POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, Number 9, June 11, 1969

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Dobbs, Halstead, Hansen, Kerry, Novack, Ring, Bolduc, Shaw.

Visitor: Horowitz

Chairman: Dobbs

AGENDA:
1. Convention
2. PC Representative to Youth Plenum
3. World Movement
4. Boston
5. Antiwar Resolution
6. Publications

1. CONVENTION

Barnes reported that the Administrative Committee had discussed the question of the Young Socialist Alliance and the party convention. Due to the proliferation of YSA locals and at-large members in areas where there are no party branches, the Administrative Committee proposes that the Political Committee issue an invitation to the YSA to attend the convention as observers and that all issues of the preconvention bulletin be made available to the YSA.

Motion by the Political Committee: To invite the Young Socialist Alliance to attend the twenty-third national convention of the SWP and to make available to the YSA all issues of the party preconvention discussion bulletin.
(See attachment No. 1)

Carried.

2. PC REPRESENTATIVE TO YOUTH PLENUM

Barnes reported.

Motion: That Comrade Shaw be assigned as PC representative to the youth plenum.

Carried.

3. WORLD MOVEMENT

Hansen reported.

Motion: To issue an internal information bulletin to the membership containing Hansen's reports to the NY branch on the World Congress.

Carried.

Motion: To approve the general line of the report

Carried.

4. BOSTON

Barnes reported.

Motion by the Political Committee: To send the attached letter to the Boston branch in response to the letter to the Political Committee from Comrade Linda Sheppard dated May 15. (See attachments No.'s 2, 3, 4, 5.)

Carried

5. ANTIWAR RESOLUTION

Horowitz reported.

Discussion on draft of antiwar resolution.

Motion: To approve the general line of the draft and to authorize an editing committee to prepare the final draft for the preconvention discussion.

Carried.

6. PUBLICATIONS

Breitman reported. (See attachments No.'s 6, 7.)

Motion by Breitman: To propose merging the International Socialist Review and Intercontinental Press into a single weekly publication.

For: 1
Against: 6
Abstentions: 3

Motion defeated.

Motion by Novack: To set up a subcommittee to consider the whole question of party publications which would come back to the Political Committee with recommendations.

For: 9
Against: 0
Abstentions: 1

Motion carried.

Motion: That subcommittee be composed of editors and business managers of the party publications.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Attachment No. 1 to PC Minutes 6/11/69

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TO ALL BRANCHES:

Dear Comrades,

The Young Socialist Alliance and the Party Convention

The Political Committee of the party has invited the Young Socialist Alliance to attend the twenty-third national convention of the SWP and has advised them that all issues of the party internal preconvention discussion bulletin will be made available to the YSA.

The branches may invite non-party YSA members to observe the preconvention discussion sessions held in each party branch.

To most effectively organize the distribution of preconvention discussion bulletins to YSA members, the national office, after consultation with the YSA national office, suggests that in areas where there is a party branch that bulletins for non-party YSA members be ordered along with the regular branch order. In areas where there are locals or at-large members of the YSA and no party branch, the organizer or members will receive the standard order form sent to all party branches.

Comradely,

Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

Attachment No. 2 to PC Minutes 6/11/69

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cc: Larry T.
Steve C.

Boston
May 12, 1969

To the Political Committee

Dear Comrades,

I am writing concerning a question of party procedure that has arisen in the Boston branch.

At the second branch meeting following the plenum Comrade Larry T. gave the second half of the plenum report to the branch. I was not present at this meeting but several comrades spoke to me the following week and indicated that they wanted to continue discussion of the plenum report at the next meeting in order to clarify remarks Comrade Larry had made in regard to our orientation towards SDS.

I agreed that since there was a tremendous amount of confusion in the branch on this question that discussion should be continued and the points clarified. I raised these points in the executive committee and moved that a plenum discussion be put on the agenda. The majority of the executive committee felt that discussion should not be continued and voted against my motion.

I then informed the executive committee that I planned to raise the question of placing the plenum discussion on the agenda before the branch for it to decide. I was informed by Comrade Steve that I was under the discipline of the executive committee not to raise the question. The reason given was that such a discussion would exacerbate a factional atmosphere in the branch and should not be held at this time. I questioned the fact that the executive committee had the right to impose discipline on its members and prevent them from presenting minority reports on any question to the branch membership. However at the branch meeting I abided by the decision of the executive committee.

A motion to reopen discussion was made by a branch member not on the exec. and was defeated by the branch membership even though roughly one third of the branch felt strongly that a discussion should be scheduled in the agenda.

At the next exec meeting I asked Steve to restate what he felt to be the correct party procedure. He and other exec members said that in their understanding the executive committee does have the right to impose discipline on its members on any question and that if a comrade wishes to disagree with an exec decision that he or she must have the permission of the exec to give a minority report to the branch. I then informed the exec that I was never aware of such a procedure, that it seemed to me to be entirely out of the traditions of our party and would be in contradiction to the fact that in making local decisions the branch, not the exec is the

highest authority. I said that I would write to the PC for clarification on this question.

This is not the first time that this question of procedure has arisen. It arose last fall when I wanted to open the floor for discussion of building SMC in Boston. It is a very serious matter as there have been divisions in the local and a tremendous amount of confusion concerning our orientation towards SDS and building the SMC. To introduce the method of preventing minority reports and stifling discussion into the party in such a situation or at any time seems very dangerous to me. I wish that you would answer the questions I have raised as soon as possible. I am sending copies of this letter to Comrades Larry and Steve so that they may clarify their position if they wish.

Comradely,

s/Linda S.

Attachment No. 3 to PC Minutes, 6/11/69

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873 Broadway
2nd floor south
New York, N.Y. 10003

May 15, 1969

Boston

Larry Trainor
Steve Chase

Dear Comrades,

We received yesterday a letter from Linda Sheppard dated May 12, 1969. She indicates that you were sent copies of the letter.

I am enclosing a copy in case you have not yet received it. The Administrative Committee would like to have your comments on the letter before we take it to the Political Committee for discussion. Would you please send us your comments as soon as possible.

Comradely,

s/Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

enc.
cc: Linda Sheppard

Attachment No. 4 to PC Minutes 6/11/69

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873 Broadway
2nd floor south
New York, N.Y. 10003

June 11, 1969

Boston

Branch Organizer

Dear Steve,

At its June 11 meeting the Political Committee discussed the questions of party procedure raised by Comrade Linda Sheppard in her letter of May 12. We had received no comment on this matter from you or Comrade Trainor in response to my letter of May 15.

A branch executive committee has no right to put one of its members under discipline not to ask for a point on the agenda at the branch membership meeting.

As Article II, Section 7 of the party constitution states: "The branch executive committee shall be elected by the membership of the branch, and shall be subordinate to branch membership. The branch organizer and all other branch officers shall be designated by the branch executive committee subject to approval of the branch, and shall be subordinate to the branch executive committee. It shall be the duty of the branch executive committee to direct the activities of the branch and to act with full powers for the branch between branch meetings."

The branch membership meeting is a higher body than the branch executive committee. When there is no State, District, or Local structure the only standing bodies higher than the branch membership meeting are the National Committee, and its elected subordinate bodies such as the Political Committee.

The branch executive committee has full powers to act in the name of the branch between branch meetings including the right to exercise discipline on all decisions involving branch action. It has the responsibility for organizing and submitting for branch approval the agenda for the branch meeting. Executive committee members have the responsibility of cooperating in this exercise of responsibility by trying to clarify and/or resolve points of disagreement that arise in the committee. When this is not possible the individual executive committee member has the right to request that the question or questions in dispute be placed on the branch agenda at a time considered appropriate so that an organized discussion can be held and decision made by the branch.

The executive committee has no right to deny such request or place an executive committee member under "discipline" to refrain from requesting a branch discussion of such disputed questions. This has been standard party procedure and avoids having disputed questions raised on the branch floor without adequate provisions having been made in advance in the organization of the branch agenda for time allotment to hold an organized discussion.

There is a broader question of party policy raised in Comrade Sheppard's letter. That is the question of minority reports and branch discussion when there are differences in the branch.

The 1965 party convention adopted a resolution entitled "The Organizational Character of the Socialist Workers Party" which codified the party's organizational norms. It points out that while the party through its formal bodies has the constitutional right to organize and control discussion it also has the responsibility to assure the fullest freedom of debate and discussion. Only this can lead to a self-acting and critical-minded membership capable of forging and consolidating a revolutionary party.

This responsibility applies in the matter raised by Comrade Sheppard where she states there is a minority view in the branch. A minority has the obligation to be disciplined and loyal; a majority has the responsibility to use its majority in such a way as to provide adequate time for minority reports and discussion on disputed questions.

Enclosed for your convenience are copies of the May 12 letter from Comrade Sheppard to the Political Committee and my letter of May 15 to you and Comrade Trainor.

Comradely,

s/Jack Barnes
for the Political Committee

cc: L. Trainor
L. Sheppard

enc: 2

Attachment No. 5 to PC Minutes 6/11/69

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(From Boston branch exec minutes of May 18, 1969)

Minutes of 4/29 read and corrected:...

2) Reason that disciplinary question came up is that exec member, Linda, asked for general clarification on matters of discipline, then specifically on question of discipline of majority of exec over individual exec members' introducing discussions in branch which exec had voted not to recommend. Came up as result of question of re-opening plenum discussion at the 4-1 meeting, when exec had voted that no member bring up a recommendation for such discussion.

* * *

(From Boston branch exec minutes of April 29, 1969)

Old business:...

Clarification of exec. comm. on disciplinary measures -- every body has its own discipline. Rank and file has say on matters, but higher bodies have right and duty to discipline rank and file. And execs, national committees, political committees, etc. have a discipline of their own.

* * *

Attachment No. 7 to PC Minutes 6/11/69

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To the National Office
On Reviving the Arsenal (or Archives) of Marxism

Dear Comrades:

One of the things lacking from our press at the present time is a regular feature presenting material from the past by the great teachers of our movement that would help the young generation to understand and feel better their connection with the past of Marxism and its relevance. The Archives and Arsenal material did that for us in the 30's and 40's. We do not have translators as we did then, but there is a big body of material in English now which we can use, properly introduced. I refer mainly to Trotsky, but we also can use many things or part of things by other Marxists.

If it is agreed that this would be useful, the question is where could we have such a feature? The Militant has space problems, and the ISR appears only six times a year. My answer to it is the combined ISR-IP weekly which I have proposed. If they are combined, I would favor having the Arsenal introduced as a regular feature from the beginning and in every issue as a rule. In the course of a year we could produce a powerful amount of educational material that way.

I would like to ask that in the near future, after the comrades have returned, or after the ISR containing the Congress documents has been worked out, we have a discussion and decision on my proposal for merging the two periodicals.

Comradely,

s/George Breitman