

RESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, No. 7, May 3, 1967

Present: NC: Barnes, Chester, DeBerry, Dobbs,
A. Hansen, J. Hansen, Lavan, Reed, Ring,
Shaw, Torres, Vernon.

Alternates: Graham, Horowitz.

Youth Representative: Jones.

Visitors: Bolduc, Brundy, Dawson, Jenness, Reissner, Singler,
Stapleton, Waters.

Chairman: DeBerry.

AGENDA: Antiwar Report.

ANTIWAR REPORT

Barnes reported. (See attached.)

Discussion: Horowitz, Ring, J. Hansen, Barnes, Lavan,
Stapleton, Jones, Shaw, Chester, Dobbs, DeBerry,
Vernon.

Meeting adjourned.

ANTIWAR REPORT by Jack Barnes

At the time of the last report March 6 we outlined our general tasks this way: "All of these new developments and our consideration of the general tasks and problems that will face us following April 15, re-emphasize our key tasks in the next five weeks of preparation: 1) the building of student participation in the movement as an independent and strong force; 2) maximizing the small but important breakthrough into the labor movement; and 3) bringing about the further participation of the Negro movement. These tasks are the key both to making this Mobilization qualitatively bigger than the previous ones and to giving us the best possible situation within the movement to work after the current coalition is hit by the severe stresses likely after April 15."

The massive character of the April 15 Mobilization, drawing 300,000 to half a million in New York alone, made it qualitatively different from any previous demonstration against the war, or in fact, any previous American political mobilization of any kind. It was a reflection of the great depth of the antiwar sentiment in the country, the unpopularity of the war, and the growth of a radicalization of a layer of the population, especially the youth. The real impact of the April 15 Mobilization has not yet been absorbed, particularly by our allies in the antiwar movement.

The most important fact about the composition of the demonstration was the overwhelming majority of youth who made up this mass. These were not only college age youth, but tens of thousands of high schoolers as well. At the April 15 demonstration we had the largest participation yet from the black population, and the three best known Negro leaders in the country, King, McKissick, Carmichael, spoke at the New York rally.

The smallest breakthrough was made in the labor movement, but it was still significant. Several important trade union figures spoke; there were a number of large locals, especially on the West Coast, that formally endorsed the Mobilization. There will be further results of the April 15th Mobilization on the labor movement. The Worker reported that the Trade Union Division of SANE in Chicago, by a split decision of the membership, voted to go after the ranks of their locals, not just functionaries as was the previous case, to join.

Finally, although G.I.'s themselves did not participate in any significant numbers in the demonstration, recent indications are that there is an increasing sentiment among them of opposition to the war. The number of civil liberties cases, refusals to obey one type of order or another, etc., continues to rise.

And of course the concrete reaction of individual G.I.'s at Fort Hood to Howard Petrick's case. It was noteworthy that a small contingent of Vietnam war veterans participated.

The massive size and character of the April 15 Mobilization was not only a reflection of the growing antiwar sentiment; it also had an effect on the entire social fabric of the country. New York comrades keep telling me of the number of people they meet in the subways, elevators, at their shops (and campuses) who participated in the demonstration and who they didn't know opposed the war. Hundreds of thousands took part in their first political action of this sort. It dominated the TV press as never before; and its impact has affected everything from the Pulitzer Prizes and letters to editors columns to the debates in Congress since April 15.

Its impact was strengthened by the right wing's fiasco on May 1. They attempted to mobilize 150,000 in a VFW "Loyalty Day" parade in New York -- and they got out 5,000. New York's Mayor Lindsay used his address at the VFW rally to stress the constitutional right of free speech, and a few days later reversed the decision of the New York Parks Commissioner who had ruled that Central Park could not be used in the future for demonstrations like the April 15th one.

Martin Luther King's participation in the demonstration and his refusal to back down from his position against the war, coupled with Muhammed Ali's refusal to be inducted into the army, has kept the question of the black population's relation to the war in the press day after day.

Division Within Ruling Class

In some respects, the most important aftermath of April 15th is the division within the ruling class itself which has both sharpened and come more in the open than ever before. This has, from the beginning, been a basic condition for the growth of the antiwar movement.

LBJ could not have timed more perfectly his heavy handed move with Westmoreland, and the handful of Senatorial "doves", sensitive about their own right to dissent, counter-attacked with stress on the constitutional right of dissent. In this context, yesterday's Republican Party "White Paper" on Vietnam made a large impact. It further opened the door for a Republican opposition to the "left" of Johnson in 1968, and sharpened further the controversy within the ruling class. The initial Democratic response could not have been better as Senator Sparkman attacked the Republicans in exactly the same terms as he used against the antiwar movement. He said they were giving hope and comfort to Ho Chi Minh by making him think he could win in the U.S. what he could not win on the battle front.

International Impact

The international impact of April 15 is a little more difficult to assess as yet, but a couple of things are fairly clear. One is the tremendous aid to our own co-thinkers who are able to use the American antiwar movement as a lever to organize antiwar actions in their own countries. In France, the National Vietnam Committee decided last weekend to try to organize a demonstration of 100,000 in Paris this spring, as a direct result of the April 15th Mobilization here.

Secondly, it seems to have made a significant impact on the Cubans, strengthening their line of revolutionary struggle and helping to shift their views further on the revolutionary potential within the U.S. In his April 20 speech Castro spent five minutes outlining the revolutionary meaning of the April 15 Mobilization. Comrades probably noted the shift in Che's article also.

Within the antiwar movement itself, April 15th was a blow against both our conservative opponents in the antiwar movement and the ultra-lefts, both of whom were swamped by the massive turnout.

It was a vindication of a two year fight for the line of single-issue, non-exclusive, mass mobilizations as the main weapon of struggle against the administration policy in Vietnam, and a blow to the concept that radicals and left wing socialists constitute a narrowing factor in building such actions, scaring off "broader" elements.

It also constituted a refutation of the ultra-left critics who held the theory of a shrinking peace movement due to the capitulation of the left wing to the more conservative forces in the antiwar coalition. Once more, it proved that large-scale anti-imperialist actions in the streets are our main weapon against both these enemies.

The Aftermath

As in the aftermath of every demonstration the right wing of the antiwar movement is again attempting to set up its own forms and structures to draw the antiwar activists into their own sphere of influence. It is important to separate out three different components of the right wing's moves: the Negotiations Now Citizens Campaign, the Vietnam Summer Committee, and the role of Martin Luther King.

The sponsors of the Negotiations Now Committee are basically a collection of conservative, social democratic-oriented clergy and religious groups who opposed the April 15th Mobilization, plus the Socialist party leadership, especially Norman Thomas. The most recent issue of New America had a large lead article on the campaign.

It represents an attempt by the right wing forces which have consistently resisted all attempts to build the antiwar coalition and especially opposed all mass mobilizations, to take advantage of the mass sentiment against the war. Their political program however, calling on north Vietnam and the NLF to respond immediately to the call for negotiations, will effectively cut them off from links to most left wing youth.

The Vietnam Summer campaign is the project of the more youthful wing of the Conference for New Politics and old guard conservatives in SDS, and represents an attempt to essentially buy off the antiwar activists, and lay the groundwork for 1968 "independent political action, inside and outside the Democratic party." In their printed leaflet "Teach Out" they state: "We propose a Vietnam summer. We urge that students consider repeating the Mississippi Summer precedent -- this time not by going South, but by staying in their own university areas to organize the community. Door-to-door in the South worked -- but it took time. Now we need to look at problems right at home. If we work this summer, by the fall we will have a solid base. We can hit hard in September to turn out a mass movement which is prepared to blast a major opening in 1968."

"Phase III: Political Action. Once we have covered the community map, block by block, and have a substantial number of volunteer groups, the really crucial organizing can go forward -- both to establish solid bases in the community and to focus sharply on 1968: local candidates (with a long running start); Presidential and other primaries; deeply based multi-issue community organization."

Although they claim to have a budget of \$200,000-\$700,000 (the figure varies) to put antiwar activists on the pie, indications are that they have nowhere near that amount, and how much of a threat it will be to the antiwar movement remains to be seen. We assume it will depend to a large degree on the summer and fall programs the Student Mobilization projects and the relations between it and the CNP campaign.

King's role in both of these projects has been to lend his name and prestige to the press conferences that kicked them off, but to refuse to formally sponsor either, just as he refused to formally sponsor the Spring Mobilization. At this point, he seems to have decided to remain formally aloof from all antiwar organizations, give his blessing to any major antiwar initiative, biding his time.

Washington Conference

Our main counter within the antiwar movement to these moves by the right is the Washington Conference of the Spring Mobilization Committee, scheduled for May 20-21. There our central task will be to establish a date and place for a massive, non-exclusionary, national and international action in the fall, and set up a democratic coalition structure, similar to that which came out of Cleveland which will enable such an action to be built.

Our major problem will be dealing with those who are opposed to mass actions under almost all conditions. This has been the real dividing line at every one of these conferences, much more so than withdrawal vs. negotiations. There are a large number of groups and individuals who favor negotiations as a political line who have supported and built each mass action. Those who have not are the ones represented symbolically by the sponsors of the Negotiations Now Committee.

In addition to the general educational job we will have to do on the meaning and accomplishments of mass actions against the war, we will also have to take care of some of the fears of our allies, satisfying them we are not trying to impose a withdrawal line on the entire coalition, and that we are not trying to pack the conferences or committees set up. We want from this coalition only one thing -- a definite date and place for a fall action. And this is the only thing which gives a coalition of this breadth any basis for existence.

One lesson in particular has come home more and more in the course of our work in the antiwar movement. We should never assume that those who disagree with us at some stage are our opponents. April 15th was proof that many are learning from the experiences of building the antiwar movement, especially large sections of the youth and the black population, and are beginning to agree with our basic approach.

A problem has been the post April 15th malfunctioning and malfunctioning of most of the national offices. In the last report we said, "... the destabilizing effect of Muste's death on this coalition has been neutralized for the moment although his absence has made the practical organizational and financial problems of the Mobilization Committee more difficult to solve and has put a cloud over the post-April 15 regroupment for the next step forward." This projection has been very closely borne out, and we now feel the effects much more deeply, as there is no one with Muste's stature, his feel for the mass movement, and his feel for the delicate consultative and consensus character of this action coalition. Thus various projects and maneuvers have caused some serious problems for the functioning of the coalition.

West Coast

On the West Coast the problems are generally of the same nature, but there the CP is the major block. As after every demonstration, before the decision has been made for the next mass action, the coalition leadership faces a perspective vacuum. Without a projected mass action, there is no basis for the coalition -- and it becomes prey to any leader who has a gimmick or wants to start a new peace/civil rights organization.

We are also faced with the standard post demonstration "politics of despair," which sets in after each successful mobilization, as the pacifist and/or individual action advocates begin their whimpering. This is a problem that is accentuated

by the class collaborationist perspective of the CP youth forces which are influenced by its line, sees no perspective of utilizing these mass actions to build any form of genuine independent political force based on the labor movement, but instead sees them beginning and ending simply as pressure actions on the Democratic party.

This post-demonstration situation is in many ways no different from the previous ones, except that the stakes are somewhat higher, the opposition is better organized, and our allies are more numerous.

We must keep in mind that one of the effects of the broadening of the movement is the conservatizing effects of the movement as a whole that result. The leaders and secondary leaders from labor and civil rights come into the antiwar movement for their own reasons, and they have no desire to see the independent logic of anti-administration mass actions carried out to the end.

Labor Movement

As yet, the support from the labor movement has been the result of cracks and dribbles from the bottom, not a large scale, organized move from the top. This has minimized the conservatizing effects. No large, significant section of the labor leadership has come in to date, but at some stage they may do so as the massive proportions of the antiwar sentiment become even more apparent, and this will reinforce the conservative trends. We cannot predict how long it will be, or how they will make their move, but the way and the timing of their move will be very important. As the size of the antiwar movement grows, the conservative forces will tend to have more support, and this makes the role of the BTHN wing, the Student Mobilization Committee, even more important in our fight to prevent exclusion of the radical forces, and to preserve an independent initiative for them.

Student Mobilization Committee

The weight and role of the student, radical, withdrawal wing of the April 15th Mobilization was the backbone that organized a significant section of the demonstrators. It is the key large organized carrier of the withdrawal line in the action coalition in the coming period. Unlike the Spring Mobilization Committee, the Student Mobilization Committee has a genuine programmatic basis for existence. It is a coalition, but not based solely on mass actions. It has a minimal program based on the three points of immediate withdrawal of troops, no campus complicity with the war, and an end of the draft.

May 13-14 Conference

At the May 13-14 Conference in Chicago of the Student Mobilization Committee we will be pushing for four things: the reaffirmation of the withdrawal position; the maintenance of

a non-exclusive, democratic structure; a meaningful summer program that will enable the SMC to maintain itself, broaden its forces, and increase its authority; and a concrete decision on the date, place and character of a fall mass action that can be taken to the Spring Mobilization Conference the following weekend in Washington as a definite proposal. The entire Midwest and East Coast youth locals are being mobilized for both conferences.

In many ways the relationship of forces at Chicago is the reverse of the situation at the NCC Washington Conference in November, 1965. It is we who are entrenched, with deep roots in the antiwar movement, and it is our line of withdrawal, and mass action against the war which is the established program. We are even stronger than five months ago at the last Chicago conference, as it will be difficult for the CP to reverse the withdrawal line or oppose a fall action. There is no evidence that they will make a major effort to oppose either of these. They are most likely to make their biggest fight on structure.

Because of our and the independent militants strength in any democratically organized structure, the CP may try to force through a structure which gives maximum weight to the right-wing forces on a national steering committee. This would mean that at crucial turning points their positions would have more weight. However, it will be extremely difficult for them to do this.

There is no evidence that they might try to split the conference on this or any other question and we will do everything possible to keep them in. Their participation has been one of the key strengths of the Student Mobilization Committee and we want to deepen and extend our original projection of drawing them closer, and taking advantage of the opportunity to develop further a united front mode of work with their youth circles. This is made all the more important by the approach of the 1968 elections when we will want contact with the maximum number of their youth milieu especially to counterpose the SWP presidential campaign to that of the two capitalist war parties.

The Chicago Student Conference is not planned as an antiwar cadre conference. It will be a large conference of perhaps as many as 1,000 activists who will lay out their course of action for the next few months.

Johnson's Escalation

The objective situation we face is that of a decision by the Johnson administration to launch another large scale escalation in the war itself. There is almost an element of desperation involved in this decision, as Johnson too is looking toward 1968 and sees no way out short of a military victory before then. His decision is to increase the military punishment of the Vietnamese. This is all the more ominous given the signs of increased Soviet complicity -- the relaxation of ten-

sions in Germany as the U.S. transfers troops to South East Asia, the absence of any response to the escalation, the conciliatory tone of the recent speeches by the Soviet leaders, etc.

However, this new escalation takes place in the context of deepening opposition in the U.S., an increasingly serious division in the ruling class itself, and the continuing economic and social effects of the war on labor and the Negro population.

Conjunctural Tasks

Our approach to this political conjuncture must be based on essentially four things:

(1) To nail down and carry off another non-exclusive mass action to End the War in Vietnam in the fall; that is, to carry off the form of large scale independent political action open to us at this time.

(2) To concentrate more space in our press and publications to both polemical articles dealing with our opponents in the antiwar movement and to pedagogical articles dealing with the basic problems confronting the antiwar movement, including the withdrawal question and the imperialist character of the war.

(3) To take a more aggressive posture to recruitment from the milieu we have drawn around us in the antiwar work.

(4) As the 1968 presidential campaign approaches, it becomes more and more important to plan a propaganda campaign, which our candidates and press will promote around a clear class struggle program for the left wing of the mass movement -- one that ties together the vanguards of the Negro, antiwar, and labor movements.

May 3, 1967