

RESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE MINUTES NO. 1, April 6, 1966

Present: Regular: Dobbs, Kerry, Shaw, DeBerry, Halstead, Ring, Weinstein, J. Hansen, Sheppard, Chester, Lavan Torres, J. Barnes, Warde, Reed, B. Allen.

Alternate: Graham, B. Barnes, Porter, Henderson.

Advisory: Mayhew.

Youth Representative: Jones.

Chairman: Chester

AGENDA:

1. International
2. Anti-War Report

1. International

Hansen reported on World Congress documents now available in current International Socialist Review.

Discussion: Ring, Kerry, Shaw, Lavan, Dobbs.

2. Anti-War Report

Report by J. Barnes (See attachment)

Discussion: Torres, Jones, J. Hansen, Shaw, Warde, Sheppard, Ring, Kerry, Henderson, Dobbs, Chester.

Announcement:

Shaw reported telephone report from Leonard in Seattle. At "tendency" meeting April 4 the Kirk-Kaye group voted to adopt a formal declaration of split from SWP. When written report is received, N.C. will be informed of details.

MEETING ADJOURNED.

Antiwar Report by Jack Barnes

The March International Days of Protest were larger and more militant than any held so far and mark another step forward for the antiwar movement. In all areas, with the exception of Berkeley, the numbers mobilized were significantly larger than in the October 16-17 demonstrations. The massive parade in New York was doubled in size. Chicago's demonstration of 6,000 represented a big gain over last October's 300.

Not only were the demonstrations bigger, but there were demonstrations in more areas than in the October Days of Protest. Many small towns had demonstrations.

The Days of Protest organized people on a larger international scale than has been the case before. There were mass demonstrations in many countries. 5,000 demonstrated in Vancouver and 2,700 in Ottawa in the first protests on this scale held in Canada.

The right wing was very unsuccessful in mobilizing opposition to these protests. With the exceptions of Boston and Denver there were no real threats to the demonstrations that we know of. Even in the small towns the demonstrations did not face opposition which interfered with their protests.

The demonstrations reflected the present composition of the movement which is still basically young people, students and radicals. But there were significant changes since the October Days reflecting the growth of antiwar sentiment in the country as a whole. In many areas there was an increase in the number of young people involved relative to the older radicals. There were contingents of "Afro-Americans Against the War" and larger numbers of workers came out. There was a higher degree of participation by organized groups such as the veterans, teachers, professionals, medical students, etc. marching under their own banners.

Large numbers of the demonstrators were not conscious opponents of imperialism or socialists. They came out to demonstrate because they were radicalized on the issue of the war. Thus while the general political understanding of many protesters was quite low, they had a very high level of consciousness on the issue of the war - as reflected in the militant signs and chants, and the almost universal acceptance of the "Bring the Troops Home Now!" signs that were sold.

The Situation in the Antiwar Movement Now

At the Washington convention and after, those who wanted to organize on a national level around the slogan of "Bring the Troops Home" were unable to do so. Events since that time - including the recent Days of Protest - have convinced a growing number of people that this perspective is necessary. Many of the things we fought for at the convention are becoming accepted in the movement as a whole:

1. The recent demonstrations in Saigon and the lessons of the "peace offensive" have made it much more difficult for the right wing of the movement to impose the negotiations theme. Many rank and filers from the DuBois Clubs, and even from the CP and SANE support the slogan of "Bring the Troops Home Now!" Dorothy Healy reflected the pressure to accept this slogan when she ended her talk at a Los Angeles rally with, "Bring the Troops Home Now!"

2. The need for a single issue antiwar movement is clearer than ever. It is the war which is radicalizing people and which is the issue around which massive united actions can be held.

a. This was shown positively in the International Days of Protest which mobilized thousands of new people and in the generally good responses to antiwar committee activities both on and off campus.

b. It was shown negatively by the decline of the Berkeley Vietnam Day Committee and the Berkeley protest movement when many activists concentrated on the Scheer campaign or temporarily turned to the multi-issue Peace-Rights Organizing Committee for Vietnam protest.

Those who were once strongest for organizing the antiwar protest by making the Vietnam Committees multi-issue have been forced to retreat - at least temporarily. They no longer raise the issue in its old crude form. In a recent article in the April 1 New Left Notes Paul Booth, the National Secretary of SDS, gives the impression that the fights over "multi-issueism" in New York and elsewhere were over the question of whether we should concentrate on organizing the "already committed people" as opposed to reaching out to new people. The debate really revolved around the question of which is the best form for the committees to take in order to win the maximum number of people to oppose the war, single-issue or multi-issue.

3. Our views on the organization of the movement are becoming more accepted. Real non-exclusive united fronts of the type we projected nationally in Washington are growing up in more local areas. These groups often include SANE and the pacifist organizations as well as all the radical groups and the Vietnam Committees. The various single-issue Vietnam Committees and Newsletter Organizing Committees have played the biggest role in organizing the withdrawal wing of the movement in local areas.

4. Many of the committees have had bad experiences with bureaucratic leaderships and procedures - either at the hands of the Stalinists or of phoney participatory democrats. Because of these experiences more people see the necessity for such things as elected leaderships, votes on important matters, and defined memberships.

The National Perspective

There is no national organization which has the loyalty of the movement as a whole - or of even its militant wing. Although the press helped the National Coordinating Committee to maintain the fiction that it was responsible for the International Days of Protest, it has become increasingly isolated from the living movement and is viewed by the activists more and more as the representative of a tendency within the movement. It is not a national coordinating committee.

Although many leading activists in the committees belong to the Newsletter it is too small to speak authoritatively for even the entire withdrawal section of the movement. Parade committees such as the ones in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia have gained in prestige because of their role in organizing the Days of Protest and the Berkeley VDC maintains some of its previous authority.

Despite the organizational vacuum on a national level, we must push for the continuation of antiwar actions on a national and international scale. It is not yet clear what forms these can take and what organizations can take the initiative in organizing them. As of now a second Vietnam Day is planned for Berkeley on May 21. The Chicago parade committee has called a demonstration for July 4.

The two general organizational frameworks for the antiwar movement which we fought for at the Washington Thanksgiving Convention - a united front non-exclusive coordinating committee for agreed upon actions, and a national organization of independent committees for immediate withdrawal of American troops - are represented in an embryonic form by the Parade Committees and the Newsletter supporters. But neither are yet really national organizations.

The Perspective of the Newsletter

With the increasing acceptance of the Newsletter's perspective, it has become the spokesman in many areas for the left wing of the movement. Organizing committees of Newsletter supporters are being successfully set up in a growing number of cities. In the present conjuncture the Newsletter should grow and gain in influence. It is expanding its activities so that it can play more of an organizing role than it has before. It helped to initiate the post-Days of Protest demonstrations in solidarity with the Vietnamese demonstrations. A membership card and throw-away brochure have been printed up in preparation for a membership drive. It has organized six different trailblazes to introduce new areas to the Newsletter, and to organize new antiwar committees. The goal of the Newsletter is to have a membership drive bringing in thousands of new members by the end of the summer.

Summer Projects and Peace Candidates

The main competing line with the perspective of the Newsletter of deepening and extending the antiwar protests and propaganda activities is that of the DuBois Clubs, the NCC, and some of the SDS leadership who have projected "summer projects." These projects are to lay the groundwork for "meaningful" electoral work in support of "peace candidates." Articles by Frank Emspack in Peace and Freedom News have pointed to Bob Scheer and Sen. Gaylord Nelson as outstanding Democratic Party candidates, urging support for them and urging antiwar activists to form Committees for Independent Political Action.

Thus far those who have emphasized the support of "peace candidates" have been relatively unsuccessful in channeling antiwar sentiment in this direction. In Chicago the Committee for Independent Political Action has had trouble getting young antiwar activists to do leg work for a Sidney Lens campaign. In Texas, Ronald Dugger who was heralded as a peace candidate has given up his campaign because he believes Johnson is now aware of the feelings of the American people and he doesn't want to jeopardize the chances of the Democratic candidate running for the same office. The Scheer campaign, which originally split the Berkeley VDC, has lost the support of many of the activists it originally attracted as the California Democratic Council has demanded concessions.

The Militant Drive

The Militant subscription drive has come at a perfect time. We are attracting many new people to us because of the deepening Vietnam protest and because of our role in the movement. We need to get the Militant into the hands of these people we have drawn around us and we need to spend time recruiting them to the movement.

April 6, 1966