

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES No. 31, November 10, 1966

() Present: DeBerry, Dobbs, Halstead, Hansen, Kerry, Shaw, Sheppard, Jones.

Chairman: DeBerry.

AGENDA:

1. Political Report.
2. Antiwar Report.
3. International.
4. Organization of Plenum.

1. POLITICAL REPORT

Dobbs reported on general line of the political report to be given to the plenum.

Discussion: Hansen, Halstead, Shaw, DeBerry, Kerry, Dobbs.

General agreement on general line of report.

2. ANTIWAR REPORT

Halstead reported:

(1) A conference has been called by the November 5 Mobilization Committee for November 26 in Cleveland. This conference will assess the November 5-8 actions and project a future spring action.

(2) Report on the general line of antiwar memorandum to be made available to the plenum. (See attached.)

Discussion: Hansen, Dobbs, Halstead, Kerry, Shaw.

Motion: To approve the general line of the antiwar memorandum.

Carried.

3. INTERNATIONAL

Hansen reported:

(1) Report on new developments in the Hugo Blanco case.

(2) Letter from England on War Crimes Tribunal.

Discussion: Dobbs, Shaw, Hansen.

4. ORGANIZATION OF PLENUM

Shaw reported:

Motion: That in case of procedural disputes, discussion be limited to two speakers, one for and one against, and that each speaker be limited to 2 minutes.

Carried.

Motion: That general discussion be limited to 10 minutes per speaker and that no one speak twice until all who wish to do so have spoken.

Carried.

Motion: That the Presiding Committee consist of the Administrative Committee (Dobbs, Kerry, Shaw, Barnes).

Carried.

Motion: To designate as plenum secretaries Janet and Reba.

Carried.

Motion: To invite as observers: Control Commission members; co-thinkers; heads of National Departments (press, literature and finances); members of the youth NEC; branch organizers.

Carried.

Motion: To add a point on the Party Convention to the agenda.

Carried.

Motion: To adopt proposed plenum schedule. (See attached.)

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

PLENUM SCHEDULE

November 18-20, 1966

Friday, November 18

10:00 A.M. Organization of Plenum
10:30 World Movement -- J. Hansen
11:30 Supplementary Report -- M.A. Waters
12:00 Noon Discussion
1:00 P.M. Recess
2:30 Continue Discussion
3:30 Summary, World Movement
4:00 Political Report -- F. Dobbs
5:30 Adjourn Session

Saturday, November 19

10:00 A.M. Discussion
12:30 P.M. Summary, Political Report
1:00 Recess
2:30 Branch Political Reports
6:00 Adjourn Session

Sunday, November 20

10:00 A.M. Organization Report -- E. Shaw
11:00 Discussion
1:00 P.M. Summary, Organization Report
1:30 Party Convention
2:00 Adjourn Plenum

Memorandum on Antiwar Movement

The large scale anti-Vietnam-war movement is now a little less than two years old. Just how far the movement has come can be seen by the fact that in the Easter peace walks of 1963, it was necessary for youth led by the SWP and YSA to defy the organizers of those traditional "united" demonstrators in order to carry signs against the Vietnam war. Any mention of the war in Vietnam had been banned from those "peace" protests.

Since the new movement began with the February, 1965, call to the SDS March on Washington, some nine major national events and demonstrations and smaller intervening actions have involved several hundred thousand individuals in antiwar demonstrations in the midst of a war and in the heart of the country carrying out that war. This alone is an unprecedented and historical development. The movement has not stopped the war, but it has accomplished several important things:

(1) It has made overt opposition to this war an acceptable part of American life, helped to prevent the development of a pro-war hysteria, and stands in the way of an all-out mobilization for the war.

(2) By adhering to a non-exclusive united front policy it has established a tradition lost for decades by the radical movement. The same policy has cut into the red-baiting, witch-hunting atmosphere left over from McCarthyism. This has so far had its greatest effect in the academic community, but it has been felt in other areas as well and the tradition can be expected to have good effects on future developments in the labor movement.

(3) The principled position of immediate withdrawal from Vietnam has been established as a completely accepted part, and even the dominant position of the movement.

(4) The idea of approaching the G.I.'s themselves has been at least formally established as a legitimate activity on the part of the movement.

These are important accomplishments. But with all this the movement is presently in crisis. There are wide-spread feelings of impotence and frustration among the activists, particularly among those who had illusions about the effectiveness of peace candidates and other such electoral action. The frustration is partly due to a failure to appreciate the real accomplishments of the movement. But it is also due to the very real dilemma that the movement as presently constituted, cannot develop the power to stop the war. This dilemma will continue as long as the movement remains largely middle class. And at present, as from the beginning, it is overwhelmingly middle class -- students, intellectuals and radicals of a wide variety, only some of whom -- the SWP and the YSA --

have a revolutionary working class orientation and any confidence in the ability of the American working class to ultimately intervene.

This is the central contradiction of the movement and as long as it remains the movement will be unstable, subject to tendencies toward pessimism, diversion from its central aim, adventurist schemes, etc.

In this respect we should be clear about our position on the draft and our attitude toward the prevailing talk about an "anti-draft program" We are opposed to the capitalist draft and recognize opposition to the draft as a legitimate part of the antiwar movement. We should be sensitive to the fact that the draft evokes a keen interest among students and youth generally. But it is highly unlikely that a campaign of draft refusal could ever develop such mass proportions as to actually effect the prosecution of the war. For all the talk among 2-S deferred students and over-age movement "leaders" about anti-draft actions, only a handful of young men have actually refused induction. Even including all the conscientious objectors, the numbers are infinitesimal in relation to the requirements of the military machine.

We have nothing to gain from denigrating the individual acts of conscience by young men who engage in draft refusal, but as a general program for the movement, draft refusal is not likely to have any effect on the war, and can result in costly victimizations which debilitate the finances and cadre of the movement.

There is another, even more diversionary aspect to the hullabaloo about anti-draft programs which is being stirred up by some of our rivals in the movement at present. This is the tendency to divert the youth in the movement away from antiwar activity into harmless and ineffective anti-draft activity such as lobbying for congress to abolish the draft. This is the suggestion made by Frank Emspak of the NCC. The best that can be said about it is that it is a waste of time.

Even worse is the tendency for some campus anti-draft campaigners to attempt to turn the movement into a quest for a "fairer," "more democratic" draft system. This is just a form of making the Vietnam war more acceptable.

Bearing all this in mind we should be careful not to be isolated from the students who are deeply concerned about the draft. That would only make it easier for the diversionists. It is important to bear in mind that we are for abolition of the draft and will support any effective movement to abolish it. We should intervene in the anti-draft discussion, demonstrations, etc., with a line of sharpening opposition to the war, and of turning the students toward the G.I.'s. It is important also to make it clear to youth facing the draft that their rights as citizens to oppose the war do not end if they are drafted.

Another question we should be clear on is what we meant when we raised the question of "single issue." We counterposed this tactic to the line of "multi-issue" being pushed by other radical youth groups for several reasons. First, it was obvious that the independent committees and united front formations could not include all the radical tendencies if the particular multi-issue program of any one of the tendencies were adopted. This would simply narrow the participation in the committee to those who could agree with that particular total program. For us, then, single issue meant a united front approach, as opposed to the sectarian approach of forcing the independent committees to become advocates of the over-all political line of one or another radical or liberal tendency.

Second, to some, "multi-issue" meant a diversion of the antiwar movement from concentration on the war itself into some vague and illusory "community" projects of social reform and welfare activities in competition with the welfare agencies. We wanted to keep our eye on the ball -- opposition to the war in Vietnam.

Third, what many of our rivals among the radical tendencies meant (and still mean) by multi-issue, was the utilization of the antiwar committees for a general political program of social reform with an eye to turning them into electoral machines for liberal Democratic Party or amorphous third party candidates.

We were, and still are fighting any turn of the antiwar movement in this direction. As a matter of fact, so long as the movement remains overwhelmingly middle class, we are opposed to its going into electoral politics as a movement, because its politics will inexorably tend to be middle class, class collaborationist, bourgeois politics. We actively counterpose to the militants in the movement the idea and example of working-class socialist politics, but we have no illusions that this movement as it is presently constituted could as a whole adopt such politics.

It is important to understand just what we mean by "single issue," and not get hung up on words. It does mean that we don't go for any attempts to turn the movement into the private preserve of any ideological tendency and its particular line on a whole set of issues. It does mean that we oppose turning the movement into a door-bell pushing operation for this or that brand of reformist politics. It does mean that we oppose any attempts to blunt or bury the antiwar activity in a set of social reform or welfare activities.

It does not mean that we reject or resist alliances with real working class and Negro forces. It does not mean that we reject for all time the antiwar movement's participation in electoral politics. If a real labor party development were to appear, for example, we would favor the antiwar movement participating, even if this meant losing some of the more conservative elements

in the present antiwar united front. If the opportunity arose for the antiwar movement to ally itself with a group of striking workers, for example, we would favor this.

In general, we are not in principle opposed to the addition of issues, though we are fully aware of the logical fallacy in the proposition that the way to broaden support is to add issues. (Too often it works the other way around: the more issues there are the fewer the people who will agree to all of them.) We are not opposed to the addition of issues provided these additions are made in response to a real possibility of alliance with significant working class forces, such as black freedom fighters, unionists, G.I.'s.

We are glad to lose whatever racists may support the antiwar movement in the process of gaining the support of Negro freedom fighters. We would be glad to lose whatever pro-capitalist elements support the antiwar movement in the process of gaining the support of workers in struggle. We could reconcile ourselves to the loss of "hippy" students, and others if it were necessary, to gain the support of G.I.'s or newly returned veterans disgusted with the war. In all such cases the movement would gain much more in effectiveness and social power than it would lose.

It is important to note that these alliances -- except for the one with certain militant sections of the civil rights movement -- are as yet anticipatory. These changes in the antiwar movement -- absolutely necessary to its success -- will be brought about according to the pace of objective developments, not by our subjective wishes and not according to abstract policy statements. Abstract statements along this line should be used sparingly and with caution for they contain a certain danger that they may provide a handle for the "multi-issue" diversionists. The best tactical approach is to keep a sharp eye out for concrete possibilities to develop such alliances, and when they appear to respond not only in words, but in action.

Fred Halstead
(Approved by the
Political Committee
November 10, 1966)