

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
July 27, 1978

TO ORGANIZERS AND NATIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

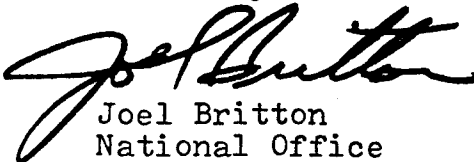
Dear Comrades,

The attached report is on our participation in the recent convention of the National Education Association. The author, Ed Fruit, was an elected delegate to the convention.

The July 21 and August 4 issues of the Militant contain further reports on convention decisions.

Comrade Fruit's report will be made available to our national teachers meeting at Oberlin. Teacher comrades not present there should be shown the organizer's copy.

Comradely,



Joel Britton
National Office

COPY

COPY

COPY

Dear Joel:

This report will try to give an overall impression of our participation in the 1978 National Education Association's national convention held in Dallas, Texas, from July 1-6.

In my mind this convention reconfirms two things. First, that the radicalization we have been talking about is continuing to get deeper and broader. Secondly, the absolute necessity for a revolutionary party to lead the working class to ultimate victory.

The convention consisted of some 8,000 delegates and 2,000 observers. We had two delegates, one other teacher comrade and a teacher sympathizer, a Militant reporter, and several Dallas comrades who were available part time. The Dallas branch was responsible for selling the Militant and the Mackler pamphlet and passing out our new jobs bill. With this modest force we helped accomplish the following:

1. getting a resolution passed supporting the July 9 March on Washington for the ERA and getting out 8,000 copies of the national NOW march leaflet;
2. getting a resolution passed endorsing the right of Héctor Marroquín to political asylum followed by a standing ovation from the entire convention;
3. gaining a whole list of people who are enthusiastic about working on the Marroquín case--especially in Texas, Massachusetts, and California;
4. getting the name of the SWP widely circulated--mainly a result of the Militant and Marroquín;
5. drawing closer to the party an individual we have been working with for three conventions and who asked us if he could go to Oberlin this year.

I will go through what we did and how we accomplished these things.

An important thing to remember is that even though

we did a lot of work it was the independents who played the primary role in making sure that the July 9 and Marroquin resolutions actually got passed. Of course, these things would not have been considered if it were not for the SWP members there, but we alone could not have achieved these successes. If we had had several more delegates we could have done more. Especially hard was the individual contact work. It was almost impossible to get around and talk to all those people who worked with us and were in sympathy with our ideas.

Upon arriving in Dallas we had a fraction meeting to determine just what we thought could be accomplished at the convention. The three basic things we could do were get resolutions passed, get out our socialist ideas, and try to recruit to the party. As far as resolutions were concerned we had to set priorities. Everyone agreed that July 9 was the most important and probably the most realistic. A resolution in support of Marroquin seemed highly unrealistic but we decided to approach the Chicano-Hispano Caucus to get a feel for what was possible in that area. Next would be a resolution against the Briggs Initiative in California, and finally a strong resolution on Bakke. If this had been the AFT the Bakke case would have been more important. But since NEA already opposed the decision, even if it was in a weak way, it was not a question of having to reverse an official position. The NEA has a successful quota system in its organization but the leadership has not said that quotas were necessary for the carrying out of affirmative action in employment and education. With a couple more delegates we could probably have gotten them to do so.

Our division of labor was as follows: One teacher comrade with a comrade from Dallas NOW to work on July 9; two teacher comrades with Marroquin to work on that; and to see what could be done on Briggs and Bakke if there was time.

JULY 9

The comrade from Dallas NOW and I went to see the leaders of the NEA Women's Caucus. We had noticed that there were several resolutions on ERA including one on extension but nothing on the demonstration. We raised the idea of a July 9 resolution with the Vice-Chair of the caucus, who is a member of NOW in Wisconsin. She was excited about the idea and invited us to the next Women's Caucus meeting to present it and get signatures to get the resolution submitted. We wrote the resolution that night and the next day brought it to the caucus. Our Dallas NOW comrade spoke at the caucus, got the signatures (50), and through me submitted it. During the meeting the Vice-Chair asked women to take the resolution to their state caucuses and make sure to get it approved. I was able to get Georgia to approve it and Wisconsin did the same.

At this point the Women's Caucus took complete charge. They decided who should speak to the motion--who would be the most influential women in the convention to do so. They then proceeded to get every microphone (35) covered by members of the caucus so the plan would be uniformly carried out. That is, whoever was recognized would automatically yield to those who were supposed to speak to the motion. The plan worked to perfection and on the convention floor John Ryor, the chair and President of NEA, announced that there were 46 people in line to speak in favor and no one to speak against. The woman from Wisconsin gave a good motivation and ended it with the following: "I intend to be in Washington this Sunday, President Ryor. Will you be there?" Following the overwhelming approval by the convention the Vice-Chair took the national NOW leaflet which we had provided her and got the NEA to print up one for each delegate at the convention and also had them posted up all around the convention hall. I feel quite confident that if the march had been two or three weeks away, many of the state NEA affiliates would have chartered buses to go. Even my Georgia delegation talked about getting a bus on one day's notice.

It should be stressed again that it was through our intervention that July 9 was put on the floor but it was through the actions of the Women's Caucus that its passage was insured. The Caucus itself is different from two years ago when we tried to get them to take some action. Even though it is still reformist dominated, women today are ready to get involved in mass action. They are ready to defend their rights by any variety of tactics, not just lobbying. Luckily for us, the leadership of the Caucus was friendly and open to seeing mass action unlike many of the NOW chapters around the country. Our contact work with members of the Caucus was limited although I did speak to one woman from Louisville who knows Debby Tarnopol and has apparently worked with the party there.

THE MARROQUIN CASE

None of us except for Héctor Marroquín himself ever in our wildest dreams expected that the NEA would support this case. Our strategy was to first test out the Chicano-Hispano Caucus and see what their reaction would be. If no one in the caucus saw the case as important we decided we would just work on endorsers and not try to get a resolution passed without any independent support. It should be pointed out that Marroquín's personal presence made all the difference in the world. Instead of supporting some abstract defense case, people could actually see in the flesh the person whose life they were being asked to save.

A couple of comrades took Héctor to the first meeting of the caucus where he was able to speak for a few minutes and answer questions. Immediately, several caucus members

became very excited about the case, even though there were also those who were more conservative and did not want to touch it. The Appeal for Asylum petition was sent around and sixty signatures were obtained. Three people also gave \$30 to the defense committee and wanted to see a resolution brought to the floor. This was a good indication to the fraction that we would not be working alone and that sentiment was present in support of Marroquín. It should also be pointed out that we had decided to emphasize to the fullest the fact that Héctor had taught high school while a university student in Monterrey. We figured that stressing this would gain even more sympathy from a human rights point of view: that a fellow teacher had been framed up on false charges because of his political views.

In the meantime we started to go around and talk to delegates we had worked with in previous years to get them to get their state delegations to support a floor resolution. One of these was a teacher from Massachusetts who had discussed party politics with me the previous two years and who is an independent radical. He took the case to his delegation and asked if Marroquín could speak to them. Héctor did so and was given a standing ovation by the whole delegation. The Vice-President of the delegation agreed to speak in favor of the resolution. The same morning the Chicano-Hispano Caucus officially endorsed the resolution and a community college teacher from El Paso in the caucus took on the passing of the resolution as his main chore in the convention. We found out later that the Michigan and Wisconsin delegations also endorsed the floor resolution. This of course made us very excited but there were still 46 other states that we had not yet reached and which with our forces and one day before the vote would have been impossible to reach.

We decided on three moves to try to get additional support. First, to get Héctor before the California delegation, one of the largest. Secondly, to get him before the Black Caucus, and thirdly, to print up several thousand copies of the leaflet which had been sent from New York addressing NEA delegates. At the top of each leaflet was inserted "Vote Yes on New Business Item 27." While all this was going on, Héctor was handing out materials on the case, including the leaflet to the delegates as they entered the assembly hall. He was able to talk to many who were impressed that this was the person whose case was being talked about. The morning the vote was to take place a Chicano supporter in the California delegation got permission for Héctor to speak before it. After a five minute presentation in front of over 500 people he was again given a resounding ovation.

Unfortunately, we were not able to speak in front of the Black Caucus but Héctor personally leafletted people entering and leaving it so we saw that many Black delegates were sympathetic to the cause. The Chairperson of the Black Caucus

apologized for Héctor not being heard and personally gave her own solidarity. This woman is very influential in the NEA. (Later in the convention we spoke with her about socialism in general and the confusion created at the convention by the Progressive Labor Party.) She was interested in the discussion and said she would look up our bookstore in Indianapolis, her hometown.

I was not sure how the NEA leadership would react to a Marroquín resolution so we introduced Héctor to Terry Herndon, Executive Director of NEA. Herndon was very friendly and indicated that he was never sure how ten thousand delegates would react to any issue. He wished us luck and Héctor gave him a complimentary copy of his pamphlet, My Story. Also, a very influential Chicana from California spoke to John Ryor, who chairs the convention, about the possibility of Marroquín being able to speak from the floor. He indicated that if it was okay with the body he would not object.

So the resolution was about to come up. We arranged for the seconder of the motion to come from the Michigan delegation on behalf of the delegation. The maker of the motion was the person from El Paso who gave a very good speech and got across as much as one could in two minutes. Also, the Vice-President of the Massachusetts delegation was prepared to speak in favor. Several people from California and Wisconsin were to be back-ups in case of substitute motions or red-baiting. Everything was now pretty much out of our hands and it was up to the convention to decide. Finally, the New Business Item 27 came to the floor. Without going into too much detail, this was one of the 4 or 5 highlights of the convention--that is, everyone was paying attention and sides were clearly drawn with much emotionalism.

After the motion was motivated, Héctor was asked to come to a microphone in order to answer a whole series of questions different delegates had. Many of these were irrelevant. The red-baiters not only didn't get anywhere but they were even booed down by several of the northern delegations. People explained that they did not care what Marroquín's politics were. They were merely defending his right to express them without harassment. What made this so gratifying was that he was so openly and explicitly a socialist, making it hard for a red-baiter to claim Héctor had a "hidden agenda." Even a substitute motion to take Marroquín's name out of the motion was defeated handily. The debate took about 20 minutes and was exhilarating for all the comrades present. Almost totally unbelievable. The amazing thing was that Marroquín was being defended by others. We didn't have to do anything! Finally, the question was called and the vote was taken. I would say conservatively that it was about 65-35 in favor. And when the chair (a vice-president of NEA who had taken over to give Ryor a rest) declared the motion passed, a standing ovation was given to Marroquín, including the chairperson, as was readily seen on the massive TV screen. Marroquín was so swamped with well wishers that we did not see him for at least a half hour after the vote. He was taken to people

heading NEA's International Relations Committee who said they would like to get teacher organizations in other countries to support the case also. And of course the ramifications of this vote are not all yet known. I gave copies of the brochure to various press people, including a reporter from National Public Radio. So some of these people may eventually do a story. It's just too early to tell all that will come out of the convention. Obviously, the endorsement by NEA will be a tremendous uplift to the case and will make other labor union endorsers more easily come by.

BRIGGS INITIATIVE

Having known that Jeff Mackler's local (newly unified into NEA) had passed a resolution opposing the Briggs Initiative, I sought out delegates from there to see if there was any motion on a resolution at the convention. It turned out that there was not but I met several people who wanted to do something. We got a resolution written, got the 50 signatures and got it passed in 10 minutes after the time had passed for submission for resolutions. We found out later that the Maryland delegation had submitted an anti-Briggs motion earlier which got in on time so there was no real problem.

Significantly, even though I was the spark for getting California to do something, after I got them the proper forms and showed them what to do, the California people did the rest themselves. So, like with July 9 and Marroquin, independents took the ball and ran once we gave them the ball. The Maryland resolution, incidentally, was passed with not too much opposition calling on NEA to work against such legislation any way it could including in the courts. The motivation for passage was that teachers are against witchhunting and it isn't anyone's business what teachers do with their private lives.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING CAUCUS

A new caucus initiated by Michigan was started this convention. Its purpose is to make NEA take more initiative in seeing collective bargaining as a primary goal and to assist those states, mostly Southern, to educate and convince their members that collective bargaining is important to fight for. (Incidentally, a very controversial resolution was passed which said that NEA would not have conventions in states where there is no collective bargaining. Because of the ERA boycott there were only seven cities where NEA could hold its convention. With the passage of that resolution Houston and Dallas were ruled out. NEA can only hold a convention in a city which can have a meeting of 10,000 delegates and which has the hotel space to put them all up. The only cities left are New York, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Detroit, and Los Angeles.) Getting back to the caucus, there was a good representation of people from Alabama and Mississippi, as well as the northern states. Importantly, Bill Piscicella, one of our Houston teachers, is seen as extremely important in this caucus. He is one of the few Texas delegates who will openly fight for the Texas

State Teachers Association to go on record in favor of collective bargaining. There are more and more people in Texas who are coming around but few are bold enough to publicly support it. So Bill is seen as an important link to Texas for this caucus. So far we don't know what the caucus will actually be able to do but Bill will keep in touch with others in the caucus throughout the year. He will know what it is doing and help us decide how much we want other NEA comrades to get involved in it.

OPPONENTS

Other groups selling newspapers at the convention were the Progressive Labor Party and the Communist Labor Party, largely based in Detroit. For the first time in the three years I have been attending the convention there was an organized intervention by another tendency--the Progressive Labor Party. They had one delegate and numerous supporters who were handing out leaflets and selling Challenge. They had a booth in the display room where publishers show their wares. Each booth costs \$500 and we have always elected not to get one. The thrust of the PLP booth was to set up a Caucus Against Racism in the NEA. They were able to get 600 signatures of delegates saying they had a right to form a caucus which the leadership was denying official status. By the end of the convention, support for such a caucus had dwindled to near zero because of their sectarianism and inability to relate to the labor movement.

The most obnoxious thing they did was to put out a leaflet on Jesse Jackson, who was one of the main speakers. It accused him of being a racist, anti-working class, and a scab against strikes. This so alienated most members of the Black Caucus that CAR was totally discredited. Their delegate submitted a resolution calling for a boycott of McGraw-Hill Books because of their association with the Republic of South Africa. It was a good resolution but because CAR was behind it the convention referred it to committee, not trusting the motives of those who made the motion.

Delegates were confused between us and them and we had to go around and tell people that CAR had nothing to do with the SLP and Marroquin or the Militant. The confusion was made worse by red-baiters who consciously linked us up with the sectarians. The PLP intervention was a good lesson for those radicals in the convention we had been working with. Their (PLP) politics and ours were clearly seen, as well as our distinct methods of operation. We also found out later that the so-called CAR of NEA was merely to be an adjunct of PL's Committee Against Racism and not really an independent caucus where teachers made decisions. Their first caucus meeting attracted about 20 people, including a few delegates. But after that first meeting, delegates stayed away from them like the plague.

OUR SALES

We were not as successful this year as we had been last year in Minneapolis where we sold 300 Militants and 150 teacher pamphlets. I think we sold around 100 Militants and about 25 pamphlets. On the last day of the convention we gave out the remaining Militants along with the bundle of job supplements. Comrades were able to sell in the convention center itself without harassment. Next year's convention will be held in Detroit where we will be able to involve more non-teacher comrades in the sales effort.

NATIONAL COORDINATION

I would like to make a few recommendations. I assume that even with our turn towards industry we will still have a number of teacher comrades plus we will continue to recruit teachers. We should prepare for the next NEA convention earlier and more fully. The letter sent from the national office to Organizers encouraging teachers to attend the NEA and AFT conventions was not seen by those who did come to the convention so I can imagine that many more who didn't come probably didn't see that communication. Next year we should start earlier, urging comrades in NEA to try to become delegates to their state and the national convention. We should also encourage--early in the year--as many teacher comrades, whether delegates or not, to go to the national convention. Not only is it important for what can be done there but it is a tremendous learning experience in how our party operates. The above remarks are to help make our national interventions even more successful than they have been. And I cannot stress too much what it does for individual comrades to see our party in action.

One final point. In the past three years we have had Militant reporters covering the entire convention--Nancy Cole in Miami, Lynn Henderson in Minneapolis, and Rick Berman in Dallas. I think this is a practice that we should continue. Firstly, it is good for the Militant. (We usually get to meet the NEA leaders and talk a lot with various reporters. Incidentally, for the last two years the Militant reporter has specifically been invited, along with the bourgeois press, to meet with John Ryor. I think it is good to legitimize our paper as the most professional and authoritative press on the left.) These individuals have also helped our teacher comrades by getting more of an overview of the convention and our participation. Those of us who are intimately involved in the convention sometimes find it difficult to step back and see clearly everything we have to do at such conventions.

Comradely,

Edwin Fruit