

POLITICAL BUREAU

Number 1

May 22, 1973

Present: Barnes, Britton, Hansen, Jenness, Jones, Morrison,
Rose, Stone

Visitors: Mirelowitz, Reissner, Scott, Seigle

Chair: Barnes

Agenda: 1. CP Defense Organization
 2. Farmworkers
 3. St. Louis
 4. Membership

1. CP DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

Mirelowitz reported (see attached).

Discussion

2. FARMWORKERS

Britton reported (see attached).

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. ST. LOUIS

Stone reported:

In both St. Louis and Pittsburgh, YSA locals have grown up over the past year which have carried out significant activity. Both locals have requested that the party consider sending in reinforcements to these areas with the perspective of building party branches.

The existence of these locals, which have carried out consistent work, and have roots and contacts in their cities, provides us with an opportunity. Both St. Louis and Pittsburgh are large, industrial cities where it is important to have SWP branches. Pittsburgh is the 11th largest metropolitan area in the country and St. Louis is the 12th. Both have large Black communities as well as important campuses and industry. It is also significant that the CP has been active in these cities for some time.

Given the growth of the party in the past year, we should try to take advantage of these openings. It is proposed that in doing this, we first respond to the request of the St.

Louis comrades, since building in this area would mean opening up a whole new region of the country. Two experienced comrades, Steve C. and Barbara M., have already gone to St. Louis to investigate the possibilities for building the movement there and other comrades have agreed to join them soon. A decision to build a branch in St. Louis should not be made at this time, but these moves would represent an important step in that direction.

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

4. MEMBERSHIP

Jones reported on the recommendation of the Oakland-Berkeley branch to readmit R.C. into membership in the party.

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the Oakland-Berkeley branch to readmit R.C. into membership in the party.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Report on CP Defense Organization

by Geoff Mirelowitz

A "National Conference Against Racist and Political Repression" was held in Chicago May 11-13 to set up a national defense organization. This conference was initiated and organized by the Communist Party (CP). The organization which was set up by the conference is an attempt by the CP to set up a front group which can help them continue the organizational gains they made around the defense of Angela Davis.

Official registration at the conference was given as 769 and a few hundred others attended a rally held on Saturday night. Well over one-half those attending were Black, Puerto Rican or Chicano and a group of about 10-20 activists from the American Indian Movement (AIM) also participated. A considerable number of unaffiliated radicals including many activists in local defense committees attended. Prominent movement figures who played a role in the gathering included Bert Corona, Lee Otis Johnson, Abe Feinglass, Clyde Bellecourt, Anthony Russo and Carl Braden.

The CP and the Young Workers Liberation League (YWLL) had an extremely large fraction and dominated the conference in every way. They were quite open about their participation. CPers such as Angela Davis and Charlene Mitchell played a prominent role in the conference, consistently identifying themselves as CPers. At times the gathering took on the tone of a campaign rally for the CP. For example, during the course of the weekend Henry Winston, National Chairman of the CP, was introduced three times and received standing ovations! One of the largest banners at the front of the conference hall consisted of a quote from Winston. It was clear that one of the purposes the CP had in mind for this gathering was to generate a spirit among their own members of coming out into the open as CPers.

The main purpose the CP had in setting up this conference was to utilize the literally hundreds of defense cases around frameups and victimizations of especially Blacks, Puerto Ricans and Chicanos in this country, to make organizational gains for themselves that would draw around them contacts and recruits for the CP.

Based on this perspective the CP wanted to organize an authoritative conference which would pass a CP-dominated structure. In order to hold the conference together, and accomplish their goal with the least amount of disagreement, they agreed to any proposal for defense activity that came up in the workshops. The workshops passed dozens of proposals that various defense cases would be "top priority" for the new organization. Many of these did not come to the floor of the plenary session due to lack of time.

The CP was able to get its structure proposal passed with a minimum of opposition on the final day of the conference. It established an executive body dominated by CPers and their periphery. The structure also provided for several officers who reflect some of the breadth and authority that the CP was able to gather around the new organization. Selected as Co-Chairpeople are Angela Davis, Bert Corona (CASA, Los Angeles) and Carl Braden (Southern Conference Education Fund). The five Vice Co-Chairpeople are Clyde Bellecourt (AIM), Alfredo Lopez (Carlos Feliciano Defense Committee and Puerto Rican Socialist Party),

Rev. Ben Chavis (Commission of Racial Justice, United Church of Christ), Bill Takahashi (United Defense Against Repression, Los Angeles) and Fred Bell (United Defense of Political Prisoners, Dallas).

Some dissatisfaction did exist among the conference participants. A small group of delegates from primarily nationalist and Pan Africanist organizations, including the Republic of New Africa, National Black Student Union, and the Illinois Committee of Ex-Offenders, put forward an alternate structure proposal. They threatened to walk out when it was defeated. They stated that they felt the CP was trying to dominate the conference and the new organization. However, they were convinced to remain at the conference by Angela Davis.

In addition, representatives of the American Indian Movement came to the conference suspicious as to whether their interests would be represented. After Bellecourt was allowed to make two major speeches and take a collection for Wounded Knee, he seemed to feel that the organization would genuinely take up the repression of Native Americans. He subsequently agreed to be an officer of the new group.

These incidents illustrate some general points in regard to the conference and the organization coming out of it. On the one hand, there is suspicion of the CP among some people who have been active in the radical movement, including people involved in defense committees that the CP has played a role in. However the idea of a broad united front defense organization that would defend the whole movement is a powerful one; there is certainly an objective need for such a formation. Therefore, despite the CP's rotten record of defending the movement (a record which is not widely known and understood) the setting up of this organization had an appeal for the conference participants.

Although the CP was successful in setting up the structure they wanted, and most of the participants left the conference feeling as if it represented a step forward in defending the movement, the CP is faced with problems. The basic problem is that it will become clear over time that this group is not a genuine united front that will seriously defend the movement. Many of the participants probably left the conference with the feeling that a powerful organization with lawyers, money, and a will to organize publicity around their particular case had been set up. When it becomes clear that this organization is not capable of or willing to act on many of the proposals that passed, there will be resentment.

It is unclear exactly what activities the CP has in mind for the organization. In the Daily World they have pinpointed three proposals that came out of the conference:

1. To "expose the political repression drive in North Carolina" centering around the case of Rev. Ben Chavis, one of the Wilmington Ten, who played a major role at the conference.

2. To launch a campaign to repeal the Subversive Activities Control Act, the "No Knock" law of the Anti-Riot Act of 1968, and the Washington Preventive Detention Law, along with abolishing the House Internal Security Committee.

3. To organize local Commissions of Inquiry into Police Crime in cities across the country. The local commissions are

to gather documentation of police crime over the past 10 years and then call a national conference to formulate an indictment.

Behind this proposal may be the idea of acting along the lines of the Committee to Abolish STRESS, in Detroit. Angela Davis made mention of the fight against STRESS in her keynote speech to the conference. We may be able to be involved in local "Commissions of Inquiry into Police Crime," if they are established and established in an open united front manner.

The CP will obviously want to use the group to defend their own members who are under attack as well as attempt to intervene in certain defense efforts in which they have a special interest. Specifically how the organization will develop and what it will do remain to be seen. We should watch for developments in local areas. It is unclear whether or not there will be a drive to set up local chapters of the organization. Reports should be sent into both the YSA and SWP national offices on local developments as they occur in regard to the new organization.

May 22, 1973

Unedited Transcript of Britton's Report on the Farmworkers

I just returned from L.A., San Francisco and Oakland-Berkeley where I laid out some of our initial thinking on the attack on the farmworkers by the Teamsters union. We had decided that it would be a good idea if we would go on a little campaign around this question in the pages of The Militant and key up some speakers to speak on this question.

Frank is now on a little swing of a few branches and YSA locals giving a talk on the labor movement, focusing in on the meaning of this attack for the labor movement.

We also want to probe the possibilities for farmworkers support activity through our contacts in the Chicano movement, the labor movement, on the campuses.

I assume all the comrades heard Fred's remarks at the plenum under the youth report, where he pointed out the significance of the moves by the Teamsters and the need for the YSA nationally to come to the aid of the farmworkers union.

It's especially important for the student movement because of the very important role played by the student movement and the youth radicalization in helping the United Farmworkers Union get established, get their first contracts after a long boycott. The support around the country, and even abroad, for the grape boycott made the big difference in their ability to organize.

An attack like the Teamster attack on the farmworkers, which threatens the very existence of this new union, is an attack on the radicalization and the student movement. It's especially important because of the type of union that's being attacked -- a more socially conscious union. It sees itself more as a social movement like some of the unions in the period of the rise of the CIO. Its slogan "La Causa" symbolizes that. Many of the activists and leaders of the farmworkers had their roots in the civil rights movement in the South. The fact that it's a predominately Chicano union, connected with an oppressed nationality, also lends a great deal of importance to it.

We're going to see more situations like this where we have combined the working-class side of the struggle and the national struggle.

The Teamsters have made crude, racist charges against the farmworkers. Next week's Militant will report a statement by Einor Mohn, who's the head of the Western Conference of the Teamsters. He says, in effect, that Mexicans and Chicanos are inferior and that they're not going to be able to vote for a couple of years after they join the Teamsters union. They won't have any rights, any membership rights.

In the May 2 issue of the Southern California Teamsters paper, they have a kicker on a headline which reads: "Bye, Bye Blackbird." This refers to the black Aztec symbol of the Farmworkers. The Teamster bureaucrats are reveling in the blows they have given to the farmworkers. And they make a telling point in their editorial in this issue that tries to get at their point that the farmworkers are somehow not a real union because they're concerned with broader social questions. They say, "It goes without saying that the history of the Teamsters is as checkered as it is long. Dave Becks and James Hoffas are not soon forgotten. But Teamsters is a bona fide trade union. It is not con-

cerned with revolution. It is a business organization interested in getting as many \$7-a-month memberships as possible. It is willing to give value received by representing its members at the bargaining table." This type of thing permeates their coverage, continually making references to the farmworkers as people who want to do all kinds of things with their union that are not legitimate concerns of a "bona fide trade union."

In 1970 a number of contracts were finally signed by the Farmworkers. They got contracts from a good percentage of the grape growers and they significantly changed the conditions for the farmworkers. Another article we'll have is an interview with some of these farmworkers in the Coachella Valley who explain concretely how their lives had changed once they got a union. Some are people who had been in the fields for 40-50 years. Just very elementary things like not having to pay for water when working in the desert.

What the Teamsters have done is sign sweetheart contracts behind the backs of the farmworkers which replace the UFWU contracts. Various polls have been taken among the farmworkers which indicate that some 80-90% of them, if they were free to, would rather be in the United Farm Workers Union rather than the Teamsters.

So they just signed these sweetheart agreements. The workers are told they're now members of the Teamsters. The Teamsters try to claim that they have superior contracts because they not only get comparable pay to the farmworkers, but they have all kinds of fringe benefits, such as the Mafia pension plan. This was exposed in connection with the Watergate exposures, and supposedly includes medical benefits and so on, provided by this gangster-run outfit. The workers will not get anything out of this at all.

The main difference between the contracts is that the Teamsters contract abolished the hiring hall, which added an element of control over the work conditions and enabled the union -- the workers -- to combat speedup to some degree. The hiring hall helps deal with the various kinds of racism and discrimination of the bosses and labor contractors. This is abolished and they go back to the despicable system of labor contractors, where these individual hustlers get together the farmworkers. They only want the fastest, hardest workers who can make the most money for them. And they contract out with the growers to pick their crops. These contractors are totally unscrupulous types, many of them don't pay the workers when they're done or cheat them out of their pay.

The Teamsters have sent out goons that they're paying over \$60 a day -- whites -- to stand around and harass the United Farm Workers organizers, who called a strike in reaction to the signing of the sweetheart agreements.

The UFW is planning to call all of the workers out of the field in the Coachella Valley in a week or so. Of course, the big breakthrough has been the move by Meany -- a very important development -- offering \$1.6 million for a 3-month period to be used for strike benefits. In many ways that may make possible the first real strike that the farmworkers have been able to organize in terms of being able to put people on strike benefits.

Of course it will be very important -- and the Farm Workers say they have this perspective -- to encourage boycott activity and other strike support activity. That will give a focus for

activity all over the country for support to the farmworkers.

One other factor: the Farmworkers have changed their position on "illegal aliens." This \$1.6 million will pay benefits for all workers that are brought in and go on strike. Some people brought in from Mexico won't know there's a strike going on. If they are talked to by the UFW organizers and given an alternative -- which would have to include financial support -- it would be possible for many of them to be won over.

One thing the Teamsters tried to do is call this just a "jurisdictional dispute." "The workers are just tired of Chavez and want the Teamsters." We want to take on this argument and go after the Teamsters bureaucracy. We'll be doing this in the pages of The Militant. This Teamster bureaucracy is making an all-out assault upon the UFW, undoubtedly the union desired by most of the workers. It's being done in collaboration with the growers. And it's being done in collaboration with Nixon. The Watergate case and the revelations that have come out make it easy to document that.

We want to scandalize the Teamsters bureaucracy and point out that in no way do these so-called labor officials represent working people, including the Teamsters. These people are a blot on the labor movement. All the progressive forces within the labor movement -- including within the Teamsters -- should speak out against this atrocity.

This gives us opportunities to educate on our ideas for the labor movement, our program for labor. The UFW struggle is an example of the fact that if the unions are going to effectively fight in the interests of the workers, they must be allied with struggles for social change.

While I was in California, it became clear that quite a few things have already started happening around the farmworkers issue. The comrades of the YSA report that on many campuses in California there's strike support activity going on, people raising food or money, or having rallies.

Within the labor movement, a number of developments: of course, Meany's statements condemning the Teamsters; I.W. Abel's concurrence; in L.A., the Teamster rank and filers have protested the Teamsters moves.

Some rank and filers showed up at the April 28 action in San Francisco and had signs solidarizing with the farmworkers. Nothing was said from the podium, however, on April 28 about the farmworkers. They indicated support for just about every other strike on the West Coast but nothing was said about the farmworkers and it seemed a little strange. In a meeting after the 28th, one of the leaders of the United Labor Action Committee (ULAC) said that he thought they had been wrong. They had decided to try and avoid the issue so as not alienate the Teamsters locals which had agreed to sponsor the April 28 action. But he thought they were wrong, and apparently that was the consensus of a number of the labor officials who organized that action. They felt they should have come out foursquare behind the United Farm Workers Union.

A number of Teamsters locals have passed resolutions against the Teamster attack. Apparently it was an issue at the Longshore convention that just took place. It's going to be an issue at a California teachers' convention coming up soon.

We discussed the need to explore what our members in unions can do around this question. Resolutions could be passed supporting the UFW through telegrams of support or authorizing contributions to the UFW. Some unions already have farmworker support committees that we might be able to participate in.

One of the most important aspects is the Chicano movement itself. If support for the farmworkers becomes a big crusade within the Chicano movement in places like L.A., it would make a big difference in getting support from the student movement, within the labor movement, in the Black community, etc. So, anywhere we have comrades in the Chicano movement, or contact with the movement, we want to try to convince people to make this their main axis of activity right now. Any Raza Unida Party, for example, that represents anything at all in the direction of independent political action, if they don't pick up on something like this, even though they disagree with Chavez on electoral politics, would amount to sectarian abstentionism.

Since I was in L.A., a week ago, Harry and Miguel went out to Coachella Valley. The UFW is having a big rally this weekend and they're going back out for that. The rally is supposed to kick-off the effort to get everyone out of the fields. There's something like 300 on strike and 1800 still in the fields in this particular area. Apparently, when the harvest is ready -- which will be around the first week of June -- the growers import quite a few workers from Mexico or big California cities. So that will be the crucial showdown there.

In the coming weeks The Militant will be giving special, expanded coverage to this struggle. Special efforts should be made to sell these issues, in the Chicano community, to unionists we're trying to work with around this question, to students where schools are still open.