

POLITICAL BUREAU MINUTES.....8 July 1968

Present: Full: Robertson, Stoute, Turner, Nelson, Henry
Alts: Small, Janacek Staff: Cunningham, Rogers, Gordon
Other: Kat D. (Iowa), Joel S.
Absent: Alt: Ellens(exc.) Staff: Martin
Meeting convened 9:05 p.m.

Special Agenda:

- 1. Personnel and Organization (cont.)
- 2. SDS Convention Report
- 3. Press
- 4. Supplemental General Information and Correspondence

Motion: To admit Joel S. and Kat D. to meeting with voice. Passed

1. Personnel and Organization:

a. Confrontation: No formal conclusion was reached last meeting on confrontation between Ellens and Joel.

Motion by Robertson: The PB finds on the basis of the confrontation that there are sufficient grounds to try Comrade Ellens on the charges (1) of wrong internal procedure: i.e., that she, assisted by Stoute and an Espartaco comrade, and speaking with the apparent authority of the N.O., instructed the Philadelphia O.C. comrades to function in accordance with Ellens' et al. own personal "policy of clandestinity" rather than the organization's policy of the struggle to maintain legality and security, and (2) that she carried her sharp criticisms of the SL outside its ranks--i.e., that she told Comrade Salinger when he was still distant from the SL that it is a third social-democratic (in composition or practices--this point only was disputed in the confrontation between Comrade Ellens and Comrade Salinger). The PB proposes, however, not to try her since we are in a major factional discussion in which Ellens plays a leading role for the Minority. However, the PB warns that a repetition of similar circumstances will be dealt with ruthlessly.

Robertson states that this was not an isolated aberrant incident but was part of the effort by Ellens to win especially new and young comrades and contacts to her positions.

Disc: Stoute, Turner, Stoute, Robertson

VOTE on Motion: For: Robertson, Nelson, Henry (Small, Janacek; Rogers, Cunningham, Gordon)

Opposed: Stoute, Turner

Not Voting: Joel, Kat

Passed 3-2

[subsequent statements on this issue by Kay Ellens and by Joel S. are attached]

b. Detroit Perspectives: Our comrade has a pretty solid backing in his region, very solid in his own union local. The International is trying to break his authority and power in devious ways. His primary task must be to broaden his working base within the union movement, to strengthen ourselves as a pro-working-class, anti-bureaucratic, militant tendency in the industry. Because of this unusual and important opportunity,

the organization is willing to give a very high priority to relocating comrades to Detroit to back up this work, to the extent of making Detroit our Midwest regional center. It is very important that we have a public face in the area, which may at first involve only selling the SPARTACIST around the universities, etc. In any case, we need to have about 5-6 comrades in the area. Disc: Nelson, Kat, Turner, Kat, Gordon, Robertson, Nelson, Kat

c. Kat: She has been a candidate member since the Plenum.

Disc: Nelson, Gordon, Robertson

Motion: To accept Kat D. as a full member of the SL.

Passed

2. SDS Convention Report:

Report by Joel: The effect of the French events was to focus at least more interest, if not continuing emphasis, on the potential of the working class. PL came to the Convention with about 25-30 members and 50-75 close contacts and sympathizers. They were organized and disciplined; this disturbed the majority of the SDSers considerably. Their proposal was that SDSers go into the factories for a few months and see what the workers are like. Another group in evidence was a group which originated out of a split from PL in New York and Philadelphia and which have formed "SDS Labor Committees" in these areas. They are now with Lynn Marcus. They attacked PL as non-serious, reformist and "economist"--their solutions were "Tax the Landlords" and other Marcusoid schemes. They had about 40 people at the convention but never got much chance at the floor. The floor was controlled by the ordinary wild-eyed New Lefters, who spent most of their time attacking "external cadre organizations"--namely, in this case, PL. On the basis of nauseating and generally vicious attacks--PL was not communist, SDS was (!), the students would lead everything--they wanted to kick PL out of SDS. They attempted to organize an anti-PL caucus, which was not very successful; the PL-baiting turned off many "borderline" elements, especially those who were somewhat pro-working-class. Tom Bell, ex-Cornell SDS, was the worst of the PL-baiters. We never got to present our resolutions on the convention floor, but our literature packet was well received and we sold about \$38 worth of other literature, including all our Marxist Bulletins. We opposed the attempts to throw PL out of SDS; Joel has written a letter to Jack Smith of the Guardian, protesting Smith's front-page article supporting these efforts. Despite their strength at the convention, PL was unable to elect even one member to the 11-man National Interim Committee.

Report by Small: We were a bit surprised that Marcus had developed such a following. Although some of the ex-PLers were capable types, notably the ex-PL organizer in Philadelphia, they seemed kind of cynical about Marxism. This may explain why they have adopted Marcus' eclectic, reformist politics. The "new working class" types seemed to have less influence in SDS than they have had in the past. Disc: Gordon, Turner, Henry, Nelson, Robertson

Motion: To append SDS report to the minutes.

Passed

Summary by Joel: The SWP was there to sell literature; Wohlforth was not. The CP was there; PFP (ISC) had a lit table. According to the ex-PLers, PL now has no more than 175 members nationally. The ex-PLers are indeed cynical; they call other groups on the left including themselves "revolutionary sectlets". Their general view of things: we need lots of research, especially in economics; we are in a 1905 situation here; there will eventually be a revolutionary regroupment. They carry on lots of activity--mostly reformist, leafletting subway riders on fare increases, etc. They are generally quite confused, and therefore vulnerable. They probably have 75-100 members nationally. Their West Side Tenants' Union published about 3 issues of a publication, "The Campaigner", and a few documents. We expect that they will soon suffer some attrition--their approach is to seek enormous reforms which they won't get. SDS now defines itself as a "revolutionary communist" organization, wants "participatory democratic centralism" and no "external cadre organizations" inside; sees PL as a direct threat--accuses PL of wanting to keep SDS from becoming a revolutionary organization, i.e., PL does not want to see SDS as a broad, non-exclusive radical student organization dissolved.

Summary by Small: Towards the end of the convention we put out a nasty document regarding the other pro-working-class tendencies. Our desk with its huge hammer and sickle got a lot of local publicity. The basis of the split of the PLers was that Steve Fraser (Philadelphia) attempted to present a document on the Marcusite approach at the PL convention; Rosen tried to prevent this and the group supporting Fraser was expelled. However, we have heard that Fraser had already broken discipline in public statements on the trade unions and an approach to them. The SDS convention was much more serious than last year--e.g., there seemed to be much more serious misgiving on draft resistance, and they adopted a contradictory motion on it. Fraser mentioned to us that he saw 15 new black members at the PL convention.

3. Press:

- a. Supplements: The 20 June staff meeting recommended to the PB that we temporarily suspend the offset SPARTACIST supplements through the period of the internal discussion, as the way the supplements save money is by substituting the work of our comrades for the printer's typesetting, placing an especially heavy burden on the comrades responsible for producing the minutes and documents of the internal discussion for national distribution to comrades.
- b. SPARTACIST #12: Will be an 8-page printed issue. Articles are SSEU (written by Nelson), New Orleans repression, France (written by Cunningham), Columbia U. student strike. Copy is in semi-final form but three articles require heavy cutting. We will drop all ads but run three good pictures: our banner supporting VO in recent demonstration; self-portrait of Comrade Glen R.; front page of New Orleans HUAC report.
- c. Marxist Bulletins: We are almost out of M.B.s #1, 3 and 8, and will be reprinting them.

Motion: To temporarily suspend our offset Supplements. Passed
 Disc: Gordon, Turner, Cunningham, Robertson, Gordon

4. Supplemental General Information and Correspondence:

- a. Mark T.: His Army deferment has has been continued. This is very good for the NYC local; very bad for the "G.I. Voice".
- b. CIPA: Manuela Dobos will run for assembly in 67th A.D. against the most left-wing liberal-Democrat in the city. The campaign manager will be Bob M., a long-time CIPA activist, who is now fairly close to us. Aronowitz has taken a neutral attitude toward CIPA and the hostility of PL-PFP. The regenerated organization has retained control of the mailing list, P.O. box and finances, is seeking to track down CIPA's mimeo machine and public address system. Disc: Nelson, Robertson
- c. Britain: George Moberg is becoming our representative there. He has remained a long-time close sympathizer of the SL despite long periods of complete isolation. His letter of 1 July reports that Crawford has much respect in his IS branch. Besides going to various meetings, Moberg is working on a book.
- d. France: We have received the first issue of Lutte Ouvriere, dated 26 June. It has stripped off its Trotskyist coloration in response to illegalization, leaving its line in favor of workers' power, its trade union line. We have a criticism of the pact signed between VO and the Pabloists, which calls upon all organizations calling themselves Trotskyist to join. The issue posed in France is not a regroupment of all "Trotskyists" but of all those who stand in favor of workers' committees. This excludes some so-called Trotskyists and includes some others. Even if in practice, as a result of sectarianism, only Trotskyists would join, the present axis of differentiation is wrong. The key issue is a new revolutionary party among all militants on the basis of immediate demands. The concern evinced by Crawford, our Bay Area comrades and us here is deepened. VO may have been disoriented into confusing newly-strengthened fraternal feeling with the actual enormous opportunities. Ellens reports that VO views the French events as France's 1905. The problem is that 1905 was when the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks united, and it took Lenin several years to split them apart again. This might have been the opportunity to draw new forces around the Bolshevik program. VO's apparent disorientation may stem from their "Trotskyist family" concept--that all those who call themselves Trotskyists actually are--criticized by us previously. When Trotsky began work in France in 1915 he found the greatest success in a time of crisis among the revolutionary syndicalists, not the old Marxists. Disc: Nelson, Gordon, Robertson
- e. Bay Area: Has put out another good leaflet attacking the Pabloists and others, in connection with the Berkeley demonstration and aftermath. Is concerned with: (1) the necessity to link petty-bourgeois struggles with the working class; (2) the need for a revolutionary party.
- f. Bay Area Labor Committee: "Workers Action" #1 received. It is pretty good, but a bit "gee whiz--we're just ordinary workers". Editorial on rank and filers and the courts is weak; states that going to court against union bureaucrats is "nearly always" wrong. There was evidently a disagreement on this, handled in the form of a letter. The 10-point program might have had another point: "For a workers' government".

Meeting adjourned 11:00 p.m.

Attachment, PB Minutes of 8 July 1968

Statement for the PB minutes of 8 July

by Kay Ellens

At the Political Bureau meeting of 8 July, when I was out of town, Comrade Jim presented a motion summing up the ersatz trial held the week before. This motion presented both charges and sentencing of myself. It stated that I had carried criticisms of the organization to non-party members and instructed the Philadelphia comrades on non-party methods of security.

The whole procedure, from ersatz trial on through the vaguely formulated (but dire sounding) "sentence" was designed to discredit me and have Jim appear magnanimous because he said that due to the factional situation, he would not recommend putting Comrade Kay on trial.

Briefly, the actual situation was as follows: Comrade Joel, who was then a contact in Philadelphia, had many criticisms of SL functioning. No one had to carry criticisms to him. As he was a prospective member and living with a very active comrade, it was best to explain these problems of functioning in their political nature. I therefore explained that New York functioned in a social-democratic way. This is certainly not "carrying criticisms of the organization to non-party members".

On the charge of "instructing" the Philly comrades in non-party methods of security: This is really peculiar, and like the preceding charge, vague and meaningless. After hearing about comrades being followed home from meetings, strange phone calls, etc., I suggested that a non-citizen contact be referred to by a name other than his own and that he be telephoned from a pay phone. Is this a "non-party method of security"? The comrades in Philly had been concerned for some time about security and have never gotten instruction. This says more about our lack of party methods of security than anything I did or did not say.

The frame-up attempt to discredit me came to ludicrous proportions when Jim reported on this ersatz trial and "sentencing" at a local executive meeting. In his feverish attempt to sow more confusion, he said that I had admitted saying something which the majority on the PB felt was similar to that which Joel said I said.

This ersatz trial mechanism is an under-handed way of charging and sentencing a comrade without a trial. Comrade Jim can then leave the impression of great magnanimity and fairness, because he doesn't recommend a trial, while attempting to malign and discredit a comrade of the minority.

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Attachment, PB Minutes of 8 July 1968

THE SAME OLD DISTORTIONS: Reply to Ellens

by Joel Salinger

Apparently Comrade Ellens feels compelled to get in a parting shot at what should be a dead issue, which thus necessitates this short corrective. The ostensible basis for Kay's addition is that she was out of town at the time that the PB passed its motion of censure, thus maligning her without her presence. What happened was, however, far different. Both Comrade Kay and myself (the principals) had an equal opportunity at the July 1st PB to present our versions of what happened, and the evidence was judged then, and on that basis. To this process there was no objection by the balance of her minority comrades concerning its fairness either procedurally or substantively. Thus the cry by the comrade is without basis and is meant as a shot in the dark, to help drum up support.

In the substance of her addition to the minutes, Comrade Kay uses a familiar device in contriving a defense--that is she blurs time sequence and destroys the fabric of the continuum to confuse events and the reader. First the facade: Kay states that "comrade Joel, who was then a contact in Philadelphia, had many criticisms of SL functioning. No one had to carry criticisms to him. As he was a prospective member and living with a very active comrade [Charlotte G.], it was best to explain these problems of functioning in their political nature. I therefore explained that New York functioned in a social democratic way. This is certainly not 'carrying criticisms of the organization to non-party members'."

In spite of reminders as to the inaccuracy of her story, Kay remains obdurate. I was at the time (early Feb.) not even a close contact of the Phila. local, but came up to New York during my semester break to meet Comrade Robertson and talk politics. It was then that I became a closer contact with some disposition to eventually joining a Marxist-Leninist group in general and the Spartacist League now in particular; but this was in the distant future. For the near term I projected the necessity to read more before I would consider myself for candidacy. It was with this background that I was sent to see Kay on the next day, as Charlotte had been ticketed for New Orleans, and if I ever joined she and I would be underneath Kay there. It was during this discussion that Kay presented the rather surprising statement that the New York local was composed of 1/3 social democrats. How could I have in this low level of development posed "many criticisms" of the organization; I had never functioned with the Philly comrades--had hardly met Tom, and hadn't seen Lou in three montas, wasn't living with Comrade Charlotte yet, although we were going together, and was not yet a "prospective member"; perhaps it was Comrade Kay, fresh from France, who had many criticisms of the organization?!

On the question of security: Comrade Kay tries to shunt aside an essential element in her visit along with Comrade Shirley and a now ex-comrade to the Phila. local.

At almost every point where there was an opportunity to bring

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up the question of security, Comrade Kay and her fellow travelers dwelled upon security measures. For example, we were instructed to give code names to all our contacts and code numbers to meeting places, not merely to use the precaution of not calling a Latin American contact from a home telephone. To another contact to whom the comrades were introduced, a full 45 minutes to an hour was spent on the question of security, before they got to the political stuff, which baffled him quite a bit.

10 August 1968

Attachment, PB Minutes of 8 July 1968

Report on the SDS National Convention [extracts].....9-15 June

by Joel S.

Members of the Spartacist League in attendance were Mark K. from New York; Gallatin D., Steve S. and Shirley (non-member) from Chicago; and Charlotte and Joel S. from Phila. All of us arrived on the 9th in the afternoon.

Preface -- Those SDSers who come to a Convention should in no way be considered typical or representative of the organization. They were in the main the most politically aware elements of the "New Left", which perhaps number a few thousand, and do not indicate any binding commitment to revolution by their more numerous and mindless followers. Those who came to the Convention showed on the whole greater interest in theory, although not always Marxist theory. There was a general sentiment that SDS should become the revolutionary party, and a growing resentment of such "outside cadre organizations" as Progressive Labor Party, which is seen now as an obstacle to SDS becoming that party. There was a strong interest in the recent events in France, with its general confirmation of our line on the traditional working class.

Many other political groups were present at the Convention; but only PLP, with 25-35 members and 50-75 sympathizers present and organized, played a major role on the Convention floor, and that turned out to be mostly a defensive one. ISC came to propagandize for the Peace and Freedom Party. The SWP-YSA came with about 10 people, only to sell literature, though. "News and Letters", "Facing Reality", several Anarchist tendencies and the New York and Philadelphia Regional Labor Committees of SDS also were there. The latter group is a newly formed tendency born out of the ideas of Lynn Marcus and organized by about half a dozen ex-PLers. They had about 40 people at the Convention, and probably number somewhere between 75 and 100 at this time....

The Spartacist League had a rather extensive literature table, and we attempted to intervene with our line in the workshop debates to the extent that our forces made this possible.

Sunday --There were only about 250 delegates and members at this meeting. We stood at the doorway and handed out our three prepared documents. They were: (1) "An Open Letter to SDS from the Spartacist League", (2) "Toward the Working Class", (3) "What is the Peace and Freedom Party and Where is it Going?". We also were the first socialist group to have a table up (the others were there by Monday).

Monday -- More individual members and delegates arrived, bringing the total number to between 700 and 800. Several of us manned the literature table, while the rest split up and went to the various workshops. The workshops were led by prearranged leaders (those in the leadership clique of SDS). The workshops were meant to be a review of the work of the past year in the local chapters. What this soon turned into was a "discovery" that at each campus where PL was

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involved, PL was somehow the cause of all the strife at campuses where SDS didn't perform well. And thus at various workshops it was decided that the role of these "external cadre organizations" should be examined. This was put off until the Tuesday continuation at most of the workshops. Gallatin's Spartacist League banner with the pictures of Lenin and Trotsky flanking either side of it created quite a fuss with the local legislators and ultimately the press garnered us a good deal of publicity. We made the local papers and gave out 5 interviews to various segments of the national press. As a result of the publicity Gallatin D. has been discharged from the army.

Tuesday -- There was a continuation of the previous day's workshops. ...At the workshop I attended at least, PL was forced to virtually admit that it has been attempting to use SDS as a front group, while trying to pretend that its sole interest was in building that front organization. What ensued, and for that matter what occupied the attention of the rest of the convention, was the logical and somewhat predictable attempt to somehow rid SDS of this bitter cancer. Most of the baiting by the "New Left" was of an organizational nature. PL's most articulate members made a rather good defense, and there is no doubt that PLP will continue to operate within SDS for some time. But it never got to introduce its "work-in" program. PL will probably recruit for some time into the future, especially among its close contacts due to the polarization caused by the baiting, but it faces a dimmer future within SDS, and is actually beginning to lose some members back to SDS (e.g., the New York and Phila. Regional Labor Committees). Steve S. and Shirley left then.

Wednesday -- Workshops (about 35) were now held on individual topics. ...No resolutions at all came out of these workshops, except the G.I. Organizing, for which Gallatin was largely responsible. The body of the resolution ran as follows: "Be it resolved that SDS initiate and support activities directed toward creating a radical political consciousness among the members of the armed forces by:

1. advocating in our draft work that individuals continue the struggle against imperialism by entering the military (instead of evasion of one type or another) for the purpose of politicizing and organizing our brothers in the military;
2. setting up G.I. drop-in centers near military installations offering a political program aimed at aiding G.I.'s in radical struggle and organizing efforts in the military;
3. encouraging individuals and chapters to conduct an organized campaign to involve G.I.'s in their social and political activities;
4. establishing a military counseling service;
5. providing the needed support for radical struggles within the military--i.e. demonstrations, publicity, printing facilities, etc."

The resolution was finally adopted by the Convention--with the addition of an amendment still supporting draft resistance!

I went to the Peace and Freedom Party workshop, which was populated largely by supporters of that formation--ISCers, PLers, etc. I handed out Tishman's document on PFP as each person came into the workshop, and during the discussion I attacked PFP and counterposed

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it programmatically to the concept of the Labor Party....Mark K. went to a workshop held by the Marcusites and tried to intervene with our concept of a transitional program. Mark and I went to another workshop of the Marcusites in the afternoon....Mark and Gallatin D. left that evening.

Thursday & Friday -- Both days were all-day plenums. They were also the scene of some of the most vicious, willful attacks on PLP, something that was not unexpected, except in its degree and the apparent depth of paranoia and hatred. PL was given little opportunity to counter the charges against it and apparently there were numerous caucuses among the top level careerists within SDS to organize the floor attack, which at one point reached its peak of frenzy with hundreds of willing followers of the leadership screaming at the top of their voices "PL out, PL out". There were several restructuring proposals for SDS (the predominant feeling was that SDS should become a democratic centralist organization). A good number of people, some spurred by honest revulsion and others by various political reasons, stood up and defended PL. Elected to office as national officers were a few unknowns who were among the few who decided to run for office (most of the careerists declined nomination to one of the national secretaries because the programs they supported failed adoption). Charlotte G. and myself left on Friday evening, with two days still to run in the Convention.

28 June 1968