

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, No. 51, July 6, 1967

Present: Barnes, DeBerry, Dobbs, Halstead, Hansen, Novack, Shaw, Sheppard, Jones.

Chairman: Hansen.

AGENDA:

1. Resolutions.
2. Swabeck Suspension.
3. International.
4. Antiwar Report.

1. RESOLUTIONS

Novack reported that draft of political resolution and resolution on independent black political action will be ready for P.C. discussion next week.

2. SWABECK SUSPENSION

Dobbs reported that in poll of National Committee a 78 percent majority* of the regular members voted to approve the June 22 P.C. motion recommending that Swabeck be suspended forthwith from membership in the party because of his indisciplined and disloyal conduct. (See attachment No. 1 for tabulation of N.C. poll.)

(*While the minutes were being prepared Torres' vote for the P.C. motion was received, raising the majority for the motion to 82 percent.)

Reading of June 13 letter from Joel, June 27 letter from Cannon, June 26 letter from Alvin and remarks by various N.C. members in submitting their votes in the poll. (See attachment No. 2.)

Discussion: Hansen, Dobbs, Shaw, Barnes, Novack, Sheppard.

Motion:

To send the following notice to Comrade Swabeck:

You are hereby notified that the National Committee has suspended you from membership in the party. The action has been taken through a poll of the N.C. on a June 22 motion of the Political Committee, a copy of which is attached.

As provided by the party constitution, your suspension remains subject to final decision of the party convention, but in the meantime you are barred from all rights as a member, except the right of appeal to the national convention from the disciplinary action taken against you.

Carried.

Motion:

To send the following notice to the party branches:

By vote of a 78 percent majority of the regular members, the National Committee has suspended Comrade Arne Swabeck from membership in the party. The action has been taken through a poll of the N.C. on a June 22 motion of the Political Committee. Copies of the P.C. motion, along with the Swabeck letters of June 2 to G. Healy and June 5 to F. Dobbs, are attached.

As provided by the party constitution, the suspension of Comrade Swabeck -- who is an advisory member of the N.C. -- remains subject to final decision of the party convention, but in the meantime he is barred from all rights as a member, except the right of appeal to the national convention from the disciplinary action taken against him.

A review of the Swabeck case by the P.C., together with opinions expressed by N.C. members who have disagreed on various grounds with the P.C. motion, will be published in the party discussion bulletin.

Carried.

Motion: To adopt the following statement concerning Comrade Cannon's letter of June 27:
(See attachment No. 3.)

Carried.

Motion: To prepare a review of the Swabeck case for publication in the party discussion bulletin.

Carried.

General agreement that Dobbs be assigned to prepare draft of review.

Hansen indicated he will submit some preliminary written comments, especially with reference to international aspects of the Swabeck case. (See attachment No. 4.)

3. INTERNATIONAL

Hansen reported that United Secretariat document on Middle East situation will run in press service.

4. ANTIWAR REPORT

Barnes and Halstead reported.

Discussion: Novack, Dobbs, Jones, Halstead.

Meeting adjourned.

Results of National Committee Poll on Suspension of Swabeck

Vote of regular members on June 22 P.C. motion recommending suspension:

<u>For</u> (23)		<u>Against</u> (1)
Breitman	Reed	Trainor
DeBerry	Ring	
Dobbs	Shaw	
Halstead	Sheppard	<u>Not voting</u> (1)
A. Hansen	Novack	
B. Hansen	Weinstein	Alvin
J. Hansen	Simon	
Himmel	Harris	
Kerry	J. Barnes	<u>Vote not received</u> (3)
Lavan	Vernon	
F. Lovell	Johnson	Chester
Torres		Coover
		Sharon

P.C. motion carried by 82 percent majority

Consultative Vote

Alternate members:

<u>For</u> (13)		<u>Against</u> (0)
S. Lovell	Spangler	<u>Vote not received</u> (6)
Leonard	Herman	
Kirsch	Spilman	Feingold
Camejo	Britton	G. Jones
Edwards	Henderson	Scheer
Montauk	Horowitz	Stevens
B. Barnes		Graham
		Taplin

Advisory members:

<u>For</u> (1)	<u>Abstain</u> (1)
Dunne	Liang
<u>Against</u> (1)	<u>Vote not received</u> (2)
Cannon	Mayhew
	Swabeck

(C O P Y)

June 13, 1967

Ed Shaw
N.Y., N.Y.

Dear Ed,

The NCers met last night to discuss the Swabeck letter. Present were Coover, Edwards, Jones, Alvin, Taplin, Hansen, Britton, Cannon, Karsner and Ferguson (visiting from Cleveland).

I began the discussion by reporting for Tom on the phone call from Farrell of last Friday and possible disciplinary actions by the PC. I reported Tom's feeling that the minimum that should be done be to suspend Arne.

All those who spoke agreed that writing to Healy was a breach of discipline and that if the only considerations were the Los Angeles ones (Arne's strength here, the branch situation, etc.) disciplinary action should be taken. Some were for criticizing or condemning his action by censure or other less severe means.

Cannon, Milt and Oscar spoke for consulting Art Sharon and the English comrades before taking any action because they felt that the letter was a deliberate provocation designed to create a scandal that would take the heat off Healy for the Robertson and Tate episodes. The "scandal" would be that the SWP expelled one of its founding members just before their pre-convention discussion and on the eve of a discussion on China in the International.

The "educational" value of not taking disciplinary action against Arne was also raised by Jim and others with several precedents from our history and the history of the Russian party.

It was my opinion that the "educational" question can cut both ways and that while it is sometimes correct to not take action as soon as a violation of discipline occurs, especially if the minority is a large one and the party is in a discussion of the political differences, it can also be of "educational" value to take disciplinary action when there is a flagrant violation of party discipline as in the case before us, where the Swabeck minority has been defeated politically and reduced to a small handful and there have been a whole series of formal violations of discipline.

Jim pointed out that the Constitution provides that an NCer can only be suspended by a 2/3 vote of the NC, which in this case would assume a mail vote.

I spoke for the strongest possible disciplinary action by the PC. Bea was also for strong action.

It was generally agreed that the English co-thinkers should be consulted, but that was the end of the agreement. When the question came up of reporting the sense of our discussion to the N.O., I suggested that since there was not a consensus on how to proceed, that each comrade who had strong feelings should write or call the N.O. At that point Jim said he would call and report. He also said then that he was against any disciplinary action at this time.

S/ Joel

(C O P Y)

June 27, 1967
Los Angeles, Calif.

To The Political Committee
New York, New York

Dear Comrades:

I am opposed to the motion adopted by the Political Committee recommending the immediate suspension of Comrade Swabeck.

As you have been previously informed, I favor a different approach to the problem raised by Swabeck's letter to Healy. I explained my views to Art Sharon during his brief visit here, and I presume that he communicated it to you. Also, Joel showed me a copy of his letter to the National Office in which he reported the discussion which took place at a meeting of the N.C. members here.

I consider it rather unfortunate that these divergent views were not incorporated in the P.C. minutes of the meeting which decided to recommend the suspension of Swabeck -- so that the other members of the National Committee would have a chance to consider and discuss them before casting their vote on the ballot sent to them together with the P.C. minutes.

My approach to the problem can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Since Swabeck's letter to Healy deals with two questions of great world importance -- Chinese developments and our policy and tactics in the struggle against the Vietnam War -- which are now properly up for discussion in the international movement as well as in our party, any action of a disciplinary nature which we may propose should be closely coordinated with international comrades, particularly the comrades in England, and carried out in agreement with them.

2. Since we are just now opening up our pre-convention discussion, where the questions raised by Swabeck will properly have their place on the agenda, it would be rather awkward to begin the discussion by suspending the one articulate critic of the party's positions and actions. A more effective procedure, in my opinion, would be simply to publish Swabeck's letters (to Healy and Dobbs) with comprehensive and detailed answers.

If past experience is any guide, the education of the new generations of the party and the consolidation of party opinion would be better served by this procedure. Examples in favor of this subordination of disciplinary measures to the bigger aims of political education have been richly documented in the published records of the fight against the petty bourgeois opposition in 1939-40, and in the internal discussion bulletins dealing with the Goldman-Morrow affair in 1944-5-6.

3. In the course of discussion, during a number of years of opposition to party policy, Swabeck has managed to isolate himself to the point where the immediate effect of the party's reaction to this new provocation will not be very great one way or the other. But the long range effect on the political education of the party, and its preparation to cope with old problems in new forms, can be very great indeed.

It is most important that our party members, and the international movement, see the leadership once again in continuation of its great tradition -- acting with cool deliberation to serve our larger political aims without personal favoritism or hostility.

Fraternally,

S/ James P. Cannon

JPC:bh

(C O P Y)

Los Angeles, Calif.
June 26, 1967

Political Committee

Dear Comrades:

I have your letter of June 22nd requesting a vote on the motion to suspend Arne Swabeck.

It is difficult for me to vote on this motion without knowing exactly why the PC is proceeding as it is. In addition you must have information in N.Y. on the views of most of the N.C. people in this area which are different from those of the P.C.

Under these circumstances it seems to me that it would be preferable for the P.C. to send an explanation of its motivation to the N.C. members in the field and to answer the point of view held by those comrades in this area who have a different position. Since there are differences among us, it would be best to discuss these and try to reach agreement on what to do. I do not know of any reason for haste in moving against Swabeck. As you know, his group is very small and not a factor of any kind in the L.A. branch, to say nothing of the party as a whole.

You will recall that we adopted, by agreement among ourselves, a certain course in the Kirk case about a year and a half ago. This turned out to be the better way to procede and his faction left the party on its own decision, in a clean break which did not cause a ripple in our organization.

For your information I would like to summarize my own position on the Swabeck case. I consider his letter to Healy a flagrant violation of discipline and a disloyal act. What he has done should be condemned by the P.C. and the facts in the case made available to the entire membership. The entire matter should be referred to the coming convention for appropriate action, which in my opinion, should be expulsion from the party.

However, I think a summary suspension at this time, just prior to the opening of our pre-convention discussion and the international discussion on the Chinese question would be a tactical error which could play into the hands of Healy. If we suspend Swabeck now, Healy could turn the discussion of his internal regime into a discussion on ours and

turn the attention of his own present followers away from examining his methods to an examination of ours. Instead of focusing attention on the Tate case, he could call attention to the Swabeck case.

We have nothing to lose by taking our time to take formal disciplinary steps against Swabeck. We should make our decision, not on purely formal constitutional grounds but on what favors us politically.

The timing of Swabeck's letter and the way in which he made a copy of it available to the P.C. suggests that it was done in such a way as to prevent the recent plenum from taking it up. This is unfortunate from the standpoint that it prevents us from considering the steps to be taken in a meeting. Of course, it would be unrealistic to have another plenum just to settle whatever differences there are among us on this point now.

As a substitute, I suggest that we have an exchange of views among ourselves in the following manner: The P.C. send a summary of its thinking to the N.C. members in the field and invite their comments and opinions. When these are in they could be distributed to the N.C. Then, if the P.C. wishes to proceed to a vote on its motion to suspend, it can go ahead. This procedure would have the advantage of giving full information to those comrades in the field who now have only the Swabeck letters and the P.C. motion but do not have the motivation for the P.C. motion.

Fraternally,

S/ . Milton Alvin

Remarks by N.C. members in poll on Swabeck suspension

J. Johnson: This action is a planned one by Swabeck. For what purpose I do not know, for in the long run there is little he can gain from it but being cut off from the party.

A. Harris: I always feel a reluctance to take a measure against a political opponent (I so classify Swabeck, of course) that the opponent wants and expects. For this reason I opposed suspending Fraser two plenums ago -- and I think not suspending Fraser at that time was correct. But in Swabeck's case, his actions are so flagrant, so against the Party, that he must be suspended. I can't see any other course.

J. Simon: If the poll should receive less than the 2/3 vote necessary to pass, or if, on the basis of additional information or considerations of international needs, the motion should be modified, I feel a motion of censure should be passed to characterize Comrade Swabeck's for the breach of discipline and violation of party rules that it is, so that there is no precedent provided for the idea that we have one set of rules for some and another for Comrade Swabeck.

L.P.Trainor: No doubt, Swabeck is in the wrong. The question is how to proceed during the International discussion re this matter. Should we take organizational steps against a completely isolated individual -- thus throwing a fog over the discussion -- or should we let the whole of the international co-thinkers get acquainted with his ideas?

I believe during a discussion period we should "bend over backwards" to a minority. We have always proceeded in that fashion -- through Oehler, Shachtman, Morrow, etc. We have nothing to lose -- and a lot of education to gain, particularly among the younger comrades.

Don't let our enemies claim we settle political differences through organizational means.

J. Liang: Suspension of Comrade Swabeck from party membership would be too precipitate and too severe. Most judges wisely refrain from imposing a maximum sentence, especially for a first offense.

Comrade Swabeck is a founding member of the party and of the Trotskyist movement. He has spent a lifetime in the fight for socialism and is rightly respected for his record. This dictates restraint.

Assuredly, it is necessary to uphold party discipline and to discountenance disloyal acts. But the need in this case can be met adequately by a lesser sanction.

J. Liang, cont'd: I urge, as an alternative to the PC proposal, a vote of censure, coupled with an admonition not to repeat.

Duncan (Control Commission member): Since my vote is only consultative and cannot affect the out come of the N.C. voting on this question, I have decided, after much thought, to defer any full statement of motivation and argumentation until the occasion arises -- presumably at the Convention -- for a full discussion and interchange of opinions on this issue.

Suffice to say that I consider the action proposed by the P.C. motion for suspension of Swabeck, to be untimely.

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Statement by Political Committee

In his June 27 letter to the Political Committee, Comrade Cannon wrote: "I explained my views to Art Sharon during his brief visit here, and I presume that he communicated it to you. Also, Joel showed me a copy of his letter to the National Office in which he reported the discussion which took place at a meeting of the N.C. members here. I consider it rather unfortunate that these divergent views were not incorporated in the P.C. minutes of the meeting which decided to recommend the suspension of Swabeck -- so that the other members of the National Committee would have a chance to consider and discuss them before casting their vote on the ballot sent to them together with the P.C. minutes."

It did not seem to the Political Committee that impressions of Comrade Cannon's views, relayed at second hand by Comrades Sharon and Joel, constituted a valid basis for purporting to communicate those views to the National Committee. In addition, we noted that Comrade Joel's June 13 letter, commenting about the discussion among N.C. members in Los Angeles, said: "When the question came up of reporting the sense of our discussion to the N.O., I suggested that since there was not a consensus on how to proceed, that each comrade who had strong feelings should write or call the N.O. At that point Jim said he would call and report."

Nearly two weeks elapsed between the time the Los Angeles N.C. members were first notified of Comrade Swabeck's indisiplined and disloyal action and the date on which the P.C. adopted its motion recommending that he be suspended from party membership. During that period we heard nothing directly from Comrade Cannon. We, therefore, assumed either that he was still considering the matter, or that he was waiting to express his views in the poll of the National Committee, as he has now done.

Adopted July 6, 1967.

Statement by J. Hansen on the Suspension of Swabeck

The response on the question of suspending Arne Swabeck from membership shows that there is virtually unanimous agreement that his action of taking his differences outside the party and solidarizing with an enemy of the party was undisciplined and disloyal. This testifies to the homogeneity of the view of the National Committee on the principle that is involved.

The disagreements on the motion to suspend Swabeck are all based on tactical grounds. These include questions about the severity of the action and its timing, the possibility of missing an opportunity to further the education of the ranks in handling a matter like this, the risk of adversely affecting the international discussion that has been opened in the world Trotskyist movement on the question of China, and the danger of playing into the hands of the Healyites.

All these tactical questions demand consideration and it is quite understandable why comrades should be concerned that they receive due attention. They were in fact intensively discussed in the Political Committee.

The question given the greatest weight was the international discussion. The analysis of this proceeded along the following lines:

Swabeck occupied a unique position, not only in our party but in the world movement as a whole. At first he advanced proposals for altering the position of the SWP on the general formula calling for a political revolution in China. This required discussion on its merits both in estimating the nature of the Mao regime and in determining our attitude toward it. But from his early position, Swabeck evolved into an utterly uncritical and even devout Maoist. Not even the rise of the cult of Mao's personality and the excesses of the "cultural revolution" caused him to reconsider. Instead, he accepted these highly unfavorable developments at face value as promulgated by Mao. The result was that Swabeck became completely isolated. So far as the SWP is concerned, the discussion with Swabeck on the Chinese revolution was finished long ago and the recent events in China only served to confirm the majority opinion as registered repeatedly at party conventions.

Consequently any disciplinary action taken in regard to Swabeck can scarcely affect further discussion of the issues which he raised, since inside the SWP they have been definitively settled politically.

In the world Trotskyist movement, Swabeck is, if anything, even more isolated. So far as is known, not a single individual shares his views.

The discussion in the Fourth International concerns something else -- the further consolidation of the reunification of the movement. Two problems are involved: (1) The clearing up of certain ambiguities relating to the general formula of a political revolution in China. (2) Analysis of the current developments so that a common position can be reached on them, particularly in relation to the various factions in China, at the next world congress.

Of the two problems, the latter is unquestionably the more important inasmuch as the International Executive Committee has shown through its statement opening the world discussion that it accepts the general formula of a political revolution.

It is thus clear that Swabek cannot be considered to be either a leader or spokesman on the question of China for any tendency in the world Trotskyist movement extending beyond the SWP.

He himself has shown in his own way, through his letter to Healy, that he recognizes this reality. From this, unfortunately, he has concluded that so far as he is concerned, he is uninterested in pursuing the discussion any further inside the ranks of the world Trotskyist movement and has withdrawn from it. It is quite significant in this respect that he addressed himself to Healy after the IEC made its position clear on the question of a political revolution in China.

So far as the international discussion is concerned, Swabek's withdrawal should make for a freer atmosphere, since participants who may want to express differences or speculate on possibilities need not fear that these may be given unwarranted interpretation through the unsought-for intervention of a confirmed Maoist.

The possibility of playing into the hands of Healy was also weighed. Here it was noted that Swabek's praise of Healy and Healy's recent espousal of Maoism might be received with mixed emotions in the headquarters of the SLL. The fact is that Healy has held Swabek up as one of the most horrible examples of the "degeneration" which he ascribes to the SWP. Does Healy then switch on this simply because this prime "degenerate" praises Healy? It is something to be considered.

In addition, Healy's playing around with Maoism appears to have purely local objectives; he is interested in certain Maoist currents that have appeared on a small scale in the British CP. Peking's current ultraleftism, it is true, coincides with Healy's ultraleft binge; but a fusion is excluded by the sectarianism of both sides, so that the gains Healy may expect from this source are completely unrealistic. The

lack of any practical successes complicates the problem Healy already faces due to his switching on Maoism in a completely abrupt and unprepared way. Swabeck's praise makes matters worse rather than better in this respect.

Finally, it must be completely clear to Healy that Swabeck is not and never will be a Healyite. Swabeck is a Maoist. He is tipping his hat in Healy's direction on the way to one of the genuinely Maoist groups where, perhaps, he hopes to play the role of a theoretical Anna Louise Strong. The difference between Swabeck and Healy is indicated by Swabeck's criticism of Healy for not having advanced far enough along the Maoist road.

The upshot is that Healy will be inclined to ponder this one carefully before he makes up his mind on precisely how to use it. He will, of course, be greatly tempted to try to exploit it as a one-day sensation, playing it up for whatever it is worth and then dropping it save for his usual lying and slanderous references in the future to such happenings. The sensation, from Healy's point of view, is those sections of Swabeck's letter attacking the SWP. He cannot make much of a sensation of any disciplinary action which the SWP takes as a result of such an attack since this is a minor matter compared to the attack itself. From all that is known about the British situation, no one there will pay much attention to it; and any laudatory publicity Swabeck receives in Healy's press will only serve to discredit him in the left wing of the Labour movement.

The most probable variant is that Healy will consider most closely how Wohlforth might utilize Swabeck's move profitably. It will not be wholly disadvantageous to us if this course is decided on and Wohlforth goes through the educational experience of serving as editor for Swabeck.

As for the other tactical considerations involved in the disciplinary action taken against Swabeck, it was recognized that if the situation were such as to involve the leader of a grouping at the beginning of a discussion in which precipitate disciplinary action could prejudice clarification of the issues then it would be necessary to defer such action. There is no doubt that the party ranks would appreciate the political need for this and that there would be little difficulty in explaining it both by analysis of the specific situation and by reference to the various excellent precedents established in the history of the party in regard to this.

But for the reasons outlined above, it was felt in the Political Committee that the situation is not analogous and that under the specific circumstances it was a better tactical course to proceed with disciplinary action.

It should be added that there was general regret that one of the founders of the party, one who has earned the highest respect for his many contributions and long service, should at this stage have taken the course he has. These feelings, however, could not be permitted to affect our political analysis, particularly in view of the importance of the issues involved.

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