

February 1, 1980

Dear Comrades:

Enclosed is a letter we have sent to the Organizer for publication regarding the article on the health fraction in the January issue. That article and our response raises the broader issue of how seriously we respect the integrity of Marxist-Leninist formations that bring together many different forces in the trend.

In the health fraction PWOC pushed strongly for limited democratic centralism calling for local groups to subordinate themselves to the national work. In general we agree with this view, the essence of democratic centralism being the subordination of the part to the whole. However, while the PWOC calls on all organizations and individuals to participate in this way, its own practice runs contrary to this principal. We would like to draw out several examples from the health fraction.

The PWOC has played a key role in the initiation and development of the fraction continuing to do so with a member on the ILC. However, the PWOC chose to rupture the development of principled struggle within the fraction by putting forward its independent summation of the founding conference through the pages of the Organizer prior to full discussion in the fraction. Initiated by the ILC, the fraction is currently beginning struggle and discussion over a summation of the conference. The ILC will be issuing its summation and has solicited other opinions and criticisms from fraction members. Through that process the PWOC as well as other forces would have the opportunity to put forward its views and lead around them. The practice of the PWOC ignores the channels of struggle and holds back the development of unity-struggle-unity relations within the fraction.

A further example of this sectarian practice is in regards to the handling of the criticism of the PSO presentation on racism. While there are certainly legitimate criticisms of that presentation, there must be consideration as to what will push forward and sharpen the struggle over political line and what method of debate holds back the struggle for unity among Marxist-Leninists. The ILC has issued the documents and presentations from the conference omitting the PSO presentation until a critique could be written. This was incorrect - either a critique should have been immediately prepared or the PSO presentation distributed along with the rest of the documents and the criticism following at a later date. We hold the PWOC partially responsible for this error based on its participation in the ILC. This practice is further complicated by the PWOC then presenting its criticism in the Organizer.

Comrades, if your practice in the health fraction was the only instance of this kind of sectarianism we might be able to excuse it. But, unfortunately we have witnessed other examples as well. In the case of the national minority conference comrades in the OCIC are refusing to engage in a struggle over the content and political resolutions of the conference until the planning committee issues its summation. Yet, the PWOC who played a leading role in the initiation and development of the conference has already published its summation in the Organizer. In-fact it was a comrade from the PWOC who is on the planning committee who also wrote the article!

Clearly the practice of the PWOC in forging trend-wide formations is that of placing the part above the whole - being more concerned with putting forward its own opinions than the internal development of those formations. We are calling on the PWOC to examine its practice relative to these criticisms. Because this is a serious issue for the entire party-building movement, raising the character of building principled struggle relations within the trend, we are sending copies of these 2 letters to other organizations and individuals within the party-building movement.

In Struggle,

Marcia Altman

Stephanie Brown

February 1, 1980

To the Organizer:

As members of the national Marxist-Leninist health fraction, we are concerned with the report of the founding conference appearing in the January issue. The article was inaccurate as well as having distorted the essence of the political struggle at the conference. This resulted in an objectively sectarian analysis.

You state those forces who were in opposition to democratic centralism did so due to "jealousy...of their own circles". There is virtually no basis for that statement. There was neither a full discussion of democratic centralism nor of the political program to which it was to be applied. Earlier in the article you correctly report that the program discussion was tabled to a future date. Therefore, while certain questions were raised regarding this issue, differences were not clear and your summation amounts to a sectarian charge.

The discussion of the founding resolution of the fraction is inaccurate. The resolution reported as being passed was in-fact proposed by the planning committee but a substitute resolution united upon. The substitute resolution called for the work of the fraction in the workers movement to be building a communist current. The original resolution was rejected as being too narrowly associated with the fusion line and the majority of forces searched for an alternate resolution which better reflected the unity of the fraction. While the resolution which passed still has a certain narrowness, it was clearly the will of the conference to alter the proposed resolution. In addition to being inaccurate, the essence of this struggle is distorted in the article.

In the discussion of leadership you pose the struggle as revolving around the insurance of minority viewpoints on the ILC. To the contrary, the discussion centered on whether or not minority viewpoints could be included in leadership raising the issue of criteria for leadership in Marxist-Leninist formations.

This article is consistent with a narrow and objectively sectarian view by the PWOC on how to assess forces, conduct struggle, and build unity in the trend. We hope this letter helps to clarify the character of the political struggle at the health fraction conference.

In Struggle,

Marcia Altman

Stephanie Brown