

MINUTES OF PC NO. 12, December 7, 1965

Present: Regular: Dobbs, Shaw, Sheppard, Chester, Warde, Reed,
Ring, Kerry, Vernon, Halstead, Weinstein,
Lavan.

Alternate: Henderson, Porter, Leonard, Graham.

Advisory: Mayhew.

Visitors: Melissa, Joyce, Dick R., Roland, Ralph, Jon,
Doug, Dan, Mary Alice, Lew, Caroline.

Chairman: Porter

AGENDA:

1. Report on Anti-War Convention

1. REPORT ON ANTI-WAR CONVENTION

(See attached digest of reports and discussion)

Motion: To approve reports.

Carried unanimously

MEETING ADJOURNED

Attachment: P.C. Minutes, Dec. 7, 1965

Digest of Reports and Discussion on the Anti-War Convention

As the convention approached we supported the idea of a national organization of independent committees which could take the political line of immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam. We knew there was going to be a block of at least the following tendencies opposed to this: SDS, May 2 and FL, the unorganized radicals of the Beinin-Aronowitz strata, and the CP and DuBois clubs. Just a few weeks before the convention it became evident that these groups had made a turn from their earlier disinterest and had decided to get as many delegates as possible to the convention.

On arrival in Washington, our worst suspicions were confirmed. The convention would be "packed" by the CP and by SDS and "independent" "multi-issue" committees like the N.Y. "West Side Committee for Independent Political Action," and the "Lower East Side Mobilization for Peace Action," as well as a host of other groups either newly created or revived from the past for this occasion.

It was also clear that the Madison office had carefully designed the agenda to exclude any serious discussion of the future of independent committees as such. The plenary sessions did not have such discussion scheduled and neither did any of the 12 workshops which were to run concurrently. In addition, the workshop on "Structure of the NCC" was to be chaired by a "strong" CP-liner who had previously been brought out of moth balls to preside over the dissolution of the New York City-Wide Committee to End the War in Vietnam.

We decided to support the idea -- also independently proposed by a leader of the Berkeley VDC -- of a separate workshop (a 13th) to discuss the possible formation of a national organization of the independent committees and other questions of interest to these committees apart from their place in the broad "peace movement."

Thirty-three delegates and leaders of independent committees signed a call for such a workshop. Most of them met a few hours before the convention officially opened and proposed some "working papers" to open discussion in this workshop. The signers did not request permission for a workshop from the "presiding committee" (an accidentally derived body elected by no one). On the one hand, the formation of an additional workshop at a gathering such as this is not out of keeping with the new tradition of organizational concepts of the movement as it has developed. It was later discovered that several such "unscheduled" workshops were held during the convention and some formally reported to plenary sessions. On the other hand, those of us who knew the convention was rigged were certain that any attempt to go through "channels" (by formally asking the presiding committee to arrange another workshop) would be quietly stalled until the convention was over if possible. Our central idea was to get these concepts before the convention as early as possible. The second plenary session was not even scheduled until Friday night (end of the second day).

As it was, a fight began as soon as the workshop was announced at the opening session. From then on nothing went according to

schedule -- Emspack even forgot to make his "opening remarks" -- and the next two days were disrupted by attempts to prevent the independents' workshop from meeting. Official "orders" to dissolve, outright physical disruption and an all-out anti-Trotskyist slander campaign put such pressure on some original signers of the call for a separate workshop that a few withdrew their names and searched for "compromise" arrangements.

Finally, it was decided to call for a "caucus" (rather than workshop) meeting of the independent delegates interested in forming an organization based on the demand for immediate withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Vietnam. By the time the caucus convened at 5 P.M. Saturday -- the third day of the convention -- a genuine revolt by independents had broken out against the organizers of the convention. The caucus room was packed. Contributing to this revolt were the undemocratic procedures and the crudest form of bureaucratic manipulation (including physical intimidation) at the preceding evening's plenary session. In addition was the fact that the NCC proved incapable of taking a position for withdrawal.

Several workshops brought in proposals to adopt the slogan: "Bring the Troops Home Now" and most of the people present at plenary sessions seemed to favor it. But it was always voted down by the voting delegates after spokesmen for DuBois clubs or other non-independent committees pointed out that it would mean exclusion from the NCC of groups who couldn't accept such a radical demand.

The caucus proceeded with its discussions in a businesslike way and with democratic discussion that was a welcome contrast to the rigged convention meetings. It adopted the original working papers as a basis for further discussion. It also adopted a proposal for the structure of the NCC which was presented on the floor of the convention. This was primarily amendments to democratize a CP-backed document introduced at the official structure workshop.

The caucus proposal on structure lost at the final plenary session by a vote of 110 to 45 with many delegates not voting. The adopted document does not contain a non-exclusion clause, does make packing by national organizations easier, and does not provide for recall of officials. The implementation of organization structure was left to the old steering committee and the old Madison office.

Following the convention the caucus held another meeting at which 150 youth showed up, signed up for the caucus, held a rousing meeting, decided to put out a newsletter and charge a \$1 a month dues. It elected a 3-man steering committee and voted to build the existing committees, help form new ones and keep them affiliated to the NCC.

Since the convention there is indication that the centrist elements are disturbed at finding themselves dominated by the CP and are trying to cook up deals to counter this. At the convention the CP passed out its own leaflet which took the line for negotiations in its own name, but most of its delegates were ostensibly representatives from other groups.

Attachment . . . 3.

Three items are basic to an understanding of what the caucus is all about: 1) the letter sent out last week over the names of Doug and Ed for the fraction steering committee, 2) the letter by Danny R. to all caucus members and 3) the first caucus Newsletter.

On the relationship of the caucus to the National Coordinating Committee: First of all it does not regard the NCC as a competing organization. The caucus is not a split from the NCC; it is simply a grouping with a particular perspective, its own point of view and its own program. The caucus, like all other groups, wants to participate and coordinate with the others in the NCC. The caucus regards the NCC as a broad "umbrella" organization which can and should include groups of all types.

Secondly, on the relationship of the caucus with the various committees to end the war in Vietnam and the VDC's around the country: There is no essential change in the way caucus members work in the CEWV's than before the convention except that now, after the experience of the convention, there is a slightly higher level of political consciousness. Members of the caucus will continue to build committees, support the activities and initiate new committees where none now exist. It will try to convince the members that they should adopt immediate withdrawal as their demand, as opposed to the nebulous concept of negotiations, etc.

To carry out these tasks the caucus voted in Washington to issue a regular newsletter and set up a steering committee in charge of technical arrangements. The newsletter will be put out in Boston.

The major problem facing this new project is that of raising funds. Fund raising will be a necessary activity for all members of the caucus throughout its existence. The Newsletter will serve as the "organizer" for recruiting to committees which support the caucus as well as creating new committees.

The caucus has been formed at a time when the anti-war movement is still clearly on the ascendancy. There are more people being recruited to the anti-war movement now than at any time before. Whole new layers of people are just coming into the anti-war movement and new broad layers will be receptive to the idea of bringing the troops home now.

A clear political division emerged from the convention: a clear line on withdrawal of the troops and self-determination for the Vietnamese people as against the formula for negotiations which the Johnson administration can claim to agree with and utilize as cover for expansion of the war. The role of the caucus will be to prevent a sliding of the anti-war movement into the swamp of pro-administration liberal politics.

* * *

One of the important aspects of this convention is the fact that we were faced with an ideological conflict with what has been and will remain for some time our main opponent within the radical movement -- the CP. And blocked with the CP were proponents of co-existence politics of all varieties.

This conflict is not going to be basically resolved by any maneuvering, although plenty of maneuvering will have to take place, has taken place and will continue to take place.

What happened was that the three main forces at the convention were, broadly speaking, the revolutionary socialist tendency, the Stalinists and the amorphous center. It showed the attraction the Stalinist line has for the leaders of the center and the convention saw the center leaders shift toward a bloc with the Stalinists to suppress discussion on the major questions of structure and program.

In order to get a hearing we were compelled to circumvent the so-called "legal" apparatus of the convention and to help organize a caucus in order to even hold a meeting in order to get those groups together who agreed with us on the two main points we were fighting for -- a "single issue" organization around the Vietnam war, and the slogan of withdrawal.

Essentially involved in the whole fight was CP concern about the radical political and anti-administration direction the movement was taking. It had decided to move in as sort of agent of the SANE line -- the negotiations line -- within the new anti-war movement. To take control if necessary in order to impose this line or at least to muzzle the sections of the movement that stand for the withdrawal position. The reasons for this are clear. The withdrawal line leads to a direct confrontation with the administration, with the capitalist state and with liberal politicians and the Democratic Party; the other line leaves open the possibility of channeling the movement into capitalist politics.

As a result of the open combat and division that finally crystallized, the center leaders found themselves in the very unhappy position of becoming captives of the CP -- the only strongly organized force at the convention outside of ourselves. These centrists can play a role as self-annointed leaders only if they can balance themselves between the major contending forces -- us and the CP. Then they appear as "leaders" of the entire movement. That's the role they've been playing. Nobody elected them and they are able to play their role only because of the relative vacuum which exists so far as a dominant working class political leadership is concerned.

In the cold dawn after the convention, when they saw where they had landed, they had probably convinced themselves we were in the process of carrying out a split which would leave them hostages in the camp of the Stalinists and they were horrified. They knew what to expect from the CP since most of them have been in either the CP or our movement or around them. They drew back in horror from the logic of their position.

Attachment . . . 5.

A few days after the convention they began to contact us, to entice us back to the fold so they wouldn't be left completely exposed as helpless agents of the CP.

Another significant fact is that for the first time in years, the CP came out of their holes. This happened prior to the convention -- in the Twin Cities, New York, Madison -- when the CP made a switch. They were originally opposed to the convention and made a switch to go along with it in order to carve out an organization in their own image. And, true to their nature, they began to operate in their traditional way by packing the pre-convention meetings and did a very effective job of packing the convention. That's what we were dealing with -- a Stalinist-packed convention -- and the convention registration records confirm it.

Now a great deal of confusion arose from the fact that the center leaders were a bunch of muddleheads and confusionists who formed a de facto bloc with the CP to prevent a clear confrontation.

There would have been nothing better for us than to have had a clear confrontation with the Stalinists on the basis of our programmatic demands. The young people first aroused to political consciousness by the Vietnam war are not attracted to the popular front line but are ready to embrace the most advanced anti-war slogans though they may not fully understand the political implications of such slogans as immediate withdrawal.

Now the maneuvering is continuing. The January 8-9 meeting (of the NCC Standing Committee) will probably see a repetition of the convention in a way. The centrist leaders, in order to involve us, now have to begin making overtures to us. It's not going to be a case of us giving up any gains we made at the convention -- the major one being the caucus -- but of our support to the formula we advanced at the convention of the role, function and composition of the NCC.

At any rate, the maneuvers continue. Shall we remain aloof? No, that would be very short-sighted. The Stalinists need the center in order to put an acceptable facade on their projected "peace" movement. They are going to go all out to defeat the revolutionary tendency in the anti-war movement so that they can impose upon it their popular front line. But to do it they've got to have a liberal-pacifist front. They can't do it with their own people alone. It would be much better from their point of view to have people leading it who are not only non-Stalinists, but people who are even known as anti-Stalinist, but non-exclusionists. That would be perfect for the CP.

The centrists don't relish the role, they resist, they draw back, they want to do something about it. We are now probably going to see occur what they accused us of at the convention, a struggle for power on the lowest level, a struggle for power through organizational control. It will probably be to our advantage to aid in defeating the aim of the CP to control this organization. To gain more time to develop our tendency in this movement it is much better to have representatives of the non-Stalinist "left"

Attachment . . . 6.

at the head of the NCC than to have someone who is nothing more than a front man for the DuBois clubs and the CP. If the CP takes over then in all likelihood the movement will be split. The left-wing will not be permitted to live in the organization under CP control unless you go along with their popular front line. We should have no illusions on that score.

On the question of a "single issue" organization: Far from being finished we will just begin to see the pernicious role that the so-called "multi-issue" organization is designed to play. Because, in tune with the CP line it is the line of the muddleheads who want to convert the movement into a vehicle for running "peace" candidates in the hope that out of this there will develop some sort of "peace" party. They want a peace party on a national scale as distinct from the CP policy of realignment within the two-party system. And they see in the anti-war movement, in the "new left," an opportunity to establish a base from which they can launch this "peace party."

This line comes into conflict with our "single issue" concept of the anti-Vietnam war movement. We're going to have to fight it out in every one of these committees. It is our view that these committees should be solely directed to struggle against the war in Vietnam and not converted into political agencies to promote the candidacies of various and sundry "peace" frauds for public office.

It would be falling into a trap to separate the question of programmatic content from that of organizational form. Many young people coming into the movement will see nothing wrong with running some peacenik on the Democratic party ticket. So we are going to have a lot of educational work to do. There is one place where we'll draw the line -- we're not going to have any truck with popular front politics.

The biggest problem for us from now on is going to be how to meet the emergence of the CP as an active agent attempting to divert this movement into the people's front camp and their attempt to capture the center and to isolate us so they would have a "legitimate" front in which to carry on their activity. And we're going to have this problem throughout. We'll have to formulate our tactics to contend with this major political factor.

Our own comrades acted throughout the convention in a most commendable and disciplined manner, and with skill beyond expectations. They acted with great teamwork and discipline under pressures which were extreme. There is no question that the joint fraction of party and youth members was well organized and maintained an efficient headquarters and office staff. The younger comrades who were leaders of independent committees in their own right carried the ball in floor work, etc.

The surprising thing about our fraction is not that they made a few little errors and oversights, the surprising thing is they didn't make more. You don't learn tactics from a gook. You learn them from actual experience in the struggle. This is the first time in many years that the party engaged in open struggle with our ma-

Attachment 7.

for ideological opponents and we took them all on in both an ideological and organizational fight and emerged with the nucleus of a very important and promising organization, with a significant number of supporters who are genuine independents. That's a good sign for the future of our party.

We now have the political responsibility for developing and spreading the movement for withdrawal now. It is well known around the country that we have been active in anti-war work, have helped to build the committees whose members support the idea of the caucus, and that we intend to continue to build the most dynamic sector of the movement. We are a very significant section of the caucus and will play a leadership role in it. We intend to get thousands of supporters and readers of the Newsletter, regardless of what organization they may be in. The caucus and its Newsletter offers the potential of rectifying the major organizational weakness of the independent committees; their lack of a national organization, focus, and publication that is regularly gotten to the ranks of the movement. In addition to everything else, this work will be a new and invaluable experience for the overwhelming majority of us, particularly the new and less experienced young comrades.

#

#

#