

C O P Y C O P Y C O P Y

REPORT ON THE CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
TO END THE WAR IN VIETNAM (In Washington, D.C. from Nov. 25-28, 1965)

From the National Executive of the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America

Most of this report will necessarily focus on the struggle over structure which dominated the entire conference. This struggle reflected the attempt that was made by a minority faction around YSA to withdraw the more than one hundred independent Viet Nam committees out of a broad National Coordinating Committee where each committee retains full autonomy and equal voting representation, and to reorganize the independent committees into a narrow, self-isolating organization. It is important that this discussion be prefaced and framed by a brief analysis of the forces represented at this meeting and the trend they represent in the American peace movement.

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The reasons given by the minority faction for the need for a different type of organization seemed valid to many delegates at first in that they reflected legitimate concerns of many independent groups. It was argued that the National Coordinating Committee was dominated by national organizations; that a single independent Viet Nam committee could have no real say in policy-making. Therefore, it was proposed that a separate organization be established which could express the feelings of local committees, which would be completely dominated by them, and which could meet their needs. This would be a membership organization which would be organized at the convention.

At the same time, the minority faction said they wanted a National Coordinating Committee -- an umbrella organization for the peace movement which would coordinate activity for the entire movement. This Committee would include every organization from SANE and Turn Toward Peace to the YSA, and would include the new organization of independents as a member.

In fact, the claim that the NCC was dominated by national organizations was untrue. 68 out of 73 steering committee seats were controlled by independent committees. There were 5 votes for national organizations, while the independents had 68. Therefore, national domination could not be the real issue.

Likewise, the charge that independent committees were denied a voice in policy making was not valid. As the NCC was structured originally, each local committee had an equal voice in policy making, one vote, the same as any other local or national organization. And yet, they were permitted the greatest degree of independence to protest the war in whatever way they thought best, considering local conditions, etc.

In actuality, the proposed new organization did away with the

independence of the local committees -- they would now be part of a national organization, bound by a common set of principles, with policy being determined not by local groups but by a national leadership. What was actually happening was that an attempt was being made to consolidate the new anti-war movements around a single, left political trend. What was actually being proposed was not an organization of the independents, but only of a small number of independent committees; not meeting the need of coordinating activity between a variety of different kinds of independent groupings, but splitting the more radical independents away from the others. What would have emerged would have been a left sectarian organization that would have isolated the new radical forces in the peace movement, rather than allowing them to work more closely with the whole peace movement in finding new ways to reach the American people.

The proposed new organization contained in its statement of purpose two political requirements: 1) U.S. aggression deprives the Vietnamese people of their right to self determination. 2) A demand for immediate withdrawal now!

The majority of independents at the convention, even though they agreed with the statements, did not feel their committees could operate successfully around those principles.

What is really needed is an NCC which could service all Viet Nam committees, no matter what their level or approach to the war. As it was (and is) structured, it can provide forms for the broad, as well as the radical, sections of the peace movement and can find ways in which they can work together.

Though early in the convention it became clear to us that the minority faction was using the question of structure to promote divisive maneuvers, we did not want to be drawn into the position of opening a factional fight by publicly exposing them. Our intention was to speak with the independents about the problem, to participate in the workshops fully emphasizing programmatic development, and attempt to aid others in defining and resolving the problem. Unfortunately we were hamstrung by a paucity of concrete proposals. To accomplish this we called a series of DBC caucuses for local and national members and other interested individuals. These caucuses were a great aid in providing clarity and direction for those who participated. Though these were of great benefit and did much to improve our relations with key people they were quickly thrown together, informally structured, and the leadership was little better prepared to help than the membership. The full effects of the caucuses were not felt because the DBC members did not take the caucus discussions out of the caucuses to the independents in the convention. While the leadership could have spoken out more in the sessions, the membership could have played a better role in bringing clarity and understanding to the independents who in the main were confused and demoralized by the tactics of the minority faction.

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The significance of the convention is that the dominant forces in the radical section of the peace movement became more convinced of the need for unity and breadth in the peace movement with strong opposition to the trend toward isolation. This was a move in the opposite direction, toward finding the means to work with all those forces who oppose the war no matter what their level of understanding might be. The convention is now history, and we must face the problems created by it and around it by others at home. We must seek to build the strongest and broadest NCC feasible.

(Note: Sections of this report were omitted to save time and space. Omissions are indicated by .... The sections which are included contain the main points of the report.)