

10 March 79

Dear comrades:

We are writing to clarify our attitude towards delegations to the Principle 18 conferences. We have requested both that delegations should, to the extent possible, express the different points of view within the organizations they represent and that delegations should not be sent to the conferences with binding voting instructions. In order to make the political basis for this request clear, we need to discuss the general problem of federationism and the harmful effect it could have on our effort to build a genuine ideological center.

The goal of the ideological center we hope to build will be the ideological consolidation of the Marxist-Leninist trend around program, strategy, and basic principles of tactics for the US revolution. In part the IC will pursue its goal directly through the independent elaboration of Marxism-Leninism for the US revolution. In part it will address itself to the closely interrelated task of resolving the ideological contradictions within the trend. This process will be long, arduous, and complex. It is absolutely essential to the success of our undertaking that we adopt a correct approach to resolving the ideological contradictions within the trend. We must begin to develop that approach now, during the OC period, both because it is important to resolving our present differences and because it will inevitably contribute to shaping our future practice.

Since most of our work in this period is carried out within the confines of local organizations, the inevitable tendency is to place primary emphasis on the local organization and its internal dynamics and to relegate the national process to secondary importance. This is the "circle spirit." Federationism is a manifestation of the circle spirit. It views the participants in the party-building process as local organizations, rather than looking at the totality of the process. It fails to see that the party-building process is much broader than its manifestations in local organizations. Further, and this is what is relevant to our request concerning delegations to the conferences, it fails to grasp that the ideological contradictions within the trend, although they frequently manifest themselves as contradictions between organizations, in essence are not contradictions between organizations but ideological contradictions.

The ideological contradictions within the trend do not and will not break down along organizational lines. A whole series of other factors besides common ideology have gone into the formation of local organizations--historical accident and local peculiarities not the least. To the extent that ideological struggle within the trend is constrained to organizational lines, the true character of the contradictions will be distorted and their resolution impeded. We must strive to create the conditions under which we can have clear struggle between contending lines, not between contending organizations.

The dynamic created by line struggle assuming the form of struggle between organizations has been a major ingredient in generating the sectarian approach to ideological struggle characteristic of our movement. It is essential for our trend to break with such harmful approaches to ideological struggle. It is particularly harmful in a period in which organizations are so ideologically ill-defined.

The subordination of real ideological struggle to inter-organizational struggle has not only been a factor in generating the sectarianism of our movement, it has been a major factor in keeping our movement mired in dogmatism. The OL, for example, was able to deflect the ideological struggle away from coming to grips with concrete reality by making the terms of the struggle the OL, as an organization, versus other organizations. They could then appeal to their organizational successes, their national press, a large mobilization for

a Fightback conference, etc. to make their case. Organizational hegemonism replaced the ideological struggle. And if organizational hegemonism guides the struggle to unite Marxist-Leninists, why take risks with an attempt to independently elaborate Marxism-Leninism for the US revolution? Better to play it safe with tried and true formulas from Lenin and Mao.

Both aspects of the request we have made concerning delegations are directed towards insuring that the conferences give the fullest play to ideological struggle within the OC and minimizing federationist distortions of the process. In the first place, it would be federationist for the majority in a local organization to exclude a significant minority viewpoint from the conference by choosing not to send any delegates to the conference who advocated the minority view. Rather than participating in the ideological struggle simply as part of a national process, the organization would be participating in the process as a bloc. The local organization would be failing to subordinate itself to the national process.

Even more clearly, if a delegation were sent to the conference with binding instructions, the local organization would not be subordinating itself to the national process. In effect, binding instructions would insure that the conference had no effect, at least as far as the conference went, on the delegation. Participation would be reduced to little more than attempting to push the position of the particular local organization. This federationist mode of participation in the ideological struggle inevitably tends towards a polarizing dynamic which plays into the hands of sectarianism, distorts the struggle, and prevents the fullest resolution of contradictions.

The Principle 18 conferences must break with federationism and strive to reflect the actual ideological struggle within the OC between the contending lines. The SC's request is designed to help achieve this objective. We urge all organizations to consider this carefully and help to achieve this objective. At stake is not only the correct resolution of the present contradiction but an initial step in rectifying our movement's approach to ideological struggle. It should be seen as part of our effort to break with the ultra-left line.

for the Steering Committee

Comradely,



John Frampton

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Some conference announcements:

- 1) The SC decided that they should attend the conferences as delegates of the SC rather than as delegates of their local organizations.
- 2) In order to contribute to the travel expenses for the minority and SC speaker at the West Coast Conference (both from the East), a special charge of \$2 is being assessed from all conference participants at each of the regional conferences.