

POLITICAL BUREAU

NUMBER 13

October 3, 1974

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

Visitors: Camejo, Horowitz, Scott, Seigle, Waters

Chair: Stone

AGENDA: 1. Free All Soviet Political Prisoners Slogan
2. Paper Editor
3. Presidential Election Campaign Committee Director
4. Critical Support to Raza Unida Party
5. Membership
6. Transfers

1. FREE ALL SOVIET POLITICAL PRISONERS SLOGAN

Jenness reported on draft of letter correcting earlier letter sent out by the campaign committee on the slogan "Free All Soviet Political Prisoners" (see attached).

Discussion

Motion: To approve the line of the draft letter.

Carried.

2. PAPER EDITOR

Barnes reported.

Discussion

Motion: To assign Larry Seigle as editor of the paper.

Carried.

3. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE DIRECTOR

Barnes reported on a proposal to make Doug Jenness 1976 national election campaign director. This proposal includes the understanding that Jenness will be the national campaign director for the remainder of the 1974 campaign, will begin preparations now for the 1976 presidential campaign, and will bring ongoing legal and ballot work under the new committee.

Motion: To assign Doug Jenness as 1976 national campaign director.

Carried.

Jenness reported that he has been having discussions with Camejo, Morell, L. Jenness, Stapleton, Wade and Dixon concerning the organization of the presidential election campaign committee and proposes that these comrades be released from some of their current assignments within the next period so that they can assume responsibilities with the 1976 election campaign committee.

4. CRITICAL SUPPORT TO RAZA UNIDA PARTY

Britton reported on the recommendations of the Houston, Central-East Los Angeles and Denver branches to extend critical support to Raza Unida candidates.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the Houston branch recommendation that critical support be extended to the Raza Unida candidates running in the November 1974 Texas elections for offices for which the SWP is not fielding candidates.

Carried.

Motion: To concur with the Central-East Los Angeles branch recommendation that critical support be extended to the three Raza Unida candidates running for offices in the East Los Angeles city council elections for which the SWP is fielding only two candidates. Five places are to be filled in the election.

Carried.

Motion: To concur with the Denver branch recommendation that critical support be extended to the Raza Unida candidates running in the 1974 elections for state regents offices for which the SWP is not fielding candidates.

Carried.

Agreed to circulate to the National Committee and organizers the letter from Frank Boehm and Jose Perez to Peter Seidman concerning formulations that are useful in explaining our tactic of critical support to the Raza Unida Party (see attached).

5. MEMBERSHIP

Scott reported on the recommendation of the Detroit branch that M. H. be readmitted to the party and the recommendation of the Central-East Los Angeles branch that B. D. be readmitted.

Motion: To concur with the Detroit branch recommendation that M. H. be readmitted to the party.

Carried.

Motion: To concur with the Central-East Los Angeles branch recommendation that B. D. be readmitted to the party.

Carried.

6. TRANSFERS

Scott presented a list of transfers to be approved.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the proposal.

Carried.

Motion: To dissolve the Austin branch since all the party members who had lived there except for one have now transferred to other branches.

Carried.

Motion: To refer the approval of all future transfers to the national office.

Discussion

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

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14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
October 3, 1974

Mike Taber
Chicago

Dear Mike,

Since I sent you the letter of September 18 on the slogan "Free All Soviet Political Prisoners" we have had further discussions here on this and decided that this slogan is perfectly correct in the concrete situation of today.

The argument against the slogan was that it could be interpreted to include those guilty of actions against the workers state. After further thought it is clear that the danger of such an interpretation is not realistic under the present circumstances.

In the first place, spies, saboteurs, etc., are not what anyone other than the bureaucrats mean by political prisoners today. The category of political prisoners is used to refer to people in prison because of their ideas.

More importantly, the fact that the slogan might be misinterpreted to include agents of capitalist restoration was abstracted from the real situation. Of course, the Stalinists will make this charge no matter what slogan we use, but everybody else will correctly assume that we mean the dissidents. And we are in favor of freeing all of them--no matter what their political views. There is no threat of counterrevolution from the old possessing classes any longer. On the contrary, the biggest restorationist threat comes from the bureaucracy itself, as it has for decades.

If we were in a situation in which internal agents of imperialism really did pose a threat to the workers state, we would have to take this into account in working out our slogans.

Today, however, if all the political prisoners in Soviet jails were freed, including those who oppose Stalinism from a religious or other reactionary standpoint, it would in no way strengthen the forces of imperialism against the workers state. It would, however, make a very big difference in helping to advance the possibilities for a political revolution against the bureaucracy and in defense of the workers state.

In relation to people like Solzhenitsyn, who is a victim of Stalinist persecution, but who has come to hold reactionary political views, our policy is to center our fire against the denial of his democratic rights by the Stalinists. We make clear our political differentiation from Solzhenitsyn's views in a pedagogical, propaganda manner.

Comradely,

s/ Dave Frankel

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

July 13, 1974

Peter Seidman
Denver

Dear Peter,

A discussion took place here in connection with the article in the May Young Socialists for Marsh and Danielson Newsletter, but as you pointed out over the phone the formulation in question was also projected in a report to the branch which you had sent in to the party national office a few weeks earlier. Also, Joel received a letter from Rich Feigenberg raising some of the same questions.

In our opinion, the formulation urging individuals who are not convinced of the necessity of socialism to vote for the RUP (instead of the SWP) is confusing and counter-productive.

The problem that we think motivated the comrades to consider this formulation is a thorny one. That is, how to explain that the logic of the development of the RUP is towards independent working class political action and that our campaign should be supported because only our program presents the answers to all the problems faced by working people.

We think that is what the authors of the YSMG article were trying to explain in paragraphs five and six: "The SWP candidates are campaigning for fundamental social change, for socialism, which represents the long-range solutions to the problems of this society. Therefore, where both parties are running for the same office, we urge people to vote for the SWP."

That is, of course, true, but a little bit one-sided, and its one-sidedness is re-enforced because it is immediately followed by the statement that "...people who are not convinced of the necessity of socialism, but do see the importance of breaking with the two parties ...[should]... vote for La Raza Unida Party candidates."

One problem with the passage is that it could be taken to mean that our solutions are far-off things, usable only in the future. But SWP candidates are not only campaigning in favor of a socialist America in the future but are presenting today the real solutions to problems working people face. The socialist program we are presenting should be implemented right now as it contains the only real solutions to all social problems like inflation, unemployment, racism, sex discrimination, inadequate housing, prisons, etc. And it could be implemented with the resources of this nation if a workers' government were in power.

By urging a vote for the SWP, and in other ways, we try to explain that these measures that people can see are reasonable and realizable are what the Socialist Workers Party would implement and what socialism would mean for America. A formulation that urges people to vote for the SWP if they are convinced of the need for socialism, RUP if they are not, cuts across our ability to present our program, beginning with proposals that are understandable to many people who do not yet see the need for socialism, and convince them, over time, precisely of that necessity.

Rather than, in effect, urge people to vote Raza Unida unless they are already convinced socialists, we should talk to those activists who already see the need to break with the two-party system about also supporting the socialist solutions to the problems working people face. Party members can explain to these activists that they and we have a lot in common, that in fact they may already agree with many of our proposals. We can convince some of them of our program, of the need to abolish this wretched capitalist system once and for all, and key elements of our strategy to do that, especially the need for a multi-national vanguard party.

Another problem with the voting formulation in the YSMD Newsletter is its tendency to create an impression that the SWP is not seriously running for office. We think it can have the effect of making people who see it, particularly those who are just beginning to consider an alternative to the capitalist parties but are not yet to the point of considering themselves "radicals" of a specific kind, less open to what we have to say.

The effect is re-enforced because we tell non-socialists, in effect, to vote Raza Unida, unwittingly giving the impression that we are not interested in speaking to non-socialists and winning them to our campaign. It can make the party sound like it is not really oriented to the problems of all working and oppressed people, but only has something to say to the "vanguard," those who already see themselves as socialists.

"Vote Socialist" is in a way a code-word, a peg for urging people to support socialist solutions to today's problems. It is a way of getting people to begin identifying socialism and our party with the solutions to their day-to-day problems.

Unfortunately, the electoral arena is structured in such a way that it is impossible to vote for both parties in the same races. So the formulation employed in the leaflet tends to cut across what the party set out to do by launching the '74 campaign.

At the same time we don't want to counterpose our party to the RUP. This could be very confusing, and could cut across one of our goals in the election campaign, which is to draw the class line between the bosses' parties (the Democrats and Republicans) and the parties that are based on the working class or a sector of the class (SWP and RUP).

Therefore, we think the indicated tactic in terms of formulations is to de-emphasize as much as possible the fact that both parties are running for some of the same offices. When the question is brought up we should emphasize that both parties are running against a common enemy and both represent independent working class political action, clearly drawing the line between "them" and "us."

At meetings where the question is raised of our relationship to the RUP, we may want to explain that both campaigns are propaganda campaigns, not contenders for victory in this election. We can point out the favorable aspects of both parties running for office--more t.v. time, newspaper coverage, and attention has been won by opponents of the two capitalist parties and supporters of political independence as the road to Chicano liberation. We should seek to establish a collaborative relationship with the RUP as much as possible in order to maximize the damage to the two-party system and move forward in the struggle for independent political action by working people, a common struggle of both tickets.

When RUP activists ask us questions like whether the effect isn't to take votes away from La Raza Unida leading to possibly losing some race, we could explain that we discussed the question of running for the same offices at the time we launched our campaign. If the RUP had serious possibilities of actually winning some office, we would not file for the same office, but rather throw our support to the RUP nominee, and would do everything possible to help the RUP win. We should also explain that we view all the votes gathered by the RUP as votes against the Democrats and Republicans and for independent working class political action.

That is the way The Militant handled this problem in 1972. First of all, although we covered Raza Unida extensively and sympathetically during the campaign period, we called on people to support the SWP campaign and to vote SWP. In the last issue before the elections we ran an editorial which said in part:

"The Socialist Workers Party and the Raza Unida Party are running for some of the same state-wide or congressional offices. In those cases, two voices have been heard in behalf of freedom, justice, and equality for the exploited and oppressed. Two voices have opposed the Democratic and Republican parties and supported independent Chicano political action.

"Where SWP candidates are running, we, of course, urge a vote for them. For other offices we urge a vote for the candidates of the RUP. We will view the votes of all Raza Unida candidates as votes for independent Chicano political action, as votes against the policies of the Democratic and Republican parties."

We think that's the correct approach. It draws the line between the capitalist parties, on the one hand, and the SWP and RUP on the other. It calls clearly and unambiguously for an SWP vote (especially when you consider this editorial was in

an issue that carried page after page of SWP election coverage), but also concretized our support for independent working class and Chicano political action by calling for a vote for the RUP where the SWP was not running. We think basically the same approach should be used in the '74 elections,

In addition, there are one or two other suggestions that can make articles like that in the YSMD Newsletter sharper.

For example, although the Democratic and Republican parties are identified as parties of oppression, racism, sexism, bugging and bombing, the reason why those two parties are that way is not explained. By stating that those two parties are capitalist parties, our position that workers need their own party would have come through more sharply as a class question, and that is a very large part of why we support Raza Unida.

In articles like this we can also explain that a massive break-away by the Chicano people from the capitalist parties would be a powerful boost towards the formation of independent Black or labor parties because the Democrats' vote-catching coalition would have been broken up. It would be a great stride forward not only for Chicanos, but for the working class as a whole. That also helps us to explain why we urge every worker and socialist-minded person, not just Chicanos, to vote RUP where we are not running.

Comradely,

s/ Frank Boehm
SWP National Office

Jose Perez
YSA National Office