochure with the point on the Chicano party, but to hold over any further action until the plenum, which I thought was proper.

Now, involved in all this -- I'm going to wind up now -- is strong evidence, that has been confirmed at this plenum, that the Political Committee was not unaware of these developments in San Francisco and in the Bay Area. That's why I don't hold the comrades in San Francisco responsible. I hold the Political Committee responsible. And I'm raising the point because I think it goes way beyond the question of the Chicano party, which I consider to be, as a political question goes, a relatively unimportant one. That it's on the method of determining party policy. Experiences we've had before, added to this, make me concerned.

For example -- I'll refer to this and I'll end -- in the discussion and the action that the Bay Area took on the question of giving critical support to the Black Panther Party candidates who were running as Peace & Freedom Party candidates, one branch voted to give critical support, the other branch was split down the middle, and the request was sent in to the Political Committee for approval of the action of the Berkeley branch. There was no response to either branch by the Political Committee. Some time later, it appeared in The Militant, evidently, it appeared as an expression of the fact that the Political Committee did have a discussion and took an action and took a position. But the branches involved were not informed. That's a very unusual procedure. As a consequence, comrades, why is it important? Whether it was an oversight, or whatever the reason was? It is important because there are comrades who think that our position in relation to that campaign was to give critical support to that campaign. There are comrades today who believe that.

There are other discussions, other new issues arising, and the way in which they're being treated in The Militant indicates to me that comrades are beginning to take positions on things before any formal discussion is being opened. I don't think that's a good way to proceed, and I think the comrades should think very carefully about continuing this method of introducing new political ideas and positions into the SWP.

Barnes: I just want briefly to outline factually for the comrades the development of this part of the report and discussion on the political resolution. Comrades remember, at our convention, there were two major areas that we thought were very important in the context of a broad, general political resolution, which we did not go into in any concrete detail. That was, the question of the importance of the growing radicalization of the other national minorities, outside of the Afro-Americans, especially the Chicanos, and secondly the beginning of the development of the women's liberation movement.

At the convention these were discussed in one way or another, in panels, and it was explicitly stated at the convention, I think by myself for the Political Committee, that one of the motivations in continuing and maintaining open literary discussion in the membership of the party on the broad questions raised in the political resolution, was to develop further discussion on these two questions, and then to grapple more with these two questions at the time of our plenum. In the transcribed version of the Political Report, we even made sure that we added a paragraph, in introducing it, to draw special attention to these two questions.

Comrades remember that there were quite a few contributions on the women's liberation movement. There were no additional contributions from any comrades on the struggles of the other national minorities outside the Afro-Americans. In preparation for the plenum, the Administrative Committee began discussing these questions, we began reviewing in The Militant the articles and reports we had had on the other national minorities, especially the Chicanos, and it became rapidly clear that the women's liberation movement was developing to such a point and our intervention to such a degree, that it would probably be wise to recommend to the Political Committee that it recommend to the Plenum that we have a separate point on that.

As we began preparing for this we received word, I think it was about the end of December, about the call by the Crusade for Justice for a second national Chicano conference, to be held in Denver in March. Comrades remember the articles in The Militant almost a year ago, on the first one that was held, at which we had several comrades. We also noted the things that have appeared in The Militant, as I outlined in my report, the evolution and deepening of the Chicano struggle, the different manifestations of it, the different areas it's affected in the six months since our convention. When we got the report on the

Denver Conference call we immediately tried to organize ourselves to arrange first hand discussion with some of the Chicano and Latino comrades, and with the organizers, at least, and a few other comrades if possible in the branches where there's either a number of Chicano comrades, whether they've been connected in one way or another with the movement.

So, as rapidly as we could release Joel Britton from his Administrative Committee responsibilities at the center, we sent him out West to at least take a brief swing and give us a factual report when he came back, on the plans for this conference. This is especially important because the comrades will remember from my report that it was at a symposium, I think at Hayward, where a couple of our Chicano comrades or Latino comrades who were running as candidates for the party were on the panel, that some leading figures in the Chicano movement spoke publicly on the need for some sort of political party, independent party, mass political break with capitalist politics. I think that the transcript of that is going to be in this week's Militant, and I think it's part of the contents of one of our new pamphlets. Well, because of this Joel went out there. He went to Austin, to Houston, to Phoenix, to Los Angeles, to San Francisco, to Oakland-Berkeley, and to Denver. And he spoke to every one of the Mexican-American, Chicano, or Latino comrades who were available, and he spoke to the organizers and other comrades, in the branches, to get the factual questions straight about this conference.

To us it was obviously a very important new development, we learned some lessons from the size and character of the previous conference, and the continuing radicalization of the Chicano youth especially. It was also very important because, as I said, we discover, when we think about it, that we have a significant Latino fraction in the SWP and YSA, many of whom are accepted and respected by the militants in the Chicano movement as revolutionary spokesmen.

We discussed the broad question of the Chicano movement, and our support for those elements in it who were beginning to raise the questions of independent political action. Comrades will remember from The Militant that it was first raised publicly at the Chicano conference one year ago. At that time it was part of the initial program of Aztlan, a general idea of the independent party, was indicated then. The only other piece of information which came into our notice was a thing which we copied right away and sent out to the National Committee, clippings that we got from Texas on La Raza Unida Party. I think the Austin branch sent them to us. They indicated that there had been a concrete development in Texas, by some Chicano militants, to form the Raza Unida Party, which they claimed was an independent party.

Then we had a second discussion in the Administrative Committee when Joel came back, and came to agreement on our approach

to this conference, and our position of support to this demand; we also discussed all the problems and pressures on in the Chicano movement which make difficult independent political action too. Then, the Third World comrades at the center, not only on the Political Committee but the other comrades, on the National Committee and the Youth Committee were involved in a discussion with Joel on the intervention in the Denver conference. Then these proposals were summarized in the report Joel gave to the Political Committee, which met before the Political Committee meeting which discussed the political resolution. Then, a week later, we had the discussion in the Political Committee on the Political Report to the plenum, in which the Administrative Committee presented, especially on this point, the basic guidelines and formula which we would use with all the cautions and additional points that I raised. Those are the facts of how the decision for the character of the report, how this point was dealt with and how it developed between the convention and now.

As to the California situation, I said what I had to say about that, as you comrades will remember, at the beginning of the summary. I can't say that I formally spoke for the Political Committee, but I know I spoke for the Administrative Committee, in those remarks that I made, and I suspect that I speak for the whole Political Committee on that particular point.

As to the other questions involved, the implications that Nat raises, of course that's for every comrade to decide for himself. And of course on the political questions involved, there's going to be more discussion in the party, there will be more discussion and more elaboration of positions as these movements develop, as we intervene, as we grapple with it. Comrades who have one point of view at this plenum may be convinced of another point of view. Comrades who didn't speak, or thought about the question, may have a point of view. The party may change its position, the party may develop its position. Of course that will all come out in future discussion.