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New York, N.Y. 10014

February 25, 1972

TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Minutes

A reading of branch and Executive Committee minutes during the recent period indicates that organizers and secretaries should be reminded of some general considerations regarding formulations used in minutes.

We must be constantly aware that the minutes of branch, Executive Committee and fraction meetings are a fairly permanent record. There will be copies on file in both the branch and in the national office. These records could fall into the wrong hands, be stolen, or even be the subject of a court action. The following examples are typical of cases where carelessness has crept in: It is always the best procedure for the organizer to check the minutes before they are sent to the national office.

1. Sometimes discussions take place at branch or exec meetings relating to the local laws regarding beverages. It is not necessary to record these discussions or exact decisions in the minutes since they are of little value as a record of the branch's political activity and could be misconstrued as "evidence" that something "illegal" was being considered. In addition, a leaflet or city letter that implies sale of beverages at a certain function could give police an unwarranted excuse to search or otherwise disrupt the gathering.

2. It is well known at present that several figures in the antiwar movement are under investigation regarding their "income." In financial reports and minutes an organizer's expenses are often listed as "subsistence" or "wages." We must be careful to describe such expenses as they really are, expenses incurred by the individual while carrying out their assignment, and not give the false impression that they are intended as wages. The same considerations apply to comrades who are reimbursed for their expenses by antiwar or other organizations.

3. The army has recently charged, in letters to comrades about to be drafted, that the SWP and the YSA pursue "illegal" goals and that the YSA is "dominated" by the SWP. (These charges are being contended.) It follows that careless formulations on the nature of our collaboration with the youth group could give a false impression that there is substance to the domination charge.

4. Loose red-baiting-type charges are often made by political opponents that the party "dominates" or "rips off" independent committees or organizations in the antiwar movement, women's liberation movement, etc. We are always very careful in our relations to other groups to avoid even the appearance that such charges carry any weight. In the case of branch minutes, some have been sent in on the letterhead of an outside

organization. Even a small thing like this should be avoided, in addition to using care while recording in the minutes our discussions and decisions relating to such groups. City letters are sometimes very carelessly worded with respect to this problem. City letters are often sent to homes where non-members can easily read them. It is wrong, for example, to motivate a mobilization of all comrades for an intervention by saying, "We expect trouble with so-and-so," or to give detailed fraction instructions in a city letter.

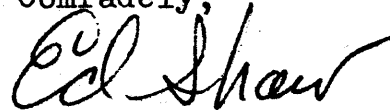
5. If a comrade is dropped from membership for something like drug use, the minutes should not read, for example, "So-and-so was dropped for using drugs." While the action is proper, the statement of the charge and the evidence, if it is necessary to divulge it, should be treated as "informal" information. We wish to avoid any chance that our records will be used as a form of "evidence" against a comrade dropped for such a reason.

6. Another example involves a person's use of a party name. It seems self-evident that minutes should not record that "So-and-so should use their party name" because of some potential problem or other.

7. It is not usually advisable to include in minutes possibly derogatory personal characterizations of people being considered for membership. It is sometimes decided that an applicant, not accepted at one time, be admitted at a later date, since people often change for the better in a short period of time. It could prove unnecessarily embarrassing or offensive to such a comrade should these unfavorable comments remain on file.

Hopefully this letter will not inhibit secretaries from continuing to record minutes which are adequately descriptive of discussions and decisions. It is intended only to keep comrades aware of situations like those described above.

Comradely,



Ed Shaw
for the Administrative
Committee