2/27/78

Response by the Buffalo Workers Movement to the recent conference; to all participants in the Organizing Committee for a national center

We thought it would be worthwhile to write down our response to the recent conference. The following points range from criticisms of the conference (1-5) to suggestions for future work for the steering committee (6-8). On the whole, we thought the conference was a step forward, we support the formation of a national structure, however minimal. We also recognize the difficulties faced by the conference organizers when so many different groups with no shared parctice and only minimally shared theory were brought together to create a national structure, all in one day.

1)We feel that the Committee of Five should have, previous to the conference, shared more of their knowledge of the various groups in the trend, as well as the criteria for inviting groups to the conference.
2)Even despite the extreme time problem, there should have been criticism and self-criticism at the end of the meeting. We criticize ourselves for not having brought it up.
3)It was unrealistic to plan for the conference to take place in one day, and end in the early evening on Sat. To have so many folks from all over the country all in one place and not take advantage of the situation by providing opportunity for informal (at least) meetings on Sunday morning was an error. We were unable to talk to many people for more than a few minutes.
4)The time problem meant that many of the important (to us) amendments were discussed only briefly or not at all. Details were invariably left to the steering committee to be decided later, a common problem of conferences where all the concrete and practical steps are decided at the last minute.
5)We felt that the issue which sparked the discussion of racism at the conference (individuals vs organizations on the steering committee) was blown out of proportion initially when the charges of racism were made. Whereas we agree that individuals should be able to be on the steering committee, especially in the light of the fact that many Marxist-Leninists from national minorities are not currently in organizations, there are obvious problems on a practical level with individuals (how to evaluate their past practice, potential indivdualism). The discussion was difficult partially because no one had thought about the issue (individuals vs groups) before, including those who raised it, as far as we could tell (at least nothing written about it was available).

On the other hand, once the issue was raised, the subsequent discussion did show defensiveness/guilt on the part of some, gut-level resentments on the part of others, and on the whole a degree of emotionalism not present during the rest of the conference. As a result, it was clear at the end of the discussion that it had been a good thing - and once again our weakness on the question of racism, within the trend, was apparent.

6)The "underdeveloped" groups all spoke to their needs; learning from the practice of the move "developed" groups, learning more about organizational structure, above all understanding how to go about fusion of the workers movement and the communist movement. The developed groups, on the other hand, stressed the need to "centralize the ideological debate," deepen our understanding of the 18 points, and focus a debate on the nature of ultra-leftism. The developed groups want to increase ideological unity of Marxist-Leninists, while the underdeveloped groups want to understand better how to fuse with the working class. While both tasks must go on, the national center mustserve the more underdeveloped groups - practice should be summarized in order to draw the lessons in theory. The steering committee, inevitably composed of the more developed groups, should guard against their bias in favor of a purely theoretical debate.

On the whole, there was far too little discussion of fusion in either the papers before the conference or at the conference itself. Agreement on fusion as a key task of this period and as the linch-pin of our party-building strategy was assumed, not discussed. It's a shaky assumption. At least once group clearly disagrees (the Guardian) and others undoubtably place different importance to fusion - and precious few groups have been able to advance very far in achieving fusion.

Some of the above concerns seemed to have been shared by El Comite. The differences between El Comite and the majority came down to the concrete question about whether a national organization should be set up at this time - but underlying that difference is a concern with local development. We felt that El Comite played a principled role at the conference, and we hope they will continue to be involved with the trend, one way or another.

7)As we said at the conference, a major task of the steering committee should be to carry out an evaluation of member organizations on the OC, wherever possible doing these evaluations on the spot, in person. The evaluations should cover the history of the groups, their main areas of work, etc. We can no longer afford to not know who we are. These evaluations, within the bounds of security should be shared with all members.
8)The internal bulletin should have summations of practice and the lessons drawn from practice for theory- as well as purely theoretical articles. We think that some articles in the bulletin should be able to be used with people outside our organizations, with advanced workers. Furthermore, good articles should be occasionally selected by the steering committee for publication elsewhere. We need to have a "public face," - the internal bulletin should be seen as a transition to a public journal, in the same way that the OC for a national center is a transition to a national center.