

REPORT ON THE 1969 SWP CAMPAIGN FOR MAYOR OF ATLANTA, By Dennis Edge
October 28, 1969

The May 11 through October 7, 1969 SWP election campaign for mayor of Atlanta is viewed by Atlanta comrades as a tremendous success. The fight against the exorbitant qualifying fee, intervention in local issues, amount of news coverage and mushrooming antiwar sentiment are the major reasons for this success.

In early May, the Atlanta YSA, which had been in existence for two years, decided to simultaneously form the Atlanta SWP branch and announce Linda Jenness' candidacy for mayor. The campaign was launched in a press conference May 11 at Emory University at the First Southwide Young Socialist Conference and received both television and newspaper coverage. In the following weeks of May we mailed a preliminary platform, sponsor cards, fund letters to our mailing list and Linda spoke to a high school political science class and was interviewed for 30 minutes on a radio call-in program. Suggestions for the platform from friends outside of the YSA and SWP were incorporated into a final printed version.

The first intervention in a local issue came on June 9 when Linda appeared before the Board of Aldermen at City Hall and made a statement attacking a proposed park curfew aimed at young people in the Peachtree-14th Street area. This area is considered to be the hippy community in Atlanta and Linda won respect from people in this area as well as the local underground newspaper for her stand regarding the curfew.

On July 22, the second major intervention took place when Linda and other comrades participated in a demonstration called by Tenants United for Fairness to protest Atlanta Housing Authority regulations and public housing conditions. Our comrades distributed about 250 leaflets calling for "tenant control of the Atlanta Housing Authority" and "a rent ceiling of 10 percent of a tenant's income." On the following day, Linda attended a public hearing on the Atlanta Transit System's request for a bus fare increase and stated opposition to the increase while calling for public control of the bus company.

These actions were followed by a Cuban support meeting on July 27, and, on August 9, an antiwar rally where Linda spoke.

Throughout the campaign there were forty-three speaking engagements ranging from garden clubs, church groups, Kiwanis clubs, etc. Significant among these were the all-black Kirkwood Community and Atlanta Urban Corps meetings where Linda used the opportunities as educational on black control. However, what was important about most of these speaking engagements was not the immediate audience but the thousands of people reached by phenomenal t.v., radio, and newspaper coverage which reported Linda's opposition to the war, support of black control, and support of the Cuban Revolution.

Qualifying Fee Fight

The fight against the qualifying fee more than any other development made the campaign successful. Combining the campaign with a popular civil liberties issue generated considerable support and sympathy.

On July 7, the Board of Aldermen, in one of their ho-hum meetings, voted unanimously to establish qualifying fees for the city elections as follows: \$5,000 for mayor, \$1,400 for vice-mayor, \$1,200 for alderman, and \$600 for Board of Education. Unknowingly, the Aldermaniacs handed to us on a silver platter a powerful weapon to use against them. We began work on it right away, putting out mailings and press releases condemning the fees, circulating support petitions and calling a press conference for July 17. The press conference, at which Linda announced our intentions of taking the city to court over the issue, was very successful, with coverage from WQXI-TV, WAGA-TV, WGST-Radio, WSB-Radio, the Atlanta Journal, The Great Speckled Bird, and WRNG-Radio. Following this two major t.v. stations editorialized against the qualifying fees, Julian Bond stated his support for the suit, the American Civil Liberties Union took the case, and two members of the National Welfare Rights Organization joined Linda as plaintiffs in the suit.

The suit was filed July 31 in Federal District Court and on August 18 a federal three-judge panel invalidated the 1969 state election law and ordered the Aldermaniacs to reset fees at a "reasonable" amount. By this time we were off the second page of the Atlanta Constitution and onto the first. After nagging among themselves in emergency session on August 19, the Aldermen lowered the filing fee for mayor to a "reasonable" \$1,000. A few days later the same three federal judges, in their democratic wisdom, upheld the \$1,000 fee as reasonable and our ACLU lawyer, feeling we should be satisfied, quit. Fred LeClercq, a lawyer from Emory University Legal Services, who had been working with the ACLU on the case and who had contributed money to the campaign, agreed to take the case to the Supreme Court. September 9, one day from qualifying deadline, Justice Hugo Black issued an opinion forcing the Atlanta government to open the election to all aspirants for office not able to pay the fees. This decision also forced the qualifying date to be extended to September 17 and 37 candidates qualified without paying a cent. This decision, plus the qualifying period extension, caused pandemonium at City Hall. There was talk that the October 7 election day would have to be extended also in order to have ballots printed, prepare voting machines, etc.

Linda went to City Hall on September 16 to qualify under the poverty clause and, as we expected, was not allowed to

because of a two-year residency requirement to serve as mayor. The next night Linda announced a major write-in campaign. She had fifteen speaking engagements after being excluded from the ballot -- two of them on major radio stations and three on major t.v. stations.

The significance of the qualifying fee victory cannot be overstated. It is well known all over Atlanta who initiated, carried out and won the fight. It is especially known in the black community where most of the candidates who qualified under the poverty clause live. The fight gave the SWP an identity in Atlanta. As indicated earlier, the Atlanta branch was formed at the same time that the campaign was launched, and outside of the radical movement and the FBI it was almost unknown. That clearly is not the case now.

In addition to the qualifying fee victory the campaign was successful because we used it as an educational example to the rest of the radical movement of how to run a working-class campaign. We didn't feel that this could be done by relating primarily to student issues or adapting either to the ultraleft rhetoric or the milieu around the local underground newspaper. Rather, we tried to address the campaign to the key questions facing the working class and black community. We tried to create the image that we were not simply a protest campaign but serious about taking power. We tried to relate to local struggles and issues by participating in them, raising our solutions and tying these issues to the central national problems of the Vietnam war and oppression of the black community.

We also used the campaign as a weapon against our major opponent in the radical movement -- RYM II. By asking them to support us and soliciting a public refusal, we were able to answer them publicly and make them look foolish. Informal reports since indicate some of their members feel they may have made an error.

Statistical Information

From the announcement of the campaign on May 11 to its end on October 7 there were 43 speaking engagements. Nine of these were either radio or t.v. programs. We had 3½ hours of radio time and 7 hours of t.v. time. (This time includes panels, etc. with other candidates). Approximately 6,200 people attended the 34 meeting-type speaking engagements for an average of 173 persons per meeting. About 4,000 pieces of campaign literature were distributed at these 34 meetings and by the end of the campaign about 10,000 pieces were distributed. Tens of thousands of people were reached by radio and t.v. Speaking engagements by month are as follows: May - 3; June - 1; July - 3; August - 14; September - 17; October - 5. Twelve press releases were put out. Nine of the press releases were printed, as follows:

1. May 9 campaign announcement
2. Statement on arrests in Peachtree-14th Street area
3. Statement attacking proposed park curfew
4. Statement defending Ahmed Evans
5. Statement on 4th of July parade
6. Statement attacking qualifying fees
7. Statement supporting TUFF rally
8. Statement attacking bus fare increase
9. Campaign rally announcement in Piedmont Park

There were three press conferences:

1. Announcement of campaign
2. Initiation of fight against qualifying fee
3. Qualifying fee victory

We received \$68 in donations and spent a total of \$90.

Number of sponsors: 106.

Linda participated in three actions: (1) August 9 antiwar action; (2) TUFF demonstration; (3) police brutality protest.

Newspaper articles - 71.

Literature:

1. 1 sticker "Black Control of Black Communities" - 1,500
2. 1 poster "Bring All the GIs Home Now - Vote Socialist" - 200
3. Leaflets - 8 leaflets plus reprints as follows:
 - a. Ahmed Evans - 300
 - b. Tenant control - 300
 - c. Education - 300
 - d. Piedmont Park rally - 300
 - e. Bus fare - 300
 - f. RYM letter - 100
 - g. Reprints - 1,000
 - h. Write-in - 600
4. Platform - 5,000

Campaign Speaking Engagements

<u>Date</u>	<u>Organization or Place</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
May 11	1st Southwide Young Socialist Conference	35
May 15	Political Science Class, Northside High	40
May 15	WRNG Radio (30 Minutes)	--
June 9	Board of Aldermen (park curfew)	40
July 23	Atlanta Transit System (bus fare hearing)	100
July 27	Cuban Support Rally - Ausp. YSA-SWP	30
July 31	West End Kiwanis Club	100
Aug. 9	Antiwar Action, Grant Park	200
Aug. 10	Unitarian Church, Ausp. NOW	350
Aug. 12	Grady High School	70
Aug. 12	Atlanta Press Club	70
Aug. 14	WRNG Radio (one-hour talk show)	--
Aug. 14	Kirkwood Community (all-black community)	100
Aug. 15	Atlanta Urban Corps	200
Aug. 15	Breakfast Exchange Club	20
Aug. 18	Atlanta Advertising Club	125
Aug. 23	Fulton Democratic Party	100
Aug. 24	SWP Campaign Rally, Piedmont Park	400
Aug. 25	WAGA-T.V. (one hour)	--
Aug. 26	Kiwanis Club of Atlanta	300
Sept. 4	Women's Chamber of Commerce (John V. spoke)	300
Sept. 4	Mayor's Comm. on Housing Resources (John V. spoke)	25
Sept. 11	WSB-T.V. (90-minute panel)	30
Sept. 11	Mead Packaging Co.	75
Sept. 14	Progressive Club	150
Sept. 14	Pacers Club (John V. spoke)	35
Sept. 15	National Council of Jewish Women	500
Sept. 17	DeKalb Democratic Women	300
Sept. 20	WERD-Radio (one-hour talk show, black station)	50
Sept. 21	WAGA-T.V. (meet the wives - Doug - 90 minutes)	--
Sept. 23	Ga. State Political Science Forum	400
Sept. 24	Mt. Holyoke Alumni Assoc.	100

<u>Date</u>	<u>Organization or Place</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
Sept. 24	WRNG-Radio (one-hour talk show)	--
Sept. 27	Mrs. Tom Brown's garden party	60
Sept. 28	WQXI-T.V. (90-minute panel)	50
Sept. 29	Bass Community Organization	250
Sept. 30	Macon Council of World Affairs, Mercer College	250
Oct. 1	Brown High School (John V. spoke)	500
Oct. 1	Hungry Club	300
Oct. 2	WETV (90-minute panel) Ausp. League of Women Voters	30
Oct. 3	Plaza Park	250
Oct. 6	Ga. State Political Science Class	30
Total speaking engagements - 43		Total attendance
		6,175