

POLITICAL BUREAU

NO. 10

May 30, 1974

Present: Barnes, Britton, Finkel, A. Hansen, D. Jenness, Lovell,
Stone

Visitors: Camejo, L. Jenness, Miah, Pulley, Seigle, Sheppard,
Thomas

Chair: Stone

AGENDA: 1. Coalition of Labor Union Women
2. African Liberation Support Committee

1. COALITION OF LABOR UNION WOMEN

L. Jenness reported.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

2. AFRICAN LIBERATION SUPPORT COMMITTEE

Miah reported on the ALSC conference and demonstration held
May 22-24 in Washington D.C. and our participation.

Discussion (Abridged report and transcript attached.)

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

MEETING ADJOURNED.

REPORT BY MALIK MIAH TO THE MAY 30, 1974 POLITICAL BUREAU
ON THE AFRICAN LIBERATION SUPPORT COMMITTEE
CONFERENCE AND DEMONSTRATION

On May 23-24 the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) sponsored a national conference on racism, capitalism and imperialism. On the first day, I estimate about 250 people in attendance. On the second day it was up to approximately 350. The conference was followed by the third national African Liberation Day demonstration, where 4-5,000 Blacks participated.

Some of the main slogans that the ALSC projected at the demonstration were 1) "Impeach Nixon" ("Dump the chump" as they called it), 2) "End police repression," and 3) "Black workers take the lead, Black people must be free." The main slogans that they projected and that came across in the demonstration were not focused on Africa or in support to the African liberation movement. And this, despite the fact that the events in Portugal had just taken place. In fact, I would say that our banner which raised the demands for independence for the Portugese colonies and an end to U.S. complicity with the white settler states was the most concrete. A few of the participants involved were African students and Eritreans and they raised demands like "Africa for Africans," but these tended to be abstract.

The conference organizers conceived of the demonstration as an "anti-imperialist" demonstration. They considered it a success even though it was much smaller than the Washington demonstration two years ago when 25,000 marched. As Gene Locke, the chairman of ALSC said, the "quality" was much higher at this demonstration than previously. And that's how they explained the smaller size of this action and the local actions that happened the weekend before--Malcolm's birthday, May 19th. All of these, except for the one in Detroit that I'll go into a little later, were relatively small, around 200-300. In fact for the one in Philadelphia, only 27 people showed up.

Overall the actions this year were not publicized well because the people in ALSC were not focusing the same efforts in building them as has been the case in past years. Their attention has been directed to the ideological debates taking place within the ALSC.

Let me first give some background on the conference. The conference was called by the ALSC leadership when they had their last steering committee in February. The reason they called it stemmed from the fact that within the ALSC there were a number of differing political views and many people within ALSC are going through a process of changing their views. The main leadership of the organization, i.e., around the Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU) and Sadaukai see themselves as moving toward Marxism, and they are influenced by Maoism. They have spearheaded a trend toward turning the ALSC into a general "anti-imperialist" and "anti-racist" Black group taking up many different issues, as opposed to a coalition around African liberation. Then you have another grouping, supporters of Imamu Baraka, in the Congress of African People (CAP). In the past they have tended to oppose Marxism and wanted to keep ALSC as a Pan-Africanist type organization.

The conference was set up partly for the reason of debating out these two main views that exist in the ALSC. But at the conference there was very little debate between the CAP and YOBU forces because the CAP people have begun to switch their positions to adopt a pro-Marxist stance.

The conference itself was not organized or conceived by the organizers to be a decision-making conference to debate out the particular projects the ALSC should be doing. It was perceived as a conference to debate out a strategy for Black liberation, which included questions such as Marxism, the relationship of the national to the class question, etc. And that's the way the workshops and panel discussions were oriented.

They had five workshops at the conference. They were on labor and the unemployed, youth and education, women and the struggle, justice, police and prisons, and one on politics. The largest was the one on women which was about 120, 65 percent of which were women. They had a good, interesting discussion.

The workshops, though they had these titles, weren't focused on these topics but ended up revolving around the general question of perspectives of the Black movement as a whole, debating the relevance of Marxism or Leninism and the need for overthrowing capitalism, and what kind of party you would need to do that.

There were two major panels at the conference. Stokely Carmichael spoke on one panel representing the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party. He, along with Max Stanford, was the main representative of Pan-Africanism at the conference. The whole content of his speech was to point out that he was a Pan-Africanist and a nationalist, and that liberation of Africa was the goal. That was his whole point and he refused to even answer questions about what we should be doing in this country.

Other main speakers were Baraka and Sadaukai. Sadaukai's speech was mainly to show how he had evolved in the past few years. He self-criticized himself. He had begun as a Pan-Africanist and now he saw the need to read Marx and Lenin. He said just because they were white didn't mean we couldn't read their ideas.

Although Baraka has been an anti-Marxist Pan-Africanist in the past, his speech to the conference reflected a change in his views under the impact of the discussion in the ALSC. He began his talk quoting Lenin on imperialism and one of the main points of his speech was that just as Lenin showed in Russia that the workers led the revolution there, that you had to build a workers revolutionary party there, and Mao showed that peasants were the revolutionary force and had to build a party based on the peasantry, that in the United States Blacks are the main revolutionary force; thus we should build a Black revolutionary party. That was the main point of his speech. He called for, and all these speakers called for, the need to overthrow capitalism as the only road for Black liberation. Everyone but Carmichael and Stanford made the point that you need a revolutionary party to do that. Pan-Africanists like Baraka meant by this a revolutionary Black party. Sadaukai and YOBU, Maoists and others were talking about a multi-national party, that you had to work with whites. The point was made that you should work with whites and built a multi-national, disciplined party.

Another major speaker at the conference was Abdul Alkalimat from Nashville, a person who has been a major force in pushing for the recent changes in ALSC. He drafted the new ALSC statement of principles.

The conference was organized so that you could only raise questions, not comments, on the floor of workshops or panels, so this is what we did. And that was the only time the question of a united front around Africa, or the question of the Democratic and Republican parties was raised, when we raised it. In reaction to our questions the main speakers agreed that the whole question of working for capitalist parties, for the Democratic party, is a tactical one in their view. Sadaukai even used the example, that if someone in North Carolina was running for office--and he was obviously referring to a Black Democrat, because that way my question--if he supported ALSC and asked for us to help get him votes, he would do it.

Nelson Johnson, another YOBU leader, in informal discussion said he saw no difference between us running as a third party or support for so-called "progressive Democrats" or Black figures in the capitalist parties.

Now, just in terms of the different tendencies at the conference itself. Baraka had a large number of people at the conference, at least 50. All would speak and use the same line as Baraka, talk about revolution, talk about Lenin, talk about being anti-capitalist. All would take part in the discussion including the women, which is something new. Most of the time in the past the women in CAP were not allowed to speak.

Carmichael did not seem to have any other people there. The same for Stanford's party. YOBU--I don't know exactly how many people they had there, but it was a large number. They were the dominant view at the conference.

All of the Maoist tendencies were there. The Black Workers Congress had at least 30 people there. They were all over the place selling their document, their new programmatic document on the Black struggle, and they spoke at the workshops.

The Revolutionary Union must have had about 10 or 15 people as well as the October League, and they would also speak. There was one person from YAWF who spoke as a member. And there were at least 7 or 8 YWLLers. They made no big CP intervention, they didn't even pass out the Daily World or do anything, just observed the conference. They were there obviously knowing that with the discussion going on in the ALSC thinking they might be able to pick up a couple of people.

I think one of the important things about the conference is that 1) we were the only group claiming to be Trotskyist there and 2) we were viewed as a legitimate part of the conference and discussions; there was no red-baiting or Trot-baiting. We raised ideas as the SWP and people listened. Every time one of us spoke everyone would be quiet to hear what we had to say, and I thought that was significant. And that included formal and informal discussion at the tables. It was also reflected in our literature sales. At the conference itself, at which there were only 300

people, we must have sold at least \$200 of literature. We only sold \$305 for the overall period of three days, and we sold 80 of the Marxism versus Maoism pamphlets, almost all of those, at the conference. We sold 80 of the U.S. Role, and we sold all 30 of the Black liberation and socialism books which were all we brought. At the conference you could hawk the book, a \$2.45 book, so there was interest in what we had to say.

And we had good discussions. We signed up at least 20 people for summer school. We had a specific leaflet for summer school. And with the discussion, like around the pamphlet Marxism versus Maoism, people would ask why did we say that, why "Marxism versus Mao", and we would get into good discussions. So the conference was not full of hard Maoists. Most of these people thought Maoism was legitimate Marxism. At the same time people didn't identify with a specific tendency. Most people didn't identify themselves as Maoist, for example, even though they thought Maoism was legitimate Marxism.

Just in terms of where ALSC is going. I think it is clear that it is not a united front organization around the issue of Africa. It is a general "anti-imperialist" Black organization, and it was clear at the conference that everybody accepted that that was what they wanted it to be, an organization taking up all these issues.

Another point we should recognize in the ALSC's move away from doing work around Africa and in support of African liberation, and Portugal and so forth, has been the effect or impact this has had on the participants of the different groups in ALSC.

For example, in YOBU we know that Mark Smith who was the vice-chairman quit YOBU because he became an outright Maoist. I guess YOBU hasn't gone far enough in that direction in his opinion. Also we know YOBU rank and file who do not consider themselves Maoist in any way. The Denver group, for example, still consider themselves Pan-Africanists and are just beginning to study Marxist literature.

The change in Baraka's views has also had an effect on CAP and people around it. One thing we know, for example, is that the group in Philadelphia was recently expelled from CAP. The group in Boston obviously doesn't agree with a lot that Baraka is saying. The East up in Brooklyn, in their recent issue said that they had split from CAP. Don L. Lee, the poet who has been one of the leaders of CAP, also has a lot of big differences with Baraka and what he's saying.

Another thing to note about Baraka is that with this change in rhetoric he has also become a little more friendly to us. I don't know if comrades heard that Derrick had a discussion with him just before the conference about his views. And at the demonstration we asked if he would like to write an answer to the article by Tony Thomas in the Militant on the Black party. He took the initiative after reading the article to come up and tell us he is considering doing that. I don't know what it all means. It is clear that Baraka's general perspective of working within the Democratic Party has not changed.

Finally, in terms of what I think our orientation should be towards the ALSC. First, I think it is obviously very important to

get in discussions with the people in ALSC about Marxism. In our press it will be important to take up some of the issues raised at the conference, including the united front and the question of Maoism. We should use the new interest in Marxism to get people interested in our ideas.

Second, just in terms of our approach on a local level we should approach ALSC as a general Black organization and not as some group focused on Africa, because that is how it sees itself. And I think a lot of these different groups, like in the Twin Cities and other places where there are healthy people who want to do something, who are involved in doing some good activity, we can support that and be involved in these activities. In Detroit we worked with ALSC to build a demonstration of a thousand people, which was the largest local demonstration. So we could work with an ALSC committee like that and in other places where it carries out viable activity around Africa or other issues.

Lastly, I think it would be important to make the point that the fact that the demonstration was 4-5,000 without being built anywhere nationally still reflects a lot of sentiment around Africa. And the size of the Detroit demonstration which was built specifically around Africa shows that we still have opportunities around the country to work and build real united fronts around the question and make contact with the different African students groups, explain our ideas, and also through the use of forums and other vehicles to do likewise. We can't be dependent upon this organization to organize support for the liberation movements in Africa and to expose the role of U.S. imperialism.

DISCUSSION ON THE ALSC CONFERENCE AND DEMONSTRATION

Pulley: One of the things that was obvious at the conference and during the discussion preceding the conference was that these are Black militants who are beginning to understand that there is more involved with Black oppression than racial oppression and that the problem we face is one of becoming revolutionaries, and of understanding Marxism. And they confuse Maoism with Marxism, and are trying to turn the action coalition into some type of other organization to fit into their new views. They don't see the ALSC as the new revolutionary party. They see it as a general "anti-imperialist" organization.

The fact that we were able to sell lots of pamphlets on Mao and speak to a lot of people about our politics indicates, I think, that those that are caught in the Maoist web aren't hardened, and that the ALSC people who identify with Mao are open to discussions with us and are confusing Maoist thought with Marxism.

Much of the discussion at the conference was centered around the question of whether Blacks were oppressed solely as a race or as part of the working class and doubly oppressed because we are Black. That is the way the discussion developed prior to the conference and that is the way some of the differences manifested themselves in the documents that were written.

Baraka was initially the proponent of the pure race theory and he was polemicized against by those who felt they had become Marxists. But what we saw at the conference was that Baraka, bending to the

dominant influence of the conference, came out saying that all are oppressed, the working class and us. So the majority of the people there who spoke were saying that there is both racial and class oppression. Even those who continued to be solid Pan-Africanists would concede that Blacks were oppressed as part of the working class. Even Stokely Carmichael said that although he contradicted himself numerous times.

So one of the general things that is happening is what we point to in the Transitional Program for Black Liberation, that is, nationalists are coming to understand the fact that capitalism has to be overthrown, that Black people are oppressed as part of the working class and must find a solution in the socialist revolution.

All the people that spoke said they accepted socialism over capitalism, and then continued on to discuss whether class or race was the decisive question or, as the Maoists put it, "the principle contradiction." But there was general acceptance of the fact that capitalism has nothing in store for Black people, that we need a socialist revolution. And there was general agreement that white workers would play some role in this.

So if we want to look at this, aside from the fact that people are confusing Marxism with Maoism, and aside from the fact that this development signifies the destruction of a united front type coalition in support of African liberation, you can say that this is a positive development in that people are recognizing that Blacks are oppressed as part of the working class. I'm talking particularly about those who are there for us to reach, not those who consciously have chosen Maoism over Trotskyism.

What this means is the destruction of the ALSC as a coalition of those concerned with supporting African liberation movements. As Malik said, Africa was not a focus of the action. If it were not for the day, African Liberation Day, Africa would not have been hardly mentioned.

Thomas: We have to go after the Maoist trends that are growing up in this country in a much stronger way than we have in the past, because this is a very broad milieu, especially among nationalist minorities like Blacks, Chicanos, etc., but also among white students, people radicalizing. To a lot of people Maoism means Marxism. And the sectarian Maoist groups are often able to attract people by pushing Marxism. They push the idea that: "We're Marxists, we're communists and we've got to build the communist party" and stuff like that. So they get in the public eye as the Marxists. We should counter this by being out there talking about Marxism, that is real Marxism.

Also, we have to, as part of this discussion have one or two articles going into the whole relation of the Black struggle to the class struggle. The Maoist groups are having debates among themselves on this. It doesn't sound like Sadaukai and the YOBU people have gone to the position that some of these Maoist groups hold that Black nationalism as such is reactionary, they haven't made that turn though there are certain hints some of them could turn that way.

Cheppard: How many comrades were at the conference?

Miah: We had ten comrades at the conference Thursday and Friday plus two independents and seventeen comrades at Saturday's demonstration.

Sheppard: It seems to me that point about Maoism making some gains among radicalizing students in the oppressed nationalities is true. I think both the RU and OL have a fair number of Blacks and Chicanos, and we've seen in California amongst this layer of students, mainly students, the influence of Maoism. So I think this idea of going after it in the paper is good. We have to do it in such a way as to go after the issues as people see them, like one good thing would be to take up this debate which is taking place in the Guardian between the Black Workers Congress, RU, October League over nationalism. They all have different positions on the questions of how the Blacks and class struggles are related.

Barnes: Was this acceptance of us a change from the past? You say there was no "Trot-baiting," people listened to what we had to say --is this different from the past?

Miah: Well, in terms of the ALSC it's not, except for one steering committee meeting a year ago when there was a big discussion on us after the last action and the role we played. There was also some red-baiting in New York by certain forces. But overall we've been part of ALSC.

But the reason I thought it was significant this time was that the Maoist tendencies were at the conference and a lot of people were influenced by them. At the same time, of course, we were not invited to be on the panels or have a speaker. Supposedly they were allowing for all views, and because we have comrades on the steering committee they know what our views are, but they didn't ask us to have a speaker. But there wasn't hostility shown.

Jeness: In New York the people around Baraka and those around the East have thawed a little in their attitude toward our comrades. Baraka invited Maxine to come and speak at the Afro-American women's conference in July. This was on their initiative. They also asked, on their initiative, to have a table at our IP banquet. We explained that it was part of an educational conference and they could have tables there, and they did and sent people to the conference with a table.

The East has also thawed. Maxine had discussions with people from the East, trying to get them involved in Haitian work that we're doing there, and so on.

Derrick recently went to Newark to discuss the elections, and Baraka himself made a point of speaking to Derrick and spending some time with him. In the past the people in the East have been extremely hostile, they were the ones who have been red-baiting us in ALSC work.

Thomas: One of the things that showed up in Derrick's talk with Baraka was the failure of his whole maneuver with Gibson, the mayor of Newark. Baraka supported Gibson and helped him to become mayor. Now there is a split between the two. The police in Newark have started some harassment of Baraka's people. Baraka's whole experience with Gibson has been negative. He sees Gibson as a form of what he calls "neocolonialism," although he's going to try to

challenge him from within the Democratic Party. He also said that he was thinking about their running a candidate outside the Democratic Party against Rodino for congress this year. He said this two years ago and two years before that, but this time he sounded a little more concrete.

There's some pressure in this direction because for the last four or five years Baraka has been the spokesman for this whole idea that you could do these things by maneuvering with Black Democrats. He had a lot of prestige because people thought he was making gains and building an organization that way. But it's becoming more obvious to certain segments that he's getting nowhere. So that has something to do with his making more radical statements.

The other thing that influences this discussion is that a lot of these people become sympathetic to Maoism as a result of their support to Nkrumahism and to the regimes in Guinea and Tanzania. Also some of their ideas are similar to those put forward by Amilcar Cabral, the late leader of Guinea-Bissau. All the people who spoke for Marxism on the big panels would make allusions to Tanzania and quote Cabral, along with Marx and Lenin and Mao and Stalin, as what they saw as Marxism or socialism.

Pulley: There's also a question of the Democratic Party and the total confusion on that question. Everyone who spoke on the panel, regardless of their views or differences with each other, all agreed it was a tactical question whether you supported the Democratic Party and its candidates. And the audience totally agreed with that view. Nelson Johnson or someone would give a talk that called for a class analysis in the abstract, but when it came to the elections, all pretenses of a class analysis went by the wayside. The ALSC in Philadelphia actually helped build the election campaign of a Black Democratic candidate. They drove the truck to D.C. that was a campaign van.

Barnes: I think that we should consider doing a whole number of things in light of these developments. This is a very surprising report to me. We ought to consider taking the offensive with these people to try to mix it up with them more, start having forums with one or two or three of these people. An example of the type of thing we could do was the panel in Detroit in the early 1960's with Breitman and others that we ran in the ISR. It's very good that Baraka would say he would consider answering us in *The Militant*.

I think we should take a fraternal attitude to this whole layer, even the leadership. We have to take such an attitude to the leaders if we want to get close to the others. What do we have to lose? We have to take their new views at face value, i.e., they are looking for the answers to the problems of Black people, the problems of revolution, the problems of imperialism, etc., and they are interested in Marxism. The important thing is that there are people here who might be interested in an exchange between Tony or another comrade and someone from the East or Baraka in a forum on "What does Marxism have to offer for the fight against racism or imperialism?" or something like that--any topic. Have some panels. Have one or two of them come to the Brooklyn forum and have some people see if we can go to the East. I think we should try to mix it up a lot more, and do it seriously.

What ALSC suffers from is a total crisis of ideological perspective. I wouldn't get hung up on whether to begin with they understand the united front or the Democratic Party. We shouldn't let their wrong views on these things get in the way of talking with them, of welcoming their new interest in Marxism or of working with them. We've got to have the general idea of exchanging ideas with them and getting involved in action with them where possible. If we get one or two of them to speak at a forum, others will come, some of their followers may come, they might buy some of our literature. They might get to meet some of our people, they might go for a beer afterwards. They may agree to work with us in setting up a class series on Marxism. We should take advantage of the new understanding that white workers are going to have a role to play, and that a multi-national socialist group is relevant.

I'm not even sure we should begin by taking it directly head-on on the Maoist question. I think we should take it directly head-on on the Marxist question. Someone wants to know what Marxism is and thinks it has something to say to them. Well, we are the Marxists.

We should forget about the phonies. We ought to think of the thing in a little broader way, in that this is really a milieu, not an organization, not a united front, a popular front, or whatever, just a mixing of people trying to grapple with the difficulty of imperialism and the world and what road to liberation, what road to socialism. We have everything to gain from exchanging ideas with them. I think we should consider that stance. We can still speak out sharply and clearly where we don't agree with Baraka or with Maoist ideas. This doesn't mean we become soft on Baraka's wrong ideas. I think that is what we should think out. Because someone is going to get some of these people. The CP or one of these organized Maoist groups that starts forging a real organization, or us.

One other thing we should consider. The Portuguese junta has thrown some money into propaganda about coming to Portugal for vacations. The TAP commercials come on saying "This is the new Portugal, the country with the oldest traditions, but with a new democracy, and come to see us." Well, we can get out in front of these TAP offices with some signs "Get out of Africa!" "Immediate independence for the Africans." "Solidarity with the African students in Portugal." Even if they aren't very big, I wonder if there aren't some cities where we could get together possibly several hundred even in front of them. They don't have to be giant things. The opportunity is there after all these years of trying to get the Portuguese out of Africa, the opportunity is there now to actually do it. So, we should consider what we can do to help support the struggle for independence at this critical juncture.

Camejo: I think there's two separate processes going on and that we have to make a certain adjustment. First is that for a whole period of time we were debating with the other groups who called themselves socialist the nature of nationalism. And we had a very big polemic around nationalism with the various sectarians and the Communist Party and those against nationalism. That made our whole approach towards Blacks and Chicanos a little bit one-sided. The emphasis on Black control of the Black community became like our main slogan; we would rarely use "fight racial oppression."

Meanwhile among Black youth that were radicalizing there was another process going on. They were trying to go beyond simple nationalism and questioning ideas of socialism. Some became attracted to Marxism. And naturally, they're instinctively drawn towards Maoism, a revolution in a non-white colonial country that appeared not to be as corrupt as the Soviet version. It is natural for Blacks and Chicanos to be more open to what the Chinese are saying. And also the attractiveness of ultraleft rhetoric that was coming out of China. They all tended to be soft on Maoism. So we have seen a growth of people calling themselves Marxist, and Maoist, among Blacks and Chicanos, while there has not been a parallel growth considering themselves Trotskyist.

I think we have to do further study on how big this layer is, and I think Jack is completely right when he says we have not so much an organization as a mood. But there is a milieu that is taking part in this discussion, a discussion that we are not yet a part of because it is generally among so-called "Maoists." And part of it is that we have to take up the side we have not dealt with enough. We've got to make it clear that we are for a multi-national party, that we think it's good that Blacks and Chicanos and whites unite in struggle. That aspect has to be emphasized more.

Sheppard: Within this I think there are two different things we are talking about. One is the hardened Maoist groups which are a source of tremendous virulence against us.

But what is involved here is different. The fact that at this conference people will walk up to us and not hit us in the mouth but say they want to read the pamphlet and ask "Why do you say Marxism versus Maoism?" That's an attitude of people we can still reach and talk to, who have not gone down the tube yet. They want to know about us and are interested that we have a different point of view.

Also, nationally I think we are becoming more of a center of the radical movement. We are a force not to be totally or completely disregarded or attacked the way that the Maoists do. So we have got some kinds of hardened Maoists--we have the October League, the RU, the Black Workers Congress (although there may be some reaction among them to being called "Trotskyists" by the others. They are being attacked as Trotskyists by the others because they have a formally closer position to ours on the dual nature of the oppression of Blacks.) But if we polemicize with the hard Maoists and enter this polemic about what is the nature of the oppression of Black people, we can influence some of the others. Peter pointed out we have had a polemic directed against those who attack nationalism who didn't understand and were backward on the development of nationalism, and there was another process that developed as some people came from nationalism and were trying to see how nationalism relates to the class struggle. We're not one-sided because we're addressing the problem as a whole. We see the inter-relation between the two.

The question of how the class and Black struggle are related is one that goes beyond this milieu that is attracted to Maoism. This whole argument of what is the nature of Black oppression continues to be a big one for the left. There is a little group in

Los Angeles that split from Wohlforth—all young Black people. They are against nationalism, but through working with us and inviting us to some of their functions, it's possible we could win them. Whether anything will come out of it I don't know. But it's the same idea of mixing it up with them.