

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES No. 38, February 16, 1967

Present: Barnes, DeBerry, Dobbs, Hansen, Kerry, Novack, Shaw, Sheppard, Jones.

Chairman: DeBerry.

AGENDA:

1. Los Angeles.
2. Antiwar Movement.

1. LOS ANGELES

Motion by Kerry: The Political Committee requests the New York local to release Comrade B. Hansen for assignment in Los Angeles.

Carried.

2. ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

Dobbs reported. (See attached summary.)

Discussion: Novack, Barnes, Dobbs, Kerry, Hansen.

Meeting adjourned.

Summary of Dobbs' remarks on antiwar movement:

Some new factors affecting the antiwar movement require thought -- Muste's death, the Reuther-Meany rift, a possibility of negotiations developing in the Vietnam war and the approaching presidential election. Concerning the Reuther-Meany dispute, there are several key aspects that focus on the situation inside the unions, but for purposes of this discussion I will abstract from these and consider only its potential impact on the antiwar movement.

Up to now the whole union bureaucracy has been identified with Meany's unconditional support of Johnson's Vietnam policy. Meantime a significant and growing antiwar movement has developed, based primarily on students who have become alienated from the unions because of the bureaucrats' line on the war. This has led to radicals playing a substantial leadership role among such students. The situation is somewhat analagous to that of the early 1930s when the AFL default enabled radicals to play a leading role among the unemployed.

Outright opposition to the Vietnam war is also gaining momentum within the civil rights movement, especially under the impetus of the black power tendency. This promotes increasing cooperation with the antiwar movement on the part of black militants, who are also becoming alienated from the unions because of the bureaucrats' policies on civil rights and the war. As a result of the ensuing trend toward reciprocal collaboration between the two movements, radicals gain enhanced opportunities to develop fraternal relations with black militants and -- in the case of the SWP -- a further gain is implicit in the appearance of a small wing within the black power tendency that sees the need for a break with capitalist politics. Even centrists like Bevel are impelled toward cooperation with the present radical-led antiwar movement -- although his pacifist line of "love" and "non-violence" adds to our difficulties in opposing Gandhi-like policies within the movement -- his action reflects the pressures of growing antiwar sentiment among Negro people.

Within the unions, opposition to the present crass pro-war line of the bureaucracy has appeared as one motivating aspect, among several, in an incipient rank and file revolt against the bureaucrats. Although the trend takes the form of identification with SANE -- and thereby strengthens the right wing of the antiwar movement -- it also implies new possibilities for radicals to develop influence within the unions around the war issue, among other points of program. That is why it is important to include the demand "Bring the troops home now" in our advocacy of a program around which to develop a class struggle left wing in the unions.

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Taken as a whole, these trends reflect growing alienation from the union bureaucracy among antiwar students, black militants and rank and file unionists. Hence Reuther's initiative in launching a palace revolt against Meany. Even though he has made no mention of Vietnam in his administrative letters to UAW locals -- and has affirmed his support to imperialism, as against the "Communist conspiracy" -- Reuther must develop some form of demagogic adaptation to the growing antiwar sentiment as part of his over-all strategy.

His needs in this connection imply a line roughly as follows: Emphasis on pressure for negotiations, as against our withdrawal demand. Efforts to reverse the present non-exclusion policy embraced by antiwar students and black militants in an attempt to exclude radicals from leading roles -- and, if it can be swung, from participation -- in the mass movement. As 1968 nears, we can expect new attempts to push the antiwar movement toward concentration on the election of capitalist "peace candidates." On the latter point, Johnson's renomination as the Democrats' presidential candidate should not be taken as a foregone conclusion; he has become a millstone around the Democrats' neck and an effort will likely be made to dump him.

An intervention along the foregoing lines, reinforced with union funds and the direct intrusion of bureaucratic hacks into the situation, will strengthen and embolden the right wing of the antiwar movement. Even the anticipation of such intervention will have effects of the kind, and we can expect new right wing attempts to "deradicalize" the Spring Mobilization.

As for Reuther, he has some things to accomplish before he can give major attention to the antiwar movement. He must first consolidate his oppositional base within the unions. That involves further tactical developments in his fight with Meany within the AFL-CIO and efforts to shore up his home base at the April 20-22 convention of the UAW. He also has the problem of renewing the contracts with the auto corporations which expire in September, and he faces some sticky internal union problems in that connection. Consequently the implications of Reuther's new course will likely have a more limited impact concerning the Spring Mobilization than will be the case later on in the antiwar movement.

That brings me to Muste's death which does, of course, have a big immediate impact on the movement. He played a central role in promoting principled cooperation between the SWP and the CP (along with the youth movements of the two tendencies) and the left wing pacifists in a united antiwar movement. Fusion of this leading bloc with a growing body of antiwar students gave the movement a significant degree of militancy -- centered on the withdrawal demand -- and enabled it to overcome

obstacles created by right wing forces and to stymie diversionary maneuvers undertaken by free-lancers who represent little more than themselves.

In immediate terms, Dellinger now assumes leadership of the left wing pacifists, a circumstance that in itself introduces changes into the general situation. Both the internal character of the left wing pacifist formation and its role in the broader antiwar movement can be expected to become modified. Dellinger not only lacks the respect and trust throughout the movement generally that Muste enjoyed. He does not have the background experience in the union and radical movements that helped Muste to play the key role he did in uniting divergent tendencies in common action on a principled basis. This implies less tactical flexibility from that quarter in the future.

In this changed situation we can expect more pronounced attempts to introduce pacifist principles and tactics into united front activities than was previously the case. That will add to the difficulties created by Gandhist types from the civil rights movement, who are being impelled toward cooperation with the antiwar movement. As revolutionists, we must naturally oppose all attempts to inject a pacifist line into united protests against war and differentiate ourselves politically from that line.

We can assume that the CP is re-evaluating its policy toward the antiwar movement in the light of the changing situation, just as we are. For them, Muste's death removes an obstacle to pushing special angles such as their current moves to convert the Fort Hood Three Committee into an anti-draft movement. Our comrades in that situation have taken a correct line in opposing the CP maneuver and, if the CP manages to put it over, as may well be the case, we must be prepared to pull out of the Fort Hood Three setup, giving support only to its efforts relating to defense of the three soldiers.

Of greater importance, we can assume that the CP is eagerly watching Reuther's shift in line and looking for ways to take advantage of it. If Reuther has studied Lewis' tactics in the split with the AFL bureaucrats and the formation of the CIO -- as I think he has most likely done -- the CP hacks are probably reviewing the tactics of the 1930s through which the Stalinists worked their way into the Lewis machine. As we think about ways to cope with Reuther's demagogy in our fight to build a class struggle left wing in the unions, the CP will be looking for ways to link up with Reuther in order to push their popular-front, peaceful-coexistence line.

Our fight against such a line within the antiwar movement, as elsewhere, will become further complicated if negotiations develop in the Vietnam war. New momentum will be given to

those pushing the negotiations line, as against our withdrawal demand. That in turn will add seeming plausibility to the idea of supporting capitalist "peace candidates," as against our fight for anti-capitalist political action.

If, on the other hand, escalation of the war continues -- or a new revolutionary upsurge breaks out on the world arena -- new factors would be added that would tend to contravene the trends anticipated in my remarks. But, as the objective situation stands at present, it seems that the potential trends I have outlined require our collective attention and thought.

Looking at the situation from another viewpoint, growth in opposition to the war is bound to bring a conjunctural change in the character of the antiwar movement. Limited forces, mainly students and vanguard black militants, initiated the protest against the war. Faced with outright opposition from union bureaucrats and conservative Negro leaders, they have accepted radical leadership. Their catalytic action, along with the impact of the war on people generally in this country, is producing accelerated growth of opposition to the war. The process is reaching a point where misleaders at the head of mass organizations can no longer afford to openly oppose the antiwar protest. To save their own skins, they must pretend to identify with mass sentiment in order to steer it away from radical influence and back into class collaborationist channels.

At the outset militants lacking political experience can be taken in by this maneuver. They will be impressed by the prospect of big reinforcements from unions like the UAW, and it will take time and experience for them to see through the demagogy of types like Reuther. In such circumstances our conjunctural role will begin to change. It will tend to shift from one of direct leadership in a relatively small mass movement to one of fighting to build a class struggle left wing among larger organized masses. In short, the axis of the fight for leadership will shift along the fundamental lines set forth in our transitional program. So it should be kept in mind that any conjunctural setback concerning our leading role in the antiwar movement, as it now exists, will be only a prelude to new and higher forms of political intervention in what shows increasing promise of becoming a mass political radicalization in this country.

To conclude on the immediate situation concerning the Spring Mobilization, it still looks like the action can be carried through. In the process we can anticipate more trouble than usual from other tendencies involved in the united action because of the changing factors I have undertaken to outline, but we should go ahead on the assumption that the project can still be realized. By the time it is over we will have the benefit of that experience, along with knowledge of another two months of developments in the movement generally, to aid us in deciding our further course.

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