

New Orleans, La.
Nov. 25, 1966

(Baltimore)

Dear Comrade:

I would like to reply to your letter of November 20, 1966. Also, I would like to comment on some of the other material as presented by the Baltimore local in the mimeoed material sent to CC members and alternates.

First, if you have sent a separate copy of the above mentioned letter to my house, notify me by phone immediately! I did not receive it. As you may have heard we are continually being watched by the police (not as a result of our inactivity).

Now let me get down to the contents of your letter. When I wrote of attempts to "usurp the national leadership" and "to create undue dissent within the organization," I meant specifically your failure to let the national leadership know of the document which you presented at the conference. And now I would add to this the motion passed by the Balto. Spartacist which stated: "That the Political Bureau be censured by the Baltimore Spartacist Committee..." (my emphasis). Further, I meant by "creating undue dissent within the organization" your letter to Od. Settle as well as your persistent unprincipled factionalism.

In any Bolshevik organization lower bodies do not have the right to censure higher bodies i.e. only the Central Committee or a Conference can take action against the PB. By the fact of your local taking such action it seems that you have gone ahead to create a dual center in the organization--now a real attempt to usurp the leadership. What this means by implication is that if the PB FAILS TO DO WHAT YOU WANT IT TO DO THEN YOU WILL SPLIT. My feeling is that if this is what you are determined to do then with the vacuum of principled political reasons backing your little faction then you won't get much more than a tiny following cemented together by their common inability to act in a disciplined manner and/or by their inexperience in the Communist movement.

Now let me discuss Tom S. with you. I spoke with him for a good while in Chicago. As far as I can tell he is at best a marginal member of this organization. This means, my double-talking friend, that he may or may not be acting as an SL member in Detroit. If he is such a good comrade then why has he failed to get a P.O. box for us in Detroit? Why is he writing and distributing Fox documents to comrades in N. Orleans and Balto. built around a Foxite position on union work (contrast his letter to me with Geoff White's article in Spartacist #7). Why is he not taking a bundle of the magazine to distribute? If he is such a good comrade you tell me (and the PB) what he is doing for the SL in Detroit? WE DON'T KNOW!

Now it seems that if you are the conscious communist that you claim to be, then you would have realized some of the minimum demands of the SL which S. has not fulfilled.

I would certainly hope that you do not believe that everyone in the organization should know everything that goes on in the SL. It seems that constructive criticism of the organization is in fact an integral part of the building of a communist cadre--not the first step. You were in the old YPSL,

so you know what real factionalism is like i.e. you recruit to your own tendency at the same time as you recruit to the organization. If we do allow criticism such as yours at any time then we will be presented with precisely such a case. You will sign someone into the organization and then begin to rip away at the majority as represented by the leadership. How many good SL cadre will be built with this method? How much of this have you done so far?

But even further than this, you have tied your criticism to a factional basis--and it is precisely this kind of criticism which is not allowed outside of a pre-Conference discussion period. This is one of the foundations of democratic centralism--as you explained it to me the first time that I met you. If you do send this document to any comrades outside the leadership without their consent then it seems that censuring you is in order. This is a ground-rule that I am sure anyone who is a communist would obey.

Now, you go on to say that you will not let the leadership know that you are circulating the mimeoed material before you do it, that you will not observe the "niceties" of diplomacy. The national leadership, a representative of the majority, is not an enemy organization (e.g., the Wohlforth split) unless the pole which you are preparing in Baltimore does consider itself a separate group not having to respect the leadership. The leadership should have been informed beforehand so as to be able to guide the group and your goodselves. The qualities of political leadership are certainly not exemplified in Baltimore--the tendency there has never found a political basis for itself (all it can do is unleash vicious personal attacks). No one in this organization outside of the PB (and especially outside of NYC) knows the full state of the organization. Your arrogance may make you believe differently but it is not true. By distributing this statement you may weaken the SL.

Now, my friend, let us look at the letter you wrote and the letter which you were good enough to reprint. You say: "You state, 'I favor any action which the organization would take against you!'" My letter read: "If you keep these pseudo-Menshevik practices up, I would certainly be in favor of any action which the organization would take against you!" You very conveniently left out the first seven words of the sentence so as to change its meaning. Who distorts?

Further, this does not mean that I would favor expulsion of the Baltimore comrades and all those who stand in solidarity with you. You spoke with me in Chicago, and you know that I agree with many of your criticisms--so do many other comrades--but what many comrades at the conference tried to impress upon you is that your method is bad. Also, only those who use this method, and take it as far as you have (censuring the PB, ignoring the restrictions on the circulation of documents, etc.) need worry about what may come. Private discussion with conscious comrades now as well as open discussion during the next pre-Conference discussion period is to be welcomed!

Now as far as your mention of Healy, I strongly resent the slander. We are not trying to stifle dissent as Healy has been known to do. We are trying to work within the framework of Democratic centralism. You have a right to hold your opinions and express them at the proper time. You do not have the right to pick up on every disagreement and make factional use of it. You do not have the right to the kind of "double-recruiting" which I mentioned above.

Also, you might pass on to "spotless Bob K." that as I understand it, he has not yet paid his pledge (even though the PB has given him a chance by reducing it). It seems that "spctless Bob" would want to be prepared to be ready to struggle for the tendency by taking care of little things like his pledge. Also, if he is arrogant enough to ask for change (Motion 6) he should damned well get his money in to the N.O.

The Baltimore Committee is I think one of the best of our groups as far as functioning goes. Your report on your election work is quite good and can be of much educational value to many of our comrades (I would like ten). Your work on the elections was good and we may be trying something like it down here next year. But don't pat yourself on the back too much, our committee has been functioning in a similar fashion. I hope you will further look into what you are doing because losing you over this kind of affair would certainly be a loss to the revolutionary movement in this country.

Leninist greetings,

Joe V.