

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES No. 21, July 28, 1966

Present: DeBerry, Dobbs, Novack, Shaw, Sheppard, Jones

Chairman: DeBerry

AGENDA:

1. Fort Hood Three Defense Case.
2. International.
3. Socialist Scholars Conference.

1. FORT HOOD THREE DEFENSE CASE

Jones reported.

Discussion: DeBerry, Jones, Shaw, Dobbs, Novack.

General agreement to send memorandum on the Fort Hood Three Case to NC members and branch organizers. (See attached)

2. INTERNATIONAL

Novack reported.

(1) Reply from U.S. on criticisms of draft of Political Resolution. Final draft incorporates suggested changes. Expect resolution to be ready for circulation soon.

(2) Letter from co-thinker on more concrete plans for publication of a series of essays covering 50 years of the Russian Revolution.

(3) Two of the revolutionaries murdered in Guatemala (reported in the Militant and World Outlook) were relatives of a co-thinker in Mexico.

General agreement that the Political Committee send a letter of condolence to the co-thinker in Mexico.

(4) Letter from Peru indicating that Hugo Blanco is either now in the process of being tried, or has been tried and sentenced to death.

Letter received signed by 21 co-thinkers in prison in Peru regarding the death of Leo Bernard.

Discussion: Shaw, Dobbs.

3. SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE

Novack reported on the continuing fight to have a representative from the SWP speak at the conference.

Discussion: Shaw

Meeting adjourned.

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM on Fort Hood Three Case

Some very important developments have taken place in the antiwar movement here recently. They have been breaking fast and are of such a nature that they are difficult to grasp simply from news reports and the like.

They are indicated in part in the introduction by Dave Dellinger to a pamphlet which the Fort Hood Three Defense Committee is putting out. It begins with the statement that the antiwar movement took a major turn June 30. And that is absolutely true. That was the day the three G.I.'s appeared at a press conference sponsored by the Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee and attended by top leaders of CORE and SNCC. Dellinger points out that this was the first time that three important forces -- the more militant section of the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement and soldiers against the war -- appeared in alliance. Any two of those would have been significant, but all three was even more of an event. The action by these soldiers happened to come not long after the Meredith shooting and the Mississippi March in which the turn toward "black power" became evident. It also came when both CORE and SNCC were deciding to make opposition to the war in Vietnam a regular part of their activity and their pronouncements. It also came just hours after the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, which angered the antiwar movement and stiffened the backbone of some of its more conservative elements.

In this context, the introduction of the three G.I.'s case has worked some extremely important changes in the antiwar movement, and it is crucial to understand their implications and potentialities.

We know that prior to June 30, the antiwar movement in New York as well as nationally was at something of an impasse with a mood of frustration prevailing. There was in connection with this a sort of cold split building up between those favoring mass demonstrations and similar activity on the one hand, and on the other those favoring a turn to political action, by which they meant coalitionist politics, campaigns within the Democratic Party, or in some cases, People's Front peace candidates. We were approaching the August 6 preparations with this kind of dichotomy building up, roughly between the more conservative and the more radical sectors.

We favored continuation of mass demonstrations because we considered this was useful activity not leading off into the wrong track. We recognized that the movement was still largely middle class based, that it couldn't possibly at this stage sustain anything but middle class, capitalist politics, and that any attempt to have the whole movement adopt socialist politics would simply narrow it. For that matter any attempt to have it as a whole adopt any particular kind of politics -- including liberal Democratic Party politics -- would

split and narrow it. That's why we pressed for continuation of the single issue approach for the movement as a whole, and for its united front formations.

But we sensed that simple mass demonstrations in themselves were getting a little bit old. Not that we shouldn't continue to have them, but the simple truth was that no matter how many people we got on the street, the war continued to escalate, and the movement remained frustrated, with apparently no effect on the power levers of society. The advocates of "peace movement politics" proposed this kind of activity as the answer. This in spite of the fact that President Johnson loves to declare that this or that primary is a "referendum on Vietnam," because he knows his machine has the election sewed up regardless of what people may think about the war. You don't even have to have our principled understanding of class politics to know that Democratic Party primaries are almost never decided on such major issues as the war in Vietnam, but on who has the patronage, who can get federal money into an area, who can provide the thousand-and-one favors cornered by the machine, and of course, on who controls the election machinery itself.

That kind of electoral activity by the antiwar movement is sucker bait. Our answer was a different kind of testing of public opinion, that the movement should prepare itself to appeal to the servicemen, that sector of the population -- incidentally heavily working class and Negro -- which actually suffers most from the war. But this was very difficult to explain, or at least it was very difficult for those to whom we were explaining it to grasp. Until the case of the Fort Hood Three, we were speaking to the wind, or at least so it seemed.

We approached the August 6 preparations with this mood of frustration and this growing dichotomy. Some of the more conservative elements even proposed a special conference of the Parade Committee enlarged to include more moderate elements, with the idea in mind of changing the Parade Committee policy for August 6. The conference was set for June 18, and it was just a few days before that, that these G.I.'s walked into the Parade Committee office and asked for help. It seemed most logical to invite them to the June 18 conference, which was not a public meeting but a conference of activists in the antiwar movement.

They appeared at the conference, and they got the help they asked for, and they transformed that conference. Since then there has been an unprecedented unity in the Parade Committee. Absolutely nobody has said it shouldn't support these guys. The unity not only appears around supporting the three G.I.'s, but around all the other activities in connection with August 6. We had previously anticipated -- and there could have been -- serious arguments at various

points over many questions. These arguments have not occurred on some questions because we specifically chose not to fight on them. Precisely because we considered the case of the G.I.'s and the turn it made possible for the movement, to be of such transcendent character that our tactics required a little adjustment.

For example, the slogan "Bring the Troops Home Now," was supposed to be the major theme of August 6. We have ended up with that slogan as one of nine. However, on the call leaflet it says in the most prominent place: "In solidarity with American youth, G.I.'s and those facing the draft, who do not want to be involved in this immoral war." We consider that an excellent trade. An excellent trade.

We haven't given up the withdrawal position. None of the nine slogans contradicts that position. As a matter of fact, those who insisted on a negotiate slogan (we did fight on that) ended up with a slogan that comes pretty close to withdrawal: "End U.S. Intervention. Let the Vietnamese Negotiate." So we don't think we gave up any matters of principle. What we did was decide not to irritate the more conservative groups over where "Bring the Troops Home Now" would be in the leaflet, so that we could emphasize the complete unity around the proposition of going to the G.I.'s with the message this case carries.

This unity now exists. But it is important to remember that the old dichotomy also exists beneath the surface. And it is important to understand the implications of the turn that has been made in order to take full advantage of the united support before a cleavage between right and left again appears.

Not everyone in New York, and certainly not across the country has quite caught up on what has happened. It didn't happen all at once either, but it happened fast. First came the press conference. Then the Army reacted, as the N.Y. Post observed, "with signs of panic." First they tried to work on the families and to bribe one of the G.I.'s into turning on the others in exchange for a discharge. The G.I.'s hung tough, and the Parade Committee reacted to this first blow in the best possible manner. Its officers shot off a telegram to the authorities and released it to the press, blasting the bribe offer right in the open, saying such things weren't going to intimidate anyone, much less the antiwar movement, and then laying out the new turn for the movement. It said: "The peace movement will continue to aid in every lawful way, anyone, civilian, soldier, sailor or Marine, who opposes this illegal, immoral war. The young men in the armed services are entitled to know the truth about the war, and to engage in discussions about it. Citizens are likewise entitled to communicate the truth about the war to servicemen and the peace movement is determined

to exercise that right."

There are many ways something like that could be said, and most of them would be wrong. But this isn't wrong. It is just right. And it ought to be given a lot of attention-- a lot of thought. What could be more reasonable than that the young men in the armed services are entitled to know the truth about the war, and to engage in discussions about it? Anything else is pure and simple thought control, brain-washing, and everything else evil and outrageous. Can anybody reasonably challenge that proposition? Isn't it completely in accord with what almost every American considers reasonable?

"Citizens are likewise entitled to communicate the truth about the war to servicemen and the peace movement is determined to exercise that right." That is unassailable. It is a civil liberty, a democratic right. It just hasn't been used very much before. But it is going to be used now.

This is not a fascist country, in spite of what some people who are very loose with words say. And it is extremely important to know that it isn't a fascist country. Extremely important. For one thing, regardless of how the liberties we are supposed to enjoy are abused by this or that authority, the traditions of free thought, free speech, freedom of discussion, and so on, run extremely deep in the American people. They haven't been burned out. They remain deep among the people, all of them, including those in the Army.

We know that in effect many of these liberties have been sham and mockery because it has been almost impossible to put them to effective use. You can vote, but you vote for peace candidate Johnson and he gives you war. You can demonstrate, but the government pays no attention. You can talk but nobody in power listens. But now these freedoms can be used to greater effect. Now the movement is going to use those freedoms we enjoy. It is going to use them. It is entitled to use them, and it is going to use them up to the hilt. It is not asking anybody to do anything wild or anything strange, or anything illegal -- just to exercise these rights.

The question is, does an ordinary American youth have the right to form his own opinion on being used, and maybe killed, in a war some place half-way around the world. A war which millions of his fellow citizens consider to be immoral and illegal. Does he or doesn't he? Obviously he does!

The activity summarized in those last two sentences of that telegram could become the main activity of the entire antiwar movement nationally. That is the potentiality. It

is the official policy of the major coordinating sector in the major city of the country. It has been taken up in New Jersey and Philadelphia. Nobody batted an eye against it -- at least not in the open -- not SANE, not WSP, not DuBois, nobody. That is the official policy. That telegram was read and passed unanimously at the July 7 meeting immediately after the three G.I.'s were arrested. It is the official policy of the Parade Committee, and it ought to be a regular part of the activity of every antiwar group in the country. Does each group have someone in charge of getting the facts on this case to G.I.'s at bus stations, at bases, or wherever else they can be reached in public places? If not, something is wrong.

This is not only a new turn for the movement, but it is vital for the defense of the three G.I.'s. Nothing puts more pressure on the authorities than the knowledge that every move they make, that every dirty trick they pull, that every jail they put these guys into, is going to be exposed, blasted publicly, and that this news is going to be made known to G.I.'s across the country. Now for example: they are not allowing these three to read newspapers or books, or anything but the Bible. And on Sundays they give them condensed novels from the Readers Digest. If that isn't brainwashing, it's as close as you can get. This has been protested, and the answer is: "This is just routine in Army stockades."

That reply got the Rev. A.J. Muste's dander up, and he is issuing a press statement on this matter. To the excuse that it is routine procedure he replies: "So, this barbarous practice is not even unusual." And he is going to try to get preachers and teachers and what have you to holler about it. We expect this will be blacked out by the cynical press. But it won't be blacked out of those leaflets. Just the facts, that's all. The movement is going to present the facts on this case. And one of the facts is this statement by Muste on this barbarous treatment in stockades. And that leaflet is going to get picked up across the country unless somebody is falling down on the job. There will even be some soldiers who don't give a damn about the war in Vietnam one way or another who will say: "Jesus Christ, its about time somebody stuck up for us on a thing like that."

We have learned a few things about approaching G.I.'s from the experiences we've had already. One thing is that a little common sense has to be used. To put it bluntly, what goes in Greenwich Village doesn't go at Fort Dix. Anyone who doesn't have that much common sense just doesn't belong in this kind of activity. Another thing. The type of leaflet that has been used. It is a monumentally dull looking leaflet. There's no picture, no big headline. No agitation. Just two pages of closely packed type. It's the kind of

thing that you could have in your possession and if someone you didn't particularly care to know what you were reading asked, "What's that?" you could say, "I don't know; I haven't read it yet; somebody handed it to me and I just put it in my pocket."

It is just a fact sheet on the case. It has one little headline that starts: "Three G.I.'s..." That ought to make any G.I. interested enough to tuck it away. People are interested in what directly affects them. And this leaflet gets read. Unlike among "movement people," you know, who never read leaflets unless its got just a headline, a time and place and a big picture. But that's not the situation in this matter. You can have two pages of closely packed type and they will be read. This leaflet just contains the facts. The statement by Master Sergeant Donald Duncan that these three are doing something more courageous than combat, the statements by CORE, and SNCC, the fact that the antiwar movement with hundreds of thousands of Americans involved is backing these G.I.'s one hundred percent. Just the facts.

Now there have been those who would advocate that other soldiers do the same thing that these soldiers are doing. There have even been those who would advocate that soldiers desert, or disobey orders, or things like that. We don't advocate any such thing. There are at least two reasons why we don't. One, it might be construed as illegal. That is a pretty good reason. But another important reason is that the people you are trying to reach would think you're nuts, they wouldn't take you seriously. All we advocate is that these three G.I.'s be defended. And in addition what is perfectly reasonable and legitimate and what any G.I. knows is reasonable, is his right to read what he wants to read, and to discuss with his friends and to make up his own mind about matters of most concern to him, like the war in Vietnam.

We know the Army takes this very seriously. Because they've shut off Fort Dix when leaflet distributors show up. No one dares challenge the right to leaflet, they just try to shut off contact by massive bureaucratic means. There were just a handful of demonstrators there, two weeks in a row, and they ringed the base with MP's. The gate is in a small town, but the Army declared the town off limits and sent a sound truck through this little town to chase the soldiers away and prevent their contact with a handful of people with dull looking leaflets.

They shut that town off and no doubt they are telling the people on the base that "these peacenicks have no regard for you; they're depriving you of your opportunity to go into town for a glass of beer. We're forced to make it off limits when they are here."

Even if bureaucratic measures limit contact, the movement can make sure the contact is not broken. There's nothing to prevent people from leafleting the bus stations at the next town, or surrounding cities. They can't shut off a whole state.

We've also found that this kind of work is very gratifying. More G.I.'s are friendly than hostile as a rule. And even those who are hostile are often anxious to argue, to talk. There has been some indication that G.I.'s are being told not to take these leaflets, and in some cases they shy away without saying anything. But that sort of thing isn't going to be very effective if the movement has perseverance, and good sense. Nobody likes to be told he can't think for himself.

The case has other obvious possibilities. We don't know yet how well they will develop, but there are certain probes which can be made. By coincidence, one of the G.I.'s has a father who is a union steward. He got his unit to go on record in favor of the case, after much discussion. And the unit is putting out a leaflet and passing it out to other units. For the first time there will be real discussion of the war in that union -- which is one of the big ones here -- not just in a little "peace committee" of radical union members. Whether they bring it to a vote in that entire union or not, the discussion is on. That's something to think about.

Another thing, this case has obvious attraction in the ghetto and among Puerto Rican and Negro youth facing the Army. This is not an abstraction, it is something real. Families are willing to speak in the neighborhoods, and so on. There is a possibility to test approaching a different section of the population than the movement has been based upon in the past. The stand of the CORE and SNCC leaders increases the possibilities in this regard.

A very important sector the movement hasn't touched in the past is, of course, the servicemen. ~~It can now turn in that direction.~~ I don't want to imply that we expect thousands or even hundreds of servicemen to pour into the peace movement tomorrow. That's not the kind of process that is going on. We aren't at that stage. But the quality of the activity can now be profoundly different than in the past. This activity is the real future of the movement, it is inspiring, it is attractive. It is the answer to the frustrations. And it has been accepted as the official policy.

Even if more conservative sections decide to pull back, they really can't do it openly. It is just too reasonable a case. There it is, it's the real thing. All they can do is say: "Well, I'm just not that much against the war, even

if it is the only way the three guys can be backed effectively in this particular situation and even if it is completely reasonable, and completely legal." And it's very hard for them to say that without being utterly discredited.

The more likely variant is that anyone of that mind would just not do much on the case, just try to change the subject, pass the buck. There was, as a matter of fact, some buck passing in the beginning. These G.I.'s figured out their own strategy and had their own lawyer before they even contacted the movement. In that sense this was a spontaneous development. But the Parade Committee wasn't the first place they went to ask for help. They went other places first. They got promises but no action. They got referred here and there, until they finally contacted the Parade Committee, and then they got what they were looking for.

Within the movement itself, this issue and this case has had certain effects in our relationship to the more moderate groups, such as DuBois. They are in a real sense in a bind on this case. They can't stay away from it, but it is not their line. It didn't come from us, but it spontaneously appeared -- right out of the experiences of the G.I.'s themselves. It will be extremely attractive for the ordinary new person in such groups as DuBois to work on this case. And it will be virtually impossible for anyone to tell them not to. It represents an opportunity to rub shoulders with these people on the best possible level. SDS, those members of it we've been able to find, lend their names to the case, and so on. There is no problem there. But they're just not doing much. This simply subsumes their particular approach in the past to the draft. Suddenly everyone senses -- though they don't seem to see the implications -- that here the movement has a real lever of power. Even those people that refused to see it before, are now open to reason. This is a concrete case, and it is easier to explain.

In a certain sense, anybody who isn't willing to defend these guys -- at least to the extent of defending their right to a day in court and to acknowledge their courage and their moral correctness in this matter -- ought to be read out of the peace movement. Anybody who isn't willing to go that far, well, you wouldn't have a hard time making a case to any activist in the antiwar movement that such a person just is not a part of the peace movement. He isn't really opposed to the war, that's all. Not only that but he's a bastard and a fink.

So far a number of peace candidates have been asked to help in the case. But very few have done so. They are stalling around. However, it is very important not to let them

off the hook on this. We want to know why so-and-so won't sponsor this case, or at least make a statement. We want to know why. We want that to become a subject of discussion in the entire peace movement where such a peace candidate is seeking support.

Involved in that approach are two things: one is the indicated opportunity to teach certain lessons, to explode certain illusions. The other is the importance of getting broad support for this case. It is extremely important to get as wide support as possible.

And there is no danger that the movement will be flooded by these peace candidates around this case, because they'll smell it. They already smell it. This is just not for the weak hearted. It's just not for the pro-establishment types, except in the case of an occasional one who really gets his dander up and turns on his own class interests. But it is important to get as much as can be gotten.

Being as reasonable as that about the matter gives us all kinds of elbow room. Somebody says, as even one of the G.I.'s did: "We want this to be an issue with the peace candidates." We don't have to throw up our hands and say, "Oh, my god, we can't have anything to do with that." We don't have to do that at all. We can say, "By all means let's try to get them to back these guys and to defend the civil liberties involved, by all means let's try." Not many of them are going to. That's the simple fact. That's an illusion of others, not of us. But this is one very effective way to dispell such illusions.

A great deal of responsibility revolves upon us for explaining these developments and this turn nationally. The real implications are not understood by most people. It is a contradiction. On the one hand people intuitively sense that here is something powerful and real. At the same time they don't really get it, don't quite know what to do with it. And the other political groupings among the youth and the antiwar movement have a similar attitude toward this matter that they have towards the independent committees against the war in Vietnam. They don't come out against them, or anything like that, but they don't spend much time building them either. We are going to have to spark this turn. Simply because it just happens to be our line. It fell into our pockets. But of course we have and we want no monopoly or anything like that. We just want the whole movement to take it up, and we are willing to work to that end.

→ (This activity is very satisfying to activists in the movement. This is an answer to the frustration often expressed: "Oh, we're talking to ourselves again." This is a way to get out of that. This is community work -- with a

punch. Every community should have its project of leaf-letting G.I.'s, regularly, like Sunday School. It is a real natural. It's something committees can be built on. It's reason enough for any committee anywhere to exist, if it didn't do anything else. It can be done in different ways in different places. You know, local conditions. We were worried at first they'd stick these guys down in Alabama or some such place to make it tough on us. But then we thought, well, maybe SNCC or the MFDP or the Black Panther could be brought in on it, and the Army would have a tiger by the tail. See, that's the way to approach the thing.

The families were really the first test on how much steam this thing had. It is always good to bear in mind that there are certain tests that can be observed in developments in the mass movement. You know, don't just plunge all of a sudden and maybe fall flat on your face. But watch to see if one thing works and it leads to the next, and if it doesn't you can pull back a while.

Well, these families provided such tests more than once, and so far they have come through at every turn. They weren't intimidated when the Army tried to work on them. They showed up at the press conference, and at the meeting after the G.I.'s were arrested. And they participated in the decision to have the Times Square demonstration in response. They spoke in place of the G.I.'s and saved the meeting. They make constant trips to see the fellows, and they are willing to speak. They can make national tours. None of them are accomplished speakers, but they will develop. Some of them work regularly on the defense committee, making decisions as well as licking stamps. Even the family of Samas, which as he said in his speech, was frightened and opposed at first, has now reacted with outrage at the arrests to prevent the boys from speaking. They are making statements to the papers in Modesto in defense of their son.

That's the kind of people involved. People with a real deep commitment to one another, and that's one of the things character is made of. The resiliency of these families is a real test. It appears that they are exceptional families, but the more you see them the more you know they are ordinary people. Now when that happens, it means opposition to this war is very deep in our society. There are other such people out there.

Now we don't want to imply that automatically this is going to be the big thing; that a point is going to be reached in a few months where thousands of G.I.'s will be reached, and the word will get to Vietnam and there will be a big "going home movement" and the war will be over because of this case. But it may be the beginning of that process. Right now it is in the movement's hands. The movement can be turned in the correct direction.

July 21, 1966