

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 56, November 19, 1976

Present: Barnes, Blackstock, Breitman, Camejo, D. Jenness,
Jones, Lovell, Lund, Lyons, Sheppard, Stapleton,
Waters

Guests: Jaquith, Morell, Rodríguez, Wohlforth

Chair: Barnes

AGENDA: 1. Report on SNCC Suit Against the FBI
2. Election Campaign Evaluation
3. Interim Tasks Report
4. Salt Lake City Organizing Committee
5. Structure and Organization of Party Leadership
6. Correction to Minutes

1. SNCC SUIT AGAINST THE FBI

Blackstock reported.

Discussion

Agreement on article for Militant.

2. ELECTION CAMPAIGN EVALUATION

(Heisler and Roberts invited for this point)

Morell reported.

Discussion

3. INTERIM TASKS REPORT

Waters reported on written draft of tasks report
to be sent out to the membership.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the general line of the report
(see attached).

Carried.

4. SALT LAKE CITY ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Waters reported on Steve Chainey's visit to Salt
Lake City and his proposal to admit nine comrades
as provisional members. Proposed that a branch
organizing committee be established there con-
sisting of the nine provisional members. Two
comrades will be transferring to Salt Lake from
Denver shortly.

Discussion

P.C. minutes/2

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

5. STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PARTY LEADERSHIP

Discussion continued on district organizing.

6. CORRECTION TO THE MINUTES

Waters reported that the minutes of the November 4 Political Committee meeting under the agenda point on Denver state that Joe Henry was transferred to Denver. The minutes should say that Joe Henry was released for a period of time to help the Denver branch.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the correction.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Some Guidelines for Our Work in the Next Two Months

by Mary-Alice Waters

Report adopted by the Political Committee

November 19, 1976

Since our convention last summer, the 1976 presidential election has been the focus of an intensive propaganda campaign effort by the entire party. By utilizing the elections as a vehicle for getting out our ideas, we have been able to reach millions of people in this country with our "Bill of Rights for Working People" and our opinions on every question from South Africa, to unemployment, to women's right to abortion, to the secret police apparatus of the capitalist state. The 1976 campaign unquestionably had the broadest impact of any the party has ever run.

But even presidential election campaigns come to an end. For the Socialist Workers party that means an adjustment in our propaganda work, and an opportunity to stop and think about our activities in the coming few months. The fact that the presidential campaign is over leaves a vacuum, but there is no one single area of party activity that can replace the campaign as the central axis of our propaganda work. We have to readjust all our activities and have a balanced appreciation of our tasks in the coming months.

We should add that the end of the election campaign roughly coincides with completion of the biggest *Militant* subscription effort the party has organized since 1972. All indications are that we will make our goal of 20,000 new readers, which was the focus of our sales campaign for the fall. Those 20,000 new subscribers are now a reservoir of contacts for the party, many of whom will be interested in our forums, classes, conferences, and other activities.

A meeting of the National Committee of the SWP, to which branch and local organizers have been invited, will take place January 6-9 in New York City. That plenum will have the responsibility to discuss out and decide upon the party's major campaigns for the spring. It will have to assess the progress we have made in reorganizing the party to take advantage of the political openings and opportunities for growth and recruitment. In the meantime, however, the Political Committee thought it would be helpful to the branch leaderships—all of whom are in the process of reorganizing their work right now—to briefly lay out our thinking on the main priorities between now and the end of January. Some clear national guidelines to help orient our work in the labor, Black, Chicano, and women's movements will make it easier for the branches and locals to decide on their priorities.

Steelworkers Fight Back

In the last weeks of the election campaign one of the points that Peter Camejo often made in his speeches and interviews was that the campaign leading up to the

February 8 elections in the United Steelworkers of America would have greater political significance for this country than the outcome of the Ford-Carter contest.

In saying this he was popularizing one of the themes that runs through the resolution and reports in *Prospects for Socialism in America*, in which we stress the central importance of the development of Steelworkers Fight Back as an expression of the radicalization beginning in the American labor movement. The Sadlowski campaign is a power struggle in the union leadership, but it is also the expression of a deeper struggle for union democracy. It is not unlike the Miners for Democracy development in the United Mine Workers union, but its leaders are younger and more radical. If the Fight Back slate can make a respectable showing in the elections and—most importantly—consolidate a real organized base that survives the elections and *continues* to fight for its principles, it will have won an important victory and opened a new chapter in American labor history.

Doing what we can to help publicize and promote our ideas about the Steelworkers Fight Back slate is one of our central priorities between now and the February 8 election date.

It is important to emphasize that there are two campaigns taking place, not one.

First there is the election campaign being waged by the Steelworkers Fight Back slate headed by Ed Sadlowski. This campaign has its own program, perspectives, organization, and leadership. While members of the SWP who are in the USWA wholeheartedly support the Fight Back slate and work to get it elected, they do not try to impose our program or politics on Steelworkers Fight Back. We support the general aims of the caucus and help build it around those issues on which we agree.

The second campaign is our campaign, the party's campaign. It is the responsibility of the party as a whole, both nationally and on a local and branch level. It is not primarily the responsibility of the comrades working in steel. Ours is a propaganda campaign to explain the meaning of Steelworkers Fight Back in the broad historic framework of the struggle by labor and its allies to develop a conscious, class-struggle orientation. We want to explain the importance of the fight by the steelworkers to win democratic control over their own organization, to turn it into an instrument of struggle in the interests of the great masses of workers. Our campaign is to explain to steelworkers, but also well beyond the steelworkers, why the Fight Back caucus is important to them, and what it means for the American labor movement and its allies. We try to provide some answers to the broader questions being

raised about perspectives for the American working class and the need for class independence on the political as well as the trade-union level.

The main vehicle for our campaign is the *Militant*, which at this time is the only regular source of information about the Sadlowski campaign on a national level. Week by week the *Militant* will carry the news about the Fight Back campaign. It will also wage *our* campaign, taking it to steelworkers and others who are attracted by the power they can already glimpse as the sleeping giant of the American labor movement begins to stir.

We should make a concerted effort to seek out places where we can meet and talk to steelworkers and sell them a subscription to the newspaper that will keep them informed about Steelworkers Fight Back week after week. Along with selling the paper between now and February 8, we should also be making a special effort to sell the pamphlet *The Fight for Union Democracy in Steel* by Andy Rose, which explains our basic ideas about the union movement today and the importance of the Sadlowski campaign.

Every city in the country where we have branches has some shop or mill organized by the USWA. It should be the norm in every city that we regularly sell the *Militant* and the pamphlet at some major workplace organized by the USWA. In some cities there are also residential areas and shopping centers where a high concentration of steelworkers can be found.

Along with sales, another major tool we can use in our propaganda campaign around Steelworkers Fight Back is our forum series. Not only can we invite leaders of Fight Back to speak, but we can present our views, and others outside the Steelworkers union can explain how they see the importance of the Fight Back campaign and what labor's allies expect from a fighting, democratic union movement. Similar meetings can also be organized on campuses.

We want to continue to direct comrades looking for work to make applications for jobs in steel. Because of affirmative action programs, Black and women comrades have better possibilities for getting hired. But the main way our steel fraction will grow is through recruitment of steelworkers, a process that has already begun.

Our campaign around Steelworkers Fight Back will also be a powerful boost to recruitment in other arenas because it provides confirmation of our perspectives for the transformation of the labor movement and helps demonstrate that the American working class will be able to fulfill its historic tasks.

Death penalty

The reinstatement of capital punishment is a major political question that will be a focus of national attention in the coming weeks. The ruling class is carefully picking the first victims for the firing squads, gas chambers, and electric chairs, testing the ground with each move, trying to prepare public opinion to accept the first executions in almost a decade. Opposition to the death penalty is fueled by the widespread understanding that the *victims* of racist as well as class injustice in the United States are the target. In many areas of the country significant coalitions are already planning actions against the pending legal murders. On both a national and local level, promoting and helping to organize the massive opposition to the

death penalty will be an important responsibility of the party as the countdowns to murder approach.

Antiracist campaigns

The decision by Portuguese imperialism that it could no longer afford the costs of an unending and unwinnable war to maintain direct military control over its African colonies opened a new stage in the fight for Black majority rule in all of southern Africa. Most importantly, the urban and proletarian Black masses of South Africa, spearheaded by the high school students of Soweto, have once again started to move.

There is no question that the struggles by the Black masses of Zimbabwe and South Africa will play an important role in the deepening problems the imperialist powers face on a world scale in the years ahead. As revolutionists in the United States, we have a particular responsibility to mobilize massive support for our Black brothers and sisters of southern Africa. Our job is to build on the broad antiwar consciousness that is the political legacy of the struggle against the Vietnam War in order to tie the hands of the American ruling class in its efforts to support the white racist regimes of southern Africa.

As with the Vietnam War, the fight against the foreign policy of the American rulers is closely tied to their racist policies at home. The historic identification and direct concern Black people in the United States feel for the struggles taking place in southern Africa means that unlike the anti-Vietnam War movement, the movement of solidarity and support for the struggles in southern Africa will be led by the most politically conscious left wing of the Black movement.

In the coming weeks the National Student Coalition Against Racism will be taking the lead in trying to organize and mobilize broad forces, especially in the student movement, for a national day of solidarity actions with the struggle in southern Africa. The exact date will be set by the NSCAR national conference the weekend of November 19-21, but the likelihood is that the day of action will be set to coincide with the March 21 anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre.

Helping build these actions, by carrying out a propaganda campaign around the struggle in southern Africa, will be one of the priorities of the SWP. Selling the *Militant*, and Pathfinder books and pamphlets, organizing forums and classes, building whatever action coalitions are possible, helping to build SCAR and its activities on every campus that can be reached, are all part of this effort.

In addition to the southern Africa campaign, the party, in collaboration with NSCAR, and other groups, will continue the activities that have been an important part of our antiracist work in the last year: mobilizing support for various defense cases, especially the Gary Tyler defense and the Wilmington 10; and building a broad propaganda campaign on the struggle for desegregation of the schools and support to busing.

Chicano struggle

The 1976 presidential election campaign enabled us to make some important gains in the Chicano movement, which were registered in part by the impressive list of Chicano endorsers for the Camejo-Reid ticket. In New Mexico, where the Raza Unida party not only endorsed the

SWP slate but actively campaigned for and with us, the Young Socialist Alliance was able to establish two new chapters. As soon as we are able to send comrades to Albuquerque, we will be able to have a branch of the SWP in New Mexico for the first time in our history. Organizing ourselves to take advantage of this opening and other opportunities in Texas, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and Southern California is an important responsibility in the coming few months.

Worried by the survival and continued development of the Raza Unida parties as Chicano political organizations independent of the capitalist two-party system, the ruling class has stepped up its drive to destroy these parties and the example they set within and far beyond the Chicano movement. At the moment the Texas RUP is the most obvious target of this government attack. Collaborating with them and helping them to fight back effectively, publicizing the truth about the government attempts to destroy them, mobilizing the broadest possible united defense—these are tasks we will have to carry out not only on a national level through the *Militant*, but on a local level with forums and other activities where feasible.

Finally, in Denver the SWP faces a challenge to our very ability to exist and function in that city. It is a political challenge we cannot and will not lose, because the fundamental question of democracy in the labor movement is at stake, and the repercussions extend far beyond the Chicano movement and far beyond Denver.

In the coming weeks we will have to continue our campaign on a national level to publicize the facts surrounding the physical assault on Fred Halstead and Steve Chainey by leaders of the Crusade for Justice; to expose the slanders and threats against Elfego Baca, the YSA comrade who has been the particular focus of the Crusade's attempt to prevent us from recruiting and gaining influence in Denver's Chicano community; and to publicize the outrageous charges and physical intimidation directed at any who have the courage to speak out against the methods the Crusade has used to try to silence opponents in Denver and elsewhere in the Chicano movement. By broadening and extending the list of signers of the "Declaration Against Violence in the Movement," we can bring political pressure to bear on the Crusade leadership nationally and help to educate the Chicano movement and its allies on the totally self-destructive consequences of allowing violence, slander, and physical intimidation to become standard operating procedure within the movement.

This is a task for the entire party, not primarily the comrades in Denver. Only by stepping up our educational campaign and gaining support in our fight for democracy in the movement can we isolate those whose methods are alien to the workers movement. It is the only way to win our own right to exist and to set an example for the entire left.

Women's movement

Under cover of the economic insecurity created by continued high unemployment and inflation and by the drive to wipe out the gains of the last decade, the ruling class continues to probe every possibility of pushing back the mass changes in the consciousness of women and attitudes toward women.

The Colorado and Massachusetts referendums con-

firmed the fact that the overwhelming majority of Americans favor the Equal Rights Amendment. It was even part of the platforms of both capitalist parties. Yet ratification by enough states to make it part of the Constitution is far from guaranteed. It must still be fought for.

Even while giving verbal support for women's equality, the ruling-class offensive to roll back the struggle for women's liberation has intensified.

The reactionary campaign against the abortion laws, for example, has made headway and had a political impact. For millions of working-class women, especially Black women, Puerto Rican women, and Chicanas, their right to obtain safe, legal abortions has been placed in danger by the Hyde amendment and similar state laws. The Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of these discriminatory laws, which is to be handed down sometime during this court term, is literally a matter of life and death for thousands of women.

Yet many women who genuinely support abortion rights and want to counter the right-wing offensive are afraid to take the issue head on. This is especially true of middle-class women, whose ability to obtain an abortion is not yet immediately threatened. They feel intimidated by the size and success of the right-wing mobilizations, they fear alienating liberal capitalist politicians whom they are lobbying to vote for the ERA, and they do not understand that *any* attack on abortion rights is a threat to all women.

Another arena of attack against the gains made by women has been the attempt to reverse affirmative action programs. For example, the federal government is now proposing to weaken the guidelines for affirmative action programs that companies holding federal contracts must comply with.

Cutbacks in child-care programs continue to put the squeeze on millions of working mothers.

In all these areas, common action by the women's and labor movements, in collaboration with other forces, is called for. But the gap between the level of consciousness and what is objectively necessary is extremely great. Our job is primarily an educational one, to continue to try to explain what needs to be done, and how to fight for our demands.

Within that framework, our propaganda activities in the next few months will focus on two targets.

1. Comrades active in the feminist movement will be exploring the possibilities of organizing some kind of activity, such as a forum, teach-in, rally, or picket line in defense of abortion rights, to coincide with the fourth anniversary of the Supreme Court abortion decision on January 22. Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican feminist groups especially should be approached to see if they are interested in working on some activity around this date.

In a number of states where the ERA has not been ratified, such as Virginia, Georgia, and Indiana, pro-ERA forces are planning actions of some kind in mid-January to coincide with the opening of the new legislative sessions. We are supporting and helping to build these actions as broadly as possible.

2. International Women's Day, March 8, is always a focus of feminist activity, and most areas have already begun to discuss possibilities for local coalitions to organize either ERA demonstrations or more general women's rights actions (including teach-ins and rallies) that will call special attention to the defense of abortion

rights and the ERA.

Within all these activities we want to carry on a propaganda campaign to explain the character of the counteroffensive against women's rights, and the need for united action to concentrate the force and maximize the striking power of the women's liberation movement and its allies.

Party campaign against government harassment

The party's campaign to expose the character and workings of the government's secret police apparatus has won us respect and support in ever broadening layers of the radical movement, labor movement, civil liberties milieus, and artistic and cultural circles. There will continue to be new revelations and developments that put our campaign in the headlines and around which we can organize local press conferences, interviews, forums, etc., to get out the ideas of the SWP.

Taking advantage of this mass exposure of the SWP, we want to gain a whole new layer of endorsements for the Political Rights Defense Fund. This should not be seen as some separate area of work but an activity that is integrated into all the other political work we are doing. There is no better way to open up a discussion with someone about the SWP than by asking them to become a sponsor of PRDF. This is one of the best tools we have for building and consolidating the kind of periphery we are drawing toward us. It is important to promptly follow up on the prominent contacts we made through our election campaign by systematically going to any who are not supporters of PRDF and asking them to sign up.

The endorsement of our suit by the International Executive Board of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees opens broad new possibilities for winning endorsements from union leaders individually, union locals, and international leadership bodies.

Building the YSA convention

The next six weeks will be an important period for the Young Socialist Alliance. The YSA will be concentrating on consolidating and politically educating the new members recruited during the fall, and organizing to bring as many as possible to the convention in Chicago, December 31-January 2.

Party branches should think out how best to help the YSA in this task. Since the pace of activity will be somewhat slower than it has been for the last few months, party comrades should take time to get to know the new YSA members. Comrades should follow the YSA pre-convention discussion, and familiarize themselves with the political openings the YSA has as well as with the problems they are trying to solve. In the Midwest, especially, many party comrades will want to attend the YSA convention.

Recruitment and education

This is closely interrelated with the general question of party recruitment and education.

The relative slowdown in the pace of our external activities for a few weeks will give branches and locals an opportunity to take a close look at the character and

structure of our educational programs.

With the division of the branches into smaller units during the last year, the planning and organization of education—including a regular weekly forum series—has suffered more than any other aspect of party functioning. Most locals and many branches do not even have an education director at the present time, and the weekly forum has become the exception instead of the rule.

Recruitment classes, new members classes, forums, branch educationals, special seminars organized by the local, special educational conferences designed to improve our own understanding of the political issues we are dealing with, summer schools—all need to be discussed and planned as part of the local and branch activities. Each one of these educational forms fulfills a slightly different need that complements the educational program as a whole. When we start sliding into combining them or substituting one for another, the education and development of our cadres suffer.

One of our priorities in the next months must be to reinstitutionalize the educational programs in every branch and local, including the norm of a regular weekly forum. As part of this process, we are encouraging every city to organize a special educational weekend sometime during the first few months of the year, and the National Education Department will be collaborating with the locals and branches to provide speakers.

Which brings us to the question of recruitment.

One special campaign decided upon at our last convention has not yet been concluded. That is the drive to recruit 300 new provisional members to the party by December 31. The drive was on schedule at the end of September, but to make the goal of 300, each and every branch will have to carefully organize the recruitment of the many potential members we attracted around us this fall. More than anything else this is a question of taking *time* to talk, to discuss, to socialize, to read, and to talk some more. Today many more people are interested in our ideas than a few years ago. For example, some of our new *Militant* subscribers are simply members waiting to be recruited. But winning them to our movement requires the same kind of patient political education as always. Since there are more potential new members around us than at any other time in recent years, more time must be spent winning them and educating them.

Recruiting and developing rounded Marxist cadres remains the most important task we have.