

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 27, July 4, 1975

Present: Barnes, Breitman, Clark, Jenness, Seigle, Sheppard

Chair: Breitman

AGENDA: 1. Rosenberg Appeal
2. Party Expansion
3. Gurewitz Letter
4. Portugal
5. Wohlforth Correspondence
6. Spelling of Party Name
7. Letter to United Secretariat
8. Message to Memorial Meeting for Bob Chester

1. ROSENBERG APPEAL

(Stapleton invited for this point.)

Jenness reported.

Discussion

Motion: That Novack, Camejo, and Reid sign the advertisement as supporters of the case. (See attached.)

Carried.

2. PARTY EXPANSION

Sheppard reported:

The Boston branch has decided, in consultation with the National Office, not to divide but to release a group of comrades to go to Baltimore to aid in working towards establishing a branch there.

The Chicago branch, in consultation with the National Office, has decided to divide, establish two branches and a Local structure, and will probably carry through the division towards the end of summer.

Comrade Pearl Chertov has agreed to a National Office request that she move to New Orleans, together with some comrades from Boston and elsewhere, with the perspective of working towards building a branch in that city.

The California branches are considering, in consultation with the National Office, a project of sending comrades to San Jose to work toward building a branch there.

A fourth project, working towards establishing a branch in San Antonio, is still in the early discussion stage.

After consultation with the New York Local City Executive Committee and with its approval, Comrade Lynn Henderson has agreed to a National Office request to transfer to New York to assume the post of New York trade union director.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. GUREWITZ LETTER

Sheppard reported on letter (attached) and discussion with Gurewitz.

Gurewitz agreed to the circulation of his letter to the National Committee, so that the NC could consider the points he raises before issuing the convention call for the convention following the upcoming August 1975 convention.

Discussion

Agreement to attach Gurewitz letter to the minutes.

4. PORTUGAL

(Foley and J. Hansen invited for this point.)

Sheppard reported.

Discussion

Agreement on line press will follow. Stepped-up coverage of Portugal will continue, including reportage on the positions taken by the various left groups.

5. WOHLFORTH CORRESPONDENCE

(J. Hansen invited for this point.)

Barnes reported. (See attached.)

Discussion

Motion: To invite Wohlforth and Fields to the open sessions of the party convention, to make the pre-convention discussion bulletin available to them, and to continue discussions with the two.

Carried.

6. SPELLING OF PARTY NAME

(J. Hansen invited for this point.)

Breitman initiated discussion on efforts to develop common style guidelines for all party publications.

Discussion

7. LETTER TO UNITED SECRETARIAT

(Letter attached.) Letter was approved by poll of Political Committee members available in New York prior to Political Committee meeting.

8. MESSAGE TO MEMORIAL MEETING FOR BOB CHESTER

(Message attached.) Message was approved by poll of Political Committee members available in New York prior to Political Committee meeting.

Meeting Adjourned.

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Dear Friend:

You may well understand why we, as children of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, have been devoting all of our energies to clearing their names. But now, the situation has gone far beyond the obvious necessity to obtain simple justice for our parents--albeit posthumously.

We now know about Watergate, the CIA-Howard Hughes relationship, J. Edgar Hoover's secret files, the spying done by the Post Office, the Internal Revenue Service and prosecution sponsored perjury and manufactured "evidence" in a whole series of trials. And thousands of Americans who may have, in the past, complacently accepted government versions of virtually everything, are beginning to understand that perjury, forgery, provocation and cover-up, are all part of the techniques used almost routinely.

Only the most naive or obtuse can believe that the Rosenberg case was an exception to the routine. To the contrary, the case was a major test of those methods. It was, after all, a giant step toward the establishment of the "national security" rationale subsequently used to enforce policy on a wide range of domestic and international issues.

Our legal requests for our parent's files have thus far met with government stalling and non-compliance. Therefore, we'll probably have to resort to the courts.

We ask one simple thing. We want the Rosenberg files to be opened--all of them--now!

As a major step in this campaign, the National Committee to Re-Open the Rosenberg Case will be placing a full-page ad in the New York Times, and, if finances permit, in other major newspapers throughout the country. The proposed text is enclosed.

We hope you will help provide the financial support required to place these ads and, if you wish, become a signator. We're enclosing a form on which you may indicate the nature of your support and request that you return it to us immediately. Obviously, we are counting on your understanding and generosity.

Sincerely,
s/Robert Meeropol
s/Michael Meeropol

P.S. Some of the people who signed this ad are:
Dr. Philip Morrison, professor of physics at MIT and co-holder of the patent on the atomic bomb; Dr. Harold Urey, Nobel Laureate and professor of physics at the University of California at San Diego; Professor Linus C. Pauling, twice winner of the Nobel Prize; Prof. Vern Countryman, faculty member of Harvard Law School; Rabbi Balfour Brickner; Joyce Carol Oates, author; Prof. Thomas I. Emerson, Yale University Law School; Arlo Guthrie, singer-composer; Henry Fonda, actor; Professor Francis D. Wormuth, Chairman Department of Government, University of Utah

WHAT ARE THEY AFRAID OF?

OPEN THE FILES IN THE ROSENBERG CASE

WITNESS THE PENTAGON PAPERS. WATERGATE. SECRET TAPES THAT UNDOED NIXON. ATTORNEYS GENERAL CONVICTED. FBI HEAD OUSTED. INVESTIGATION OF THE CIA ON CHARGES OF ILLEGALITIES. DIRTY TRICKS AND DIRTY TRICKSTERS.

Each new shock wave of duplicity in high places makes it imperative that we look vigorously and fearfully into the most controversial case of the McCarthy Era and the Cold War--the Rosenberg/Sobell case.

When Russia exploded the A-bomb in 1949, the advocates of the Cold War began a frantic hunt to find scapegoats who could be blamed. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed on June 19, 1953 on a charge of conspiracy to commit espionage. Despite serious questions as to the legality of the procedures in the trial and the dubious validity of the evidence, and despite world-wide appeals for clemency, they were convicted and died in the electric chair maintaining their innocence to the end. Today, Michael and Robert Meeropol, the sons of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, are trying to clear their parents' names.

Commencing long before the execution and mounting steadily throughout the years, a body of evidence has grown to support the position of those asserting that the case was riddled with perjury and falsification of evidence by officials in government trying to feed the Cold War, exploit the hysteria and frighten dissenters. Yet, as Justice Hugh Black observed on the day of the Rosenberg's execution, the Supreme Court "never reviewed this (trial) record and never affirmed the fairness of this trial."

We the undersigned, believing our country should now confront this cornerstone case, related in a fundamental way to what government does with its power, call for:

1. Full disclosure under the freedom of information act of all material pertaining to the Rosenberg case in the files of the FBI, CIA, AEC, White House, and departments of Justice, State, and Defense. Recent disclosures have already pointed dramatically to new avenues of inquiry. Meanwhile, steps must be taken to prevent any Rosenberg files from being "lost," as the FBI has already claimed.

2. Full investigation by an appropriate arm of Congress as to why the government agencies have not complied with the Freedom of Information Act, why the agencies have refused to release all the Rosenberg files, and why "national security" continues to be used as an excuse for government non-compliance with the law and refusal to let Americans know the truth.

WILL YOU JOIN IN OUR DEMAND FOR THIS CRUCIAL INQUIRY?

OPEN THE FILES--LET THE TRUTH COME OUT!

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Cambridge, Ma.
June 11, 1975

Political Committee
SWP

Dear Comrades,

. . . In the Convention call, it states that absentee ballots can only be accepted from comrades who have to work. What is the rationale behind not accepting absentee ballots from those who are sick, cannot get baby-sitters, are on vacation and, especially, those who are on political assignment? It seems that it is often the case that important political events that the Branch must intervene in come up at the same time voting is scheduled. Why should comrades performing an important political task for the Party be denied a vote? In addition, it seems that, in a factional situation, this provision could lead to some real problems. For instance, if a minority comrade whose vote was needed to make enough for a delegate had to perform some important assignment (say at a union meeting), his or her grouping could be denied a delegate despite their real strength in the Branch. That would seem to be wrong. Or, in a Branch whose leadership was factionally motivated, couldn't the organizer deny a minority its right to a delegate by simply assigning "X" number of minority comrades to take on some political assignment that would force them to miss the meeting where the voting was to take place? It doesn't seem right to risk having such incidents occur unless there is a compelling reason to deny comrades who are on political assignment the right to an absentee ballot. . . .

Finally, if, after explanation, it seems to me that the norm(s) should be changed, what is the procedure? I'm not really "worried" about this stricture creating any problems now, certainly not in relation to the up-coming Convention, but I think maybe a change should be made for the long run. At any rate, I've wondered about this so long, I'm really curious about the explanation. Thanks.

Comradely,
s/Don Gurewitz
Boston Branch

June 24, 1975

Dear Jack:

We have had some time to think about the discussion we held with you and the other comrades, as well as to study the Black resolution and the international discussion material which you made available to us.

As you know, since at least the beginning of this year, we have been convinced of two central political points which we expressed in letters to Comrades Sheppard and Hansen. The first is that the idealist and ultra-left course of the WRP and its satellites like the WL represents a fundamental break with Trotskyism. This tendency today represents an impediment to the construction of the Fourth International at this critical time. While individuals and perhaps even tendencies from the so-called IC may contribute to the FI in the future, they will do so only through a fundamental break with the policies of G. Healy and this history.

We believe this turn on the part of the IC, while prepared through sectarian practices in the past, is primarily its reaction to the new international situation. The chief characteristic of this new situation is the powerful movement of the working class in every country under conditions of the developing economic crisis. The IC is running away precisely from the responsibility posed to it by this crisis: a crisis which it had predicted for so long.

The second essential point is in regard to the SWP. We became convinced that its rich history under the leadership of James P. Cannon marked the most important contribution to the construction of the Fourth International outside that of Trotsky himself. This is why this history has been subjected to such a slander campaign from Pablo, from the dissident groups (in our opinion right-wing splits) breaking from the SWP such as Passen-Gregorich and Fender and from the IC itself. This is why we felt it was important to write an answer to Mike Banda. We still maintain that such material is highly important for the development of the entire FI.

Most important is the response of the SWP to this new stage of the crisis. In our opinion, the party has turned to the working class seeking to seriously confront the problems of developing a bridge to the current consciousness of workers who are in motion. Only in this way can Trotsky's Transitional Program live in our day and a mass revolutionary party be built in America in preparation for the socialist revolution.

This became absolutely clear to us in practice in the two Boston anti-racism marches, as well as in the SWP's intervention in the municipal crisis. Upon reading the SWP resolution on American Perspectives, we found ourselves in basic agreement with it.

In the course of the discussion we held, we hoped to make essentially two points: 1. the importance of propaganda work for the labor party in this period in preparation for a future labor party development; 2. the importance of work among minority youth by our own movement. We viewed these suggestions as ways of implementing the

perspectives resolution with which we agreed, as points to consider as the movement went through a new experience in a new period.

Looking over the international material was very helpful. We believe the SWP has taken a principled position on Trotskyist fundamentals within the international movement as well as exercised a considerable degree of patience necessary because of the inexperience and freshness of many of the forces in a number of countries. At the same time, the perspectives fought for in Portugal represent a correct approach to the entire unfolding revolutionary situation in Europe.

We also believe that the SWP has made a serious contribution to the building of the FI, while the efforts of Healy have only led to disintegration and sectarian disorientation. It will be, however, the efforts of the SWP within the U.S. to reach the masses of American workers which will be the most decisive factor to the building of the FI internationally.

We have, of course, theoretical differences with the SWP. We agree with the resolution on the Black question on the central role Blacks will play in the coming American revolution and on the necessity of a continuing fight against all forms of racial discrimination and oppression as part of the struggles of the working class. The Blacks do not represent, however, a national minority and this is the central reason for the reactionary role Black nationalists have played in the past and for their disintegration in the present period characterized by the moving forward of the whole working class (of course, this movement forward takes on a different tempo and different forms among different layers of the class.)

We believe the present majority group within the United Secretariat is an expression of Pabloite revisionism rooted in the theoretical issues raised in 1953. We believe these issues will have to be discussed at some point in the reorientation of the FI.

We believe the Healy group has transformed the Marxist method into an idealist philosophy separated from the material struggles of the working class. This is as much a revision of Marxism as Burnham's attempts in 1940 to separate "program" from class criteria and method. Nonetheless, a revolutionary party cannot be properly trained outside a continuous struggle for the Marxist method as part of the development of program, strategy, and tactics to carry forward the workers struggles in a revolutionary direction.

We believe these questions are best discussed in a leisurely and comradely way in the course of a common experience as we all learn in the new period.

We have been active, as you know, for a number of years in the socialist movement. Despite our recent experience, we are determined to contribute in any way we can to the construction of the revolutionary party. We are convinced of the socialist future of the U.S. and the world. We know the building of a revolutionary party is essential to that future. We are party people.

We wish, therefore, to apply for membership in the SWP and contribute in any way possible to its development.

We are looking forward to a discussion on this proposal and will be glad to help in any way we can. We are always available except from the 2 of July until the 14 when we will be out of town.

Comradely,

s/Nancy Fields
s/Tim Wohlforth

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14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
July 7, 1975

Dear Comrades Fields and Wohlforth,

Jack will be out of town for the next two weeks, so I am replying to your letter of June 24, 1975.

The Political Committee discussed your letter, and of course the PC members were pleased by your desire to become members. The next stage in this process, the Political Committee felt, is to have further political discussions with you, and to come to agreement on areas of common political work following the convention. Jack reported to the meeting that a discussion with Comrades Novack and Reed has been set up following your vacation, as one of the discussions we project.

The Political Committee also agreed to invite you both to attend the open sessions of the upcoming SWP convention (enclosed are materials relating to making practical arrangements for attending), and to make the preconvention discussion bulletin available to you. It is probably easiest if we send you the bulletins as they are produced, and bill you for them.

Comradely,

s/Barry Sheppard
National Organization
Secretary

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June 30, 1975

United Secretariat

Dear Comrades,

From a copy of a letter dated June 5, signed by Duret for the Bureau of the United Secretariat, and addressed to the Political Bureaus of the European sections, we have learned that the Bureau made a decision to hold the first session of the projected International Cadre School from August 18 through August 30.

As all comrades of the United Secretariat are aware, this reverses the earlier decision, contained in a March 17 letter from Duret on behalf of the Bureau, addressed to the Political Bureaus of the sections, to hold the projected first session of the school in the fall, so that leading members of the Socialist Workers party and the Leninist Trotskyist Faction could participate in the school.

The project of an International Cadre School was discussed by Comrades Barnes and Hansen of the SWP and Comrades Walter and Duret before the IEC meeting in January. At that time, it was suggested, and we concurred, that it would be essential for leaders of both the LTF and the IMT to participate in every level of the Cadre School, including a basic sharing of the teaching of the sessions. Also at that time, that is, at least five months ago, we informed the comrades that the SWP convention would be held during the week of August 17-23 and that in the week following the SWP convention, there would be a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction. We also explained that we had already made reservations for the site of the convention, paid a deposit, and could not change these dates. All four of us mutually agreed to schedule the first session of the proposed International Cadre School sometime in the fall. This agreement was reflected in the March 17 letter from the Bureau, which explained, "we propose that the first [session]--which will be a sort of 'test school'--be held in the end of September-October-November period." However, a letter dated April 14 from Duret on behalf of the Bureau, addressed to the political bureaus of the sections and sympathizing organizations, indicated that there was to be a change in the date, to either August 18-30 or August 25-September 6. These dates would exclude any members of the SWP and the leadership of the LTF from participating in the school.

When Comrade Charles was here in early May in the capacity of an observer at the plenum of the SWP National Committee, we again explained the situation to him. He assured us that the dates would be changed back to the original agreement so that the SWP and the LTF leadership would not be excluded. But now we are informed through a copy of a letter to the European sections, that the Bureau has decided on the August 18-30 dates, exactly the dates that totally exclude participation by the SWP or LTF.

If these dates are adhered to, then the "International Cadre School" will have been effectively transformed into an "IMT Cadre

Cadre School/2

School" as there can be no leadership participation by the LTF or SWP. Since the information about the dates of the SWP convention and the LTF Steering Committee meeting was made available to the leadership of the IMT almost five months before they decided to change the dates of the school, we can only assume that this decision to scuttle the International Cadre School in favor of an IMT Cadre School was made deliberately. We believe this decision of the IMT is a serious error.

It would be far better to use our limited resources to hold a united International Cadre School, as first projected and agreed upon. We ask the United Secretariat to reverse this decision of the Bureau, and to reschedule the International Cadre School at a time when it can be held as a legitimate united effort of the whole international movement and not as a school monopolized by a single faction.

Comradely,

s/Barry Sheppard
for the Political Committee
Socialist Workers Party

Bob Chester

From his first days as a professional revolutionist, Bob Chester took a special interest in socialist education. He was so dedicated to this that he became recognized by younger members for his aptitude in the party leadership as a socialist educator.

But his revolutionary life encompassed much more than this. In forty years, Bob organized branches, took difficult assignments in expanding the party, organized and led all kinds of campaigns, helped found the party's printshop and put it on a professional basis, and was an active member of several union fractions. And he did much of this when the resources of the party and its members were extremely limited, and initiative, determination, and unstinting unpaid labor were crucial. It was, for instance, above all the conviction that Anne and Bob Chester had of its importance, plus their readiness to carry the project through personally, that made possible the production of Art Preis's important book Labor's Giant Step.

Bob always thought for himself on the difficult political and organizational questions that the party had to grapple with, and he did not hesitate to voice his opinions. At the same time, he always maintained sharp interest in the opinions of others and an objective attitude toward himself. And these qualities did not diminish as he grew older. In fact, gauging how best he could contribute to solving one of the big problems facing the party in the past decade, that of a transition in leadership, Bob acted in a model way. He kept up his educational activities and selected a special field in which he thought he could make a contribution. He thus became a source of strength to those who will continue his work.

Bob is an example of a worker-Bolshevik who devoted his life to the revolutionary movement and who was always ready to pull up stakes and go wherever the party needed him. And he knew that the work he and the party were doing would result in a new generation being won to the socialist goals he understood and strove for.

s/Jack Barnes, for the
Political Committee of the
Socialist Workers Party

July 1, 1975