

MCHR HOLDS CONVENTION; ULTRA LEFT SET BACK

The 13th National Convention of MCHR, held the first week in May in Cincinnati, Ohio, saw an escalation in the struggle against ultra-leftism in that organization.

After a largely successful struggle against the formerly dominant right forces in MCHR, represented primarily by the CPUSA and elements close to it, the organization in the last year has been threatened by an infantile brand of "leftism," represented by the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP).



A KEY ISSUE: Should MCHR be a narrow organization of health professionals or should it seek to broaden itself by including health workers and consumers?

Ultra-leftism conceals right wing practices by dressing them up in revolutionary sounding clothing. As the case of the RCP illustrates, when we strip away the militant sounding rhetoric and analyse the actual political line, what we have is a policy that at every point weakens the masses in their struggle against monopoly capital.

To use a favorite phrase of the RCP, it is time to "sum up" their work in health.

MCHR CONSTITUENCY

One of the major issues in MCHR historically and at the convention is whom should it attempt to represent and organize.

Under capitalism, almost everyone suffers the effects of a health system based, not on human needs, but on profit. MCHR, if it is to wage successful battles for better health care, must be a broad-based organization that unites health workers, consumers, professionals and students in a common fight.

The RCP, however, believes that MCHR should be an organization of health professionals and students and should emphasize taking up the struggles of these groups. They have opposed MCHR taking up consumer-oriented issues like patients rights, and have opposed reaching out to the broader working class movement around issues of occupational health and safety.

We support joining in the progressive struggles of professionals and students. What we oppose is a narrow perspective that *limits* MCHR to those struggles, and excludes from MCHR health workers and consumers -- groups who have the most to gain from changing the health system, and who have been determined and militant fighters for change in the past.

At the MCHR Convention, increasing numbers of people spoke up against a narrow line on constituency. The issue was put most eloquently by an MCHR consumer activist from Denver who stated that emphasizing MCHR as an organization of professionals only serves to *divide* professionals from consumers when our goal, in every instance, should be to maximize unity. We could not agree more!

REFORMS -- BROADEN THE STRUGGLE

As communists, we understand that capitalism cannot be reformed out of existence; however, as communists we must stand at the head of all the mass struggles of the people. We must simultaneously be exemplary fighters for progressive reforms while we raise the consciousness of the masses as to the limitations of those reforms.

The RCP has put forward the line that MCHR should deal only with local struggles against cutbacks and layoffs and should ignore broader reforms, especially those that might involve legislation. They have thereby driven away from MCHR many honest people who have felt these struggles to be important.

We know that reforms like the right to organize and strike, the 8-hour workday, and laws against racial and sex discrimination have been won, *not* through the benevolence of the ruling class, but through the determined mass action of the people. We know that the ruling class fights for the defeat of all progressive reforms (including legislative ones) and if passed fights to minimize their import.

Yes -- the reform struggle presents us with difficult tasks, but so does making a revolution. Unlike the RCP, however, we do not fear the masses or any of their just struggles.

The line of the RCP serves only to narrow

two AFSCME locals at PGH, a few leftists, and some community people representing neighborhood groups as well as organizations like SCLC, PUSH, and the NAACP.

The reason for remaining aloof from these groups, according to the RCP, is that it is dangerous to enter into coalitions contaminated by trade union bureaucrats and opportunist community leaders.

This stand exposes the essence of ultra-leftism: Save yourself from possible right errors by isolating yourself from the struggles of the people. It also exposes the RCP's white chauvinism in steering clear of mass organizations of Black people, allegedly because their leadership is not communist.

But the RCP has been defeated in the case of PGH. PWOC cadre, the majority of the local Philadelphia MCHR chapter, and the majority at the convention, have enthusiastically supported MCHR's participation in this coalition. Our strategy is to urge a broad coalition to unite behind a progressive pro-

camp as the John Birch Society.

Within MCHR, the result has been that they ignore the struggle against racism and sexism and they take a contemptuous attitude towards those who have pushed MCHR to address these issues.

As communists we obviously agree that the class contradiction is primary; however, we also understand that the struggles for democratic rights are crucial -- not only for minorities and women, but for *all* of us, in order to defeat the racism and sexism which keeps us divided. These struggles are part and parcel of the class struggle, not something alien to it.

While the Convention did not spell out in detail a new strategy in this area, there was the beginnings of self-criticism around the organization's failures. Several people pointed out at least one obvious result of this failure -- that nationally oppressed health workers have for the most part steered clear of MCHR.

PROGRAM

MCHR needs a program -- a clear, comprehensive, written statement covering all major aspects of health care. This was a major demand at the convention. Over and over people spoke about how the lack of a program was hurting their work.

Without a program, it has been difficult to explain what MCHR stands for nationally, and has retarded the ability to educate both ourselves and others about health issues of concern and importance to the broad masses of US people.

A broad program would help to reverse MCHR's drift into narrowness. It would help to attract new members who presently assume that MCHR, as an organization, considers many broader issues unimportant.

Given their dogmatic position on constituency, on reforms, on work in trade unions and coalitions, and on racism and sexism, it is no wonder that the RCP has in the past, consistently opposed the development of a broad program.

In response to the overwhelming sentiment of the convention, however, they did a total flip-flop and joined in the cry for a program. Even with this apparent change of heart, however, it seems clear that their ultra-left positions on the issues will lead them to push for a program that is equally narrow.

THE CONVENTION -- A SUM-UP

While not detracting from the dedication and determination of those present, the declining attendance at MCHR conventions is distressing: attendance at the 1974 convention was 300; in 1975 -- 150; and this year -- only 90. This is a reflection of the problems noted here and at the convention itself -- namely the tendency to narrowness at all levels.

While the convention was generally self-critical around these errors, the special role of the RCP in formulating and perpetuating these errors was definitely recognized. They came under sharp criticism, both for their incorrect line and for their sectarian and divisive methods of work.

While the RCP, understandably, did not criticize themselves for their basic political approach, they were forced, under intense pressure, to finally admit to narrowing MCHR's program, and to a "style" of struggle that was "sometimes unprincipled and subjective." Although these were superficial criticisms at best, it was a significant victory considering their total resistance to any criticism or self-criticism in the past.



THE RCP OPPOSED MCHR'S JOINING THE "SAVE PGH COALITION," on the grounds that it was full of trade union bureaucrats and opportunist community leaders.

the legitimate arena of struggle for MCHR. It keeps MCHR small and weak, and ignores the expressed demand of the working class for reforms in the health system like national health insurance (NHI).

The honest majority at the convention engaged in healthy self-criticism about MCHR's narrow perspective on reforms, especially NHI. There was an overwhelming sentiment that MCHR has a responsibility to critically study the issue of NHI and to take a public stand exposing the currently pending plans and raising a progressive alternative.

WORK IN COALITIONS -- CEMENT THE LEFT-CENTER ALLIANCE

As a mass organization fighting for better health care, MCHR must enter into coalitions with other groups and individuals representing diverse strata: trade union, community groups, civil rights groups, even progressive public officials. To advance the mass movement we must, in these situations, attempt to consolidate the left and middle forces around a progressive program, at the same time isolating and exposing the opportunists.

Because of their consistently ultra-left line, however, the RCP has opposed MCHR joining into such coalitions -- the result, as always, being to narrow the movement and fragment the struggle.

In Philadelphia, the RCP has opposed MCHR joining the SAVE PGH COALITION -- a young group which consists primarily of rank and file PGH workers, officials of the

gram; to develop an organizational structure that will maximize united action; and to reach out to rank and file PGH workers and the huge number of community people concerned with the threatened loss of our only public hospital; and even to *win* the fight to keep PGH open!

RACISM AND SEXISM -- SUPPORT THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

Our health system is thoroughly racist and sexist at every level: the inferior health care delivered in minority communities, the discrimination against women and minorities in health related jobs and schools, and the denial of women's right to control over their bodies around questions like abortion and forced sterilization are only a few examples.

It would seem obvious for MCHR to be in the forefront of the struggles against racism and sexism in the health system, but the RCP denies the validity of taking up these struggles (or for fighting racism and sexism within MCHR) on the grounds that it raises "secondary contradictions" (racism and sexism) to the level of the "primary contradiction" (class).

We have seen, nationally, how this bankrupt and discredited line has led them to liquidate the struggles of women and national minorities for their democratic rights. They have opposed the desegregation of schools through busing, which, in Boston, has put them in the same camp as the Ku Klux Klan and other reactionary, racist elements. Similarly, their opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment has placed them in the same

Black member on the International Executive Board, the 22-person governing body of the UAW between conventions. Even though Black workers made up a large portion of the UAW membership and were subject to vicious discrimination in hiring and upgrading by the auto and aircraft companies, Reuther called the demand for Black representation on the IEB "racism in reverse" and a demand for "special privileges."

He led the opposition to this proposal at the 1943 convention, and the motion was defeated. The same debate with the same results was repeated at convention after convention. Not until after the organization of several caucuses of Black unionists and the Black rebellions of the 1960's did the Reuther caucus support a Black candidate for the Executive Board -- Nelson Jack Edwards.

Early in 1951, the Detroit Negro Labor Council, led by William R. Hood of Ford Local 600, launched a petition drive in Detroit for a local Fair Employment Practices Ordinance. Reuther responded by issuing a directive to all locals in the Detroit area, calling on all UAW members who had signed the petitions to withdraw their names.

The directive offered this lame justification: "this irresponsible Communist-inspired approach to secure FEPC by referendum" had been started without the prior OK of the "UAW-CIO. . . or other sincere advocates of FEPC in this community."

REUTHER'S PRACTICE AROUND RACISM

In response to the problems of hiring and upgrading discrimination in the auto and aircraft industries, the UAW had gone on record in its early years in favor of FEPC clauses in all UAW contracts. Reuther had included a demand for such a clause in the 1946 negotiations with GM, but quietly dropped it during the course of that strike.

During Reuther's campaign for UAW president at the subsequent 1946 convention, he spoke to a Black caucus about his stand for equal rights. During Reuther's presentation, the head of the UAW Fair Practices Office, George Crockett, Jr., rose and criticized Reuther for dropping the demand for a FEPC clause in the GM contract. After his victory in the presidential race, Reuther sent Crockett a letter suggesting that he quit the UAW staff.

In short, it's one thing to make a speech about segregation in Alabama, and quite another thing to fight racism in your own back yard. Unfortunately for the union, neither Reuther nor Woodcock measured up when it came to that.

Racism and discrimination remain rampant in the industry and the union, especially in the area of upgrading, and the unity of the UAW has been badly weakened as a result.

THE RANK AND FILE VOICE

But the UAW rank and file hasn't been asleep all these years. Wildcat strikes have increased, as the International signed no-strike clauses tying the union to binding arbitration, and limiting the right of locals to call strikes on their own authority. And every 2 years (now every 3 years since the 1974 convention) when local union officers face election, over 50% of them are voted out by the angry rank and file membership. But most important and effective in achieving real change have been the many organized efforts to reform the union and bring it back under the control of the membership.

Throughout the 50's, 60's, and into the 70's, the rank and file has continued to organize and fight for a democratic militant union. The rank and file forces have fought on many issues -- they fought extension of terms of office from one to two to three years; the 1958 sell-out of the short work week; the 1973 sell-out on voluntary overtime; the elimination of the right to strike. They fought for the demand for referendum vote for UAW International President and officers, and an end to racial discrimination.

Some of these fights, such as the fight against the 3-year term of office, have been partial victories for the rank and file. Opposition at the 1974 Convention forced the International to allow a compromise resolution on the 3-year term, which allowed local unions to retain the 2-year term for stewards and committeemen. Many locals then voted to retain the 2-year term against the wishes of the bureaucrats.

CAUCUSES FIGHT FOR BETTER UAW

There have been several organized, national caucuses in the UAW since 1950, whose main objectives have been to return democracy to the union, fight racism and discrimination and demand a militant fight against the Corporations. The Committee for A Democratic UAW, formed in the early 50's by President Carl Stellato of

Local 600, and the National Committee for Democratic Action in the UAW, formed at the 1959 Convention in order to fight for referendum election of officers and against a dues increase. Now both defunct, they played an important role in organizing and leading rank and file workers in their fight to strengthen the UAW.

The National Negro Labor Council, the Negro American Labor Council, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers have all served at one time or another as the focal point and organizing centers in the fight for full equality of Black UAW members. The NNLC and the League were also leaders in the fight for a more democratic and militant union generally, and by playing that role set an example for all auto workers, white as well as Black.

The center of organized opposition in the UAW today is the United National Caucus, formed in 1967 to fight for a \$1/hour wage increase and against the surrender of the Cost-Of-Living clause in the 1967 contracts.

Since that time, the UNC has taken up the fight for

membership referendum election of International Officers, the short work week, the right to strike, and for a decent contract in 1967, 70, 73, and 76.

LOCAL RANK AND FILERS ORGANIZE

In addition to these national movements, there have been hundreds of local rank and file caucuses in the UAW over the past 25 years. These local groups have taken up the struggle for the right to strike, against speed-up, against the retiree vote in local in-plant elections, for real health and safety protection, for equal hiring and upgrading of Black and women workers, and for a better union in every way.

It is to this movement, organized and still unorganized, local and national, that auto workers must look when we search for a better future for the UAW. Our union has a rich history, full of heroism, struggle, and unity as well as betrayal and division -- it's up to us to use the lessons of that history to build the kind of union we need for the battles that lie ahead.



ULTRA LEFT SET BACK IN M.C.H.R.

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The isolation of the RCP forces was seen in the election of national officers where their candidates won only the two positions which were uncontested. The other three national officerships were won by independents from Boston, Denver, and Philadelphia.

The general mood of the convention was also reflected in the resolutions passed on the final day. The first resolution directed the national officers and the National Executive Committee (chapter representatives) to

develop an MCHR program that is to be broad in scope and include positions around such issues as racism, sexism and NHI.

Another resolution stated that any state ments at the national level are to define MCHR's constituency as "people who are concerned with fighting for better health care," rather than the RCP's formulation "professionals and students."

Finally, the convention defeated a resolution, proposed by an RCP cadre, that MCHR go on record as supporting the July 4th RCP Rich Off Our Backs demonstration in Philadelphia.

In conclusion, this 13th national convention must overall, be considered a victory for those who want to build MCHR as a broad based mass organization.

However, the narrowness the RCP seeks has to a large degree already been achieved, as indicated by the size and scope of the convention. Holding key offices such as national chairperson and a majority on the NEC, it retains its stranglehold on MCHR.

Unless independent forces are able to rebuild the organization -- vigorously broadening our organizing and struggling sharply against sectarianism -- MCHR, along with the RCP, is doomed to oblivion -- the ultimate fate of all dogmatist and sectarian organizations.