

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MINUTES, Number 2, March 19, 1970

PC Present: B. Barnes, J. Barnes, Breitman, Britton, DeBerry, Dobbs
Halstead, A. Hansen, J. Hansen, Horowitz, LaMont,
F. Lovell, Novack, Ring, Waters.

Visitors: Kerry, Seigle

AGENDA: 1. Message to Cannon Birthday Banquet
 2. Women's Liberation Steering Committee
 3. World Movement
 4. Communication on IMG letter
 5. Denver Chicano Conference

1. MESSAGE TO CANNON BIRTHDAY BANQUET

Novack reported.

Motion: to send the following message to James P. Cannon on the occasion of his 80th birthday: "We would have liked to be at the banquet and celebrate your arrival at the eightieth year together with you and the rest of the comrades in Los Angeles. But, as you discovered early in your career, political duty often does not harmonize with personal inclination. Though we can be present only by proxy, we speak for the entire party when we say how grateful we are for your historic initiative of forty-two years ago and for all the subsequent contributions which have led our movement to its present unprecedented prospects for expansion."

Carried.

2. WOMEN'S LIBERATION STEERING COMMITTEE

Waters reported.

Report incorporated in letter to organizers [see attached.]

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

3. WORLD MOVEMENT REPORT

J. Hansen reported.

Motion: to approve the report.

Carried.

4. COMMUNICATION ON IMG LETTER

J. Barnes reported.

Motion: to send the communication to our cothinkers.
[see attached]

Carried.

PC Minutes, Number 2, Page 2

5. DENVER CHICANO CONFERENCE

Britton reported on our participation.

Motion: to approve the report.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

873 Broadway
New York, New York
March 20, 1970

Political Committee of the IMG
c/o Pioneer Book Service
8 Toynbee Street
London E 1, England

Dear Comrade Peterson,

I am enclosing a copy of a communication that was approved by the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party at a meeting March 19, 1970.

Fraternally yours,

Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

cc: United Secretariat of the Fourth International

In a letter dated November 18, 1969, sent by the Political Committee of the International Marxist Group to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, with a copy to the Socialist Workers Party of the USA, various questions were raised concerning an article by Tom Kerry entitled "A Mao-Stalin Rift--Myth or Fact?" that included an expression of difference with a statement made by Tariq Ali in his book The New Revolutionaries: A Handbook of the International Radical Left.

The Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party is of the opinion that the difference does not directly involve either a matter of current political line or basic position of the world Trotskyist movement. It concerns a debatable historical question.

In fields such as this, the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party is opposed to the imposition of views that may be contrary to those held by a particular author. As we see it, democratic centralism is not synonymous with monolithism, but permits freedom of public expression in areas where united political action is not immediately concerned, as determined by the conventions and congresses of the Fourth International and its sections, or organizations in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International.

This attitude has hitherto governed the publication of many items sponsored by the world Trotskyist movement, as was notably the case with the collective book Fifty Years of World Revolution.

We agree that public debate on such issues should be conducted in comradely fashion and that if the debate should lead to, or should disclose, differences over policy of some depth, the discussion should be transferred to the internal publications of the movement.

We note the correction made by the Political Committee of the IMG concerning Comrade Ali's membership status at the time he wrote his book. The misstatement in the article in the International Socialist Review resulted from wrong information and can easily be publicly rectified if it is felt necessary. However, Comrade Kerry included the statement precisely in order to show that his criticism on this point was not directed at the IMG. It should also be noted that Comrade Kerry also made completely clear that he does not

regard Comrade Ali to be a "Maoist," and that it was his intention to deal only with one point in a currently widely circulated book, a point having to do with event that occurred almost a quarter of a century ago.

From the reports of the American comrades who discussed this matter with Comrade Tariq Ali and the other leaders of the IMG last December, we assumed that the misunderstandings had been cleared up and that Comrade Ali would feel free, if he wished, to reply to Comrade Kerry in the pages of the International Socialist Review. As yet, however, the editorial board reports that it has heard nothing further about this. Perhaps the British comrades have given further consideration to the question of a reply or it has not been possible to find time to write something along the lines indicated by Comrade Ali in the discussion last December.

In any case, we should like to confirm what our American comrades told the Political Committee of the IMG last December -- that the pages of the International Socialist Review remain open to contributions on this subject and that we feel that further discussion of the difference could prove to be both stimulating and fruitful, providing fresh evidence of the rich intellectual life characteristic of our world Trotskyist movement.

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L M A R X I S T G R O U P

8. Toynbee St.,
London E.1.
18/11/69

To: United Secretariat of Fourth International
Copy: Socialist Workers Party of USA

Dear Comrades,

The Political Committee of the International Marxist Group wishes to bring to your attention a serious matter. In the September/October issue of INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW there is an article by Tom Kerry entitled "A Mao-Stalin Rift - Myth or Fact"; this article virtually starts with an attack on Tariq Ali, a member of the IEC of the Fourth International who is also on the National Committee of the IMG. The article is the main piece in the journal, it is written by the editor and is featured as the key article of the issue on the cover. It has, therefore, all the hallmarks of being an authoritative and definitive statement.

After the attack, Tom Kerry, as if to excuse his action, writes: "Tariq Ali wrote this article for the anthology before the announcement of his adherence to the International Marxist Group, the British section of the Fourth International...."

This statement is false: in the very book that Tom Kerry refers to Tariq Ali acknowledges the help given to him in producing the book by his colleagues of the IMG. The article in question was, in fact, discussed in draft form with a member of the United Secretariat (Strong).

It is not the intention of this letter to take up the politics of Tom Kerry's article. However, we want to pose a number of implications of an attack like this.

Firstly, we would point out that the charges by Tom Kerry against Tariq Ali are:

- (1) he contributed to the myth of a Mao-Stalin rift; and,
- (2) he regards Mao as one of the great revolutionaries of the 20th century.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST REVIEW has not always regarded this view as heresy. In the Fall, 1960 issue of the journal in (an) article by Murray Weiss, the then editor, it was written:

"....The Chinese Communist party did not act according to Stalinist theory and practice when it led the revolution to power....If, by following the Stalinist program the Chinese Communist party had overthrown imperialism, landlordism and capitalism, then indeed it would be necessary to reexamine the Trotskyist theory of Stalinism....The Chinese CP 'in defiance of Stalin's edicts' took power. According to the recently 'leaked' records of the July 1945 Potsdam Conference, published in the MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE August 22, 1960, Stalin, in his meeting with Churchill and Truman, referred to Chiang Kai-Shek as 'the

best of the lot.' Stalin said he 'saw no other possible leader and that, for example, he did not believe that the Chinese Communist leaders were as good or would be able to bring about the unification of China.'

"Clearly the Kremlin wanted the Chinese CP to continue its ruinous policy of working for a coalition with the Chiang regime. It was only when the situation became so rotten ripe for the overthrow of the inwardly decomposing and demoralised Nationalist government, and when the elemental movement of the agrarian revolution swept the Chinese CP leaders along with it that they could no longer abide by Stalin's directives. This is the simple fact (sic) about how and why the Chinese CP took power." (original emphasis throughout - the article was a polemic against one Walter Kendall, the deletions are references to him).

In the Spring 1962 issue of the journal, in a joint article by Murray Weiss and Bert Deck (managing editor), one could read:

"...the Chinese CP refused to give up its own armed forces, the Red Army, in the course of its coalition attempts with Chiang Kai-Shek. This key decision in turn enabled and even compelled the Chinese CP to stand at the head of a socialist revolution..." (and later in the article,):

"In a comparable manner (supporting John L. Lewis against the AFL bureaucracy) today, we support Mao without being Maoists. To be more concrete: on the main theoretical questions in dispute between the Russians and the Chinese, we think the Chinese are correct. In addition, the Chinese leaders base themselves on revolutionary social strata aroused by 650 million people entering the arena of history."

But there is more involved than this.

It is quite contrary to the traditions and practices of democratic centralism to have uncontrolled public discussion of differences in the form of leaders attacking each others' views. Such debate is, of course, permissible and can be valuable provided it is controlled, comradely and with full consultation. If it is left to the whim of individuals only chaos and confusion, which will disorient our membership and periphery, will result.

We must point out that there are on occasion views expressed by our comrades of the SWP in their publications with which we find ourselves in disagreement. Sometimes these views are reproduced in INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS and, therefore, distributed in Britain. Despite this fact we would never think of differentiating ourselves publicly from these views unless we had carefully discussed the matter and consulted all concerned. The same goes for other sections' views. We are sure that there are other sections which, from time to time, have similar feelings. What would happen if we all behaved in the manner of Tom Kerry?

Let us conclude by saying that we will consider the incident closed if our views are made known to the members of the SWP and the leaders of sections and groups of the International. We have no wish to change the warm and fraternal relations which exist between the IMG and the SWP, on the contrary it is because we wish to maintain these relations that we have to make our views known. Because the ISR is now on sale in Britain we are acquainting all members of the IMG with our views. At present we do not envisage the necessity of making a public statement.

Revolutionary greetings,

PETER PETERSON
(For Political Committee of the IMG)

TO THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE:

Attached is a copy of the correspondence between Livio Maitan and Hugo Blanco that Joe referred to in his report to the March 19 meeting of the Political Committee.

This is confidential material for the information of the Political Committee.

Jack Barnes

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November 26, 1969

Dear H.:

We have been informed that your conditions are good and we are very happy about this. Nevertheless, we again repeat that if you consider it really necessary for someone to visit you, a doctor could go from here or France. If you have any other necessities you should write.

What has happened with your book? We have received some pages, which appear correct to us, as I have already written you. We are awaiting further information about this.

We have received some information on the situation in the FIR that has alarmed us a great deal. I am not certain of the nature of the differences, consequently I cannot express an opinion on them. However I am convinced that if unfortunately there should be a split, the consequences would be bad for all.

I urge you to write as soon as possible what your opinion is on this. I also urge you to do everything you can in order to avoid an unfavorable outcome in the conflict now occurring before a debate is held with the participation of the international movement.

As I said on another occasion, I consider that it would be very bad to involve the FIR and you personally in the conflict that took place in Argentina which led to a split last year. Naturally all the Peruvian comrades have the right to an opinion on Argentina and to take a position (including struggling within the International to change the decision of the World Congress). But it would be a very serious error to make the Argentinian problem the axis of the debate in Peru.

As you know, the World Congress decided that El Combatiente continues to be the official section and La Verdad a sympathizing section. The position of the reporter was that the differences were not sufficient to justify a split and the decision taken implies that if a rupture occurred, the majority continues to be the section (naturally, this does not hold when a majority breaks with the general concepts of the International as occurred with the capitulatory tendency of N.M. Perera in the island of Ceylon).

You are in a position to evaluate the situation in your country: I believe that you are able to see better than we that in view of the present weakness of the organization, a split would be fatal. In any case, such an event would be immediately and shamelessly utilized by all the enemies of Trotskyism on an international scale to try to lower the prestige of the International and of its members in Peru, including you personally, Comrade Hugo.

I know very well that you are conscious that the role you have to play is much greater than the role of a leader of a small organization or of a tendency in that organization. Because of this, I am sure that you will do everything possible to prevent an outcome that would be very prejudicial to Peruvian and international Trotskyism.

A warm handshake,

L.

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El Frontón
December 12, 1969

Cd. L:

For a long time everyone proclaimed the line of the FIR and no one applied it. There was harmony; my photograph and my "celebrated phrases" appeared in all the publications of the FIR.

Now, after a difficult struggle, some of the comrades have decided to carry out the line of the FIR in practice.

What remained for the rest? Become active or leave the party. They found another alternative: They discovered that the line of the FIR was "obsolete" and that it was necessary to follow a different line.

Majority? Of course they are "majority"! The same people who proclaimed the line and would not carry it out. They are an overwhelming majority of inactivists.

The FIR activists, who are now indeed increasing, are a small group.

I am deeply convinced that a Bolshevik party is an indispensable requisite for the Peruvian revolution and that a nucleus now exists that will serve as a base to construct it.

I consider it my duty to the Peruvian and world revolution to devote my fullest efforts to this valuable nucleus.

This is more important than maintaining unity with inactivists.

That this is injurious internationally?

Trotskyism is strengthened much more by a genuinely active Trotskyist party in Peru than by a large number of people who agree on singing praises to the "President of the FIR" Hugo Blanco and on being inactive.

The demonstration in practice of the effectiveness of the Trotskyist line is more beneficial to Trotskyism than the abstract "figure of Hugo Blanco" and the idyllic memory of Chaupimayo.

This will serve to injure my personal prestige? That the role I have to play "is much greater than the role of a leader of a small organization or of a tendency in that organization"?

We are followers of Trotsky, comrade. He preferred to be a leader "of a tendency" and then "of a small organization." And this served naturally to "lower his personal prestige" -- and how!

That we should not become involved in the Argentinian split, we are in complete agreement.

I do not know nor could I know much about the Argentinian problem.

If this has had some influence in Peru, it is, it appears, owing to the inactivist majority receiving "ideological sustenance" justifying its breaking with the line of the FIR.

I assume that you will now understand that the delay in my book (which will only be a pamphlet) is not the result of negligence, but of intense activity.

I am in fine health. Thanks.

Greetings,

H.

LETTER FROM HUGO BLANCO TO JOSEPH HANSEN - JANUARY, 1970

El Frontón
January 27, 1970

Comrade Joseph Hansen:

The object of this letter is to convey our opinion on the international debate on Latin America.

We repeat once again that we stand on the Transitional Program. That we are against the guerrillerista current.

The "Draft Resplution on Latin America" reached us at a time when our attention was concentrated on a struggle against a student syndicalist deviation that showed up among the leaders of a party filled with persons who were anything but active. It was on the eve of a Plenum that was to take a stand on this. Preparing for this, we did not have time to study the draft closely. We did not know that you had presented a document differing with it.

The contradictory aspects of the document prevented us from seeing that it was an expression of the guerrillerista current that we had fought for years.

Although I, preoccupied by a specific national question, came out in favor of the document, the Plenum did not discuss it because information that another document, yours, existed had not reached us.

Then a Peruvian comrade returned from Argentina, influenced by El Combatiente. After incorporating himself in the leadership and in all the party bodies without having been elected, he began to arbitrarily alter the line of the party. He openly declared that the line of the FIR was "obsolete," and, without previous discussion, began to alter the line against the program of the FIR that was voted on and ratified by the Plenum. He utilized the majority of a leadership that had been elected to carry out our line in order to shift the party toward a verbal guerrilla-ism. To achieve this he undertook a convenient "purge" of the leadership, threatened more purges, and in practice excluded me from it, despite the fact that the Plenum had elected me as a member of the C.C.

They did not disagree with the documents that we sent in defense of the line. (They did that after the rupture.) It was easier to say nothing about the documents and act contrary to them, expelling and disciplining those who opposed this. All this could be done because in recent years the FIR has consisted of a numerous group of petty-bourgeois elements who in general do nothing. The ratification of our line by the Plenum, the start made in applying it, signified a danger for these charlatans: either become active or get out of the party. With the arrival of the comrade holding the guerrillerista deviation, they were offered an ideal solution: neither become active nor get out -- talk about guerrillas.

In this way the process of rectifying the party, which was to have begun through engagement in activity, took another form: Those who did not want to work engaged in talking about guerrillas. They constituted a crushing majority (the factor that, as Comrade Livio told me, was decisive in recognizing El Combatiente as the official section in Argentina.)

In face of such arbitrariness from people who were inactive, who did not even permit us to work, we few activists decided to reorganize the FIR in accordance with the line laid down in the program and ratified by the Plenum. We are carrying this out with excellent results despite the difficulties that every party nucleus faces at the beginning.

In reality the importation of the guerrillerista deviation was beneficial, since it accelerated purging the activists.

Your document, which we have just read, finished clarifying the scene for us; we see that our personal stand in favor of the "Draft" was a mistake and that the guerrilleristas were completely correct in taking it as their banner. We leave it in their hands; really it is theirs, not ours, we apologize for our initial confusion.

As for us we stand on the Transition Program, on the Program of the FIR, on the document of Comrade Joseph Hansen, who once more, as many other times in the history of our movement, has shown his Trotskyist consistency, the maturity of the Socialist Workers Party.

We advocate the methodology of Chaupimayo, criticizing ourselves for our deficiency in party building. We hold that it was one more demonstration of the continued validity of the method of the Transition Program. We think that the use of guerrilla war as a tactic was correct; we think that we will use this tactic again in Peru. Probably the guerrilla charlatans will not accompany us; they did not accompany us either in Chaupimayo.

Another factor must be taken into account; "guerrilla-ism", at least in Peru, is another form of being "revolutionary" without doing anything.

The members of my guerrilla force (except an artificial element) were taken from the best in the union vanguard; it is sufficient to mention the organizational and economic secretaries of the Federación Provincial de Campesinos and the general secretaries of four unions. People who had been looked down on for occupying themselves with demanding "crumbs" while the "genuine revolutionaries" argued over how to take power. This happened and will happen again; here and elsewhere. Today we are fighting for higher wages and against unemployment, with our old Transition Program in hand. The audacious guerrilleristas call us cowards, they tell us that we don't want to make the revolution or that we are thinking of doing it in the year 2,000. We know that we will again take up arms in the city

and the countryside; we did it before they did, with forces that emerged from our people, not artificially "a suero." With this in mind we are working patiently today in organizing the peasantry and in advancing the workers' wage demands. We have confidence in Comrade Trotsky because Chaupimayo showed us that he was right.

Comrade, it would seem that we Trotskyists have been guilty of considerable complacency in the face of guerrilla-ism in order not to appear sectarian. We criticized Comrade Moreno's "Two Methods" because of its "excessive hardness in form"; but we were in agreement with the content and still are. For this reason we republished it, because it drew the line of demarcation. It seems that international Trotsky-ism considered this work to be "too hot" and now we are paying dearly for not having debated his thesis exhaustively. And the result is that now, when guerrilla-ism in Latin America is declining, defeated by the reality, it is reborn...within the Trotskyist movement!

Another item in which Moreno was right as against us: My defense and the defense of the happenings at Chaupimayo should not have been that of a "Trotskyist guerrilla" as was done in general, but as an example of the application of the Transition Program in opposition to guerrilla-ism. By way of contrast it stood out as an example of armed struggle that arose as a result of work among the masses.

It is understood that in identifying myself with Comrade Moreno it is in the general defense of our method; I know little about the current situation in Argentina.

There is much that must be said about guerrilla-ism, unfortunately I am pressed for time, hence the lack of order in this letter.

I am confident that you will defend our position with the necessary firmness. Up to now it appears to me that there has been too much complacency in the face of the guerrilla current.

I authorize you to use any document of ours, either in whole or in part, in the discussion within the Trotskyist movement.

Affectionately,
s/Hugo Blanco G.