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DISCUSSION ARTICLE ON EC DOCUMENT ON DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM; AND AMENDMENTS

The I.S. is now facing a new situation, one with many more possibilities for us. With the economic and political climate in the country changing, the I.S. is now an organization that has confidence in itself and can begin to grow. There is beginning to be a real excitement over possibilities of growth in the working class, of new people who are interested in us, etc.

In view of this, I support the EC's attempt to make the organization more serious, and more aware of what its responsibilities are. In the past, when the I.S. did not have much effect, neither did we have too much to lose. Now, as the stakes get higher, so are the responsibilities all of us are taking.

Part of this turn we are taking is going to have to mean increased centralization. If we are to be judged by results, people have got to implement national policies. However, the main purpose of my writing this position paper is to take issue with some of the EC's positions as stated in the document on "The IS, The Revolutionary Party and Democratic Centralism". The EC was "bending the twig", because of trying to compensate for IS past practice. They bent the twig too far, and so I want to bend it back some.

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E.C. DISCIPLINE

Much of the reason for the EC's move, not only toward democratic centralism, but also toward a disciplined EC, comes from the IS past. In the past, small differences were elevated to become important questions dividing the organization. The IS could not act, because it would continue to debate the position we should take until it was too late to act decisively.

Now, the EC feels that it is necessary that the EC go to the organization with one position, and fight for it. The EC also wants the NC and other leadership bodies to run on the same type of functioning. Accordingly, the best way to get the members to function in an effective way is for the leadership to all take one position.

This new position, it turns out has one thing in common with the old position. And that is, it has an emphasis on the combat within the organization. Internal differences continue to be very important. Only in the present circumstance, the leadership is all supposed to be of one viewpoint, with hopefully no other organized viewpoint.

One of the reasons that the IS allows members to organize a caucus if they so desire is that unless opposition has a right to organize, then it will just be words in the wind. This does not mean that we encourage caucuses and factionalism. But we do expect differences in a live and dynamic organization like the IS. However, these will not be hard and fast differences. They will not be over basic strategy and principles. Nor would the lines be drawn the same on every issue.

The EC apparently believes that we cannot have a healthy discussion of an issue, unless the entire EC, and hopefully NC is of one viewpoint. This implies that members of the IS are not capable of going into a discussion, hearing different views, then acting on the result, unless only one view is carefully prepared. In effect the EC wants to act as a caucus within the I.S.

The EC internal discipline is also augmented in that in the majority of cases that I am aware of, the EC takes a position before ideas are floated to other members of the organization. But there should be a certain amount of consultation of branch and fraction leaders, NC members, etc., before the EC takes a position which it feels it must fight for. Instead, the EC discusses a question and takes a position. It then informs other leaders of the organization who are supposed to go and convince the rest of the members of the position.

So, besides acting as a caucus, the EC wants there to be no other organized caucuses within the I.S.

Sure, some questions, infact many questions, the EC must decide without waiting for an NC. Some of these require immediate action and cannot wait for consultation. On these, it is right that the EC should be supported by the organization. On other questions, a brief period of discussion before taking a position would be valuable, but the EC is definitely discouraging this type of discussion.

Another problem of the EC internal discipline is that it makes evaluation of a past event difficult. As I stated before, the EC is correct in saying that the IS needs to have an attitude that when an event is taking place, once our position is set, the organization should be working out how to implement the position rather than is it correct. However, there is no reason to have disciplined evaluations of our participation in events that are over. Instead we need to have the fullest discussion of what has taken place.

Another thing that shows the emphasis that the EC places on internal discussion being somewhat of a combat situation is its evaluations of the November and February NC's. Those sessions where the EC positions passed strongly were evaluated as the best, and those where NC members had most questions about NC policies were not regarded as very good. The EC did not think that perhaps its own preparation was inadequate. As the EC sees it, the NC members should be defending the EC proposals in the organizations, and anything that takes away from that is harming the organization as a whole.

In the democratic centralism document, the EC has some references to this same general question of agreement with the EC. For example, on page 14, it is stated that "Consciousness within the revolutionary organization is also uneven. We do not pick a leadership to reflect the ranks, the unevenness of consciousness. Rather we select out the most advanced, conscious elements to lead . . ."

In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with this statement. But it implies something else. It implies that with any important disagreement, some have higher levels of consciousness, and some lower levels. Presumably, this means that the EC has the highest level of consciousness, and those who have disagreements with it, are on a lower level of consciousness. This is false.

Having different opinions within the organization reflected in the leadership does not have to lead to factionalism. It only does if that is what the leadership wants. The purpose of having different opinions reflected in the leadership is precisely the opposite: It is to build unity. How does this build unity? It does so because members know that their opinions are reflected in the leadership and when questions are coming up for discussion, their point of view will be considered before a decision is made.

Similarly, the last paragraph of the document states, "The cadres must win the new members to the positions and leadership of the group, not confuse, demoralize, sow doubts." This is very much like saying that criticizing the leadership is raising doubts about the organization as a whole and weakening it. It may be that there is some legacy from the past of people in the I.S. who would criticize and not really be interested in building our group (such as RT of 73 and TCT of 72). If this is what the EC means, fine. But if they are referring to the criticisms of many of our comrades now, then they are wrong.

CENTRALIZATION

Concretely, the EC is making a couple of proposals about centralization which need to be defeated. One is on the EC appointing branch organizers, and the other is

to give the EC the power to transfer staff (including branch organizers). These measures show that the EC has a distrust of the IS branch members, if it feels that they cannot make these decisions. The ability of the EC to determine the best organizer will diminish, and related problems will grow, as the IS itself grows.

While "ideally" appointing local organizers might work out, there is no basis in practice to show that this will help the organization. An organizer must have the confidence of the local members to be effective. That confidence is not something that can be simply bestowed on from above.

Sometimes it might be desirable for the EC to intervene in a branch to urge it to choose a certain person as organizer. But this is not the same thing as choosing the organizer for the branch. If the EC does not trust branch members to choose their own organizer, how can they trust them to build a revolutionary party and make a revolution. Also, it goes without saying that in exceptional circumstances, such as the RT of 1973, such branches should be put in receivership.

Nor is this an abstract question, even at present. The Cleveland branch would have a different organizer now if its organizer had been appointed. (no elaboration because I understand discussion on this is supposed to be closed.)

Similarly, transferring of local organizers, while it may be desirable, should not be done without the agreement of the organizer her/himself, or at least of the branch. Even revolutionary organizations in the past have used the power of transfer to remove local leaders from their base of support when there was a difference of opinion. Of course, there is no reason that this should be a problem now. But it could be a problem in the future. Furthermore, collaboration with branches involved is vital.

DISCIPLINE

There is another kind of discipline besides organizational discipline, and that is self-discipline that comes out of a political awareness of the tasks that need to be done, and the possibilities of doing them. Stress on "chain of command" is not going to bring about the turn toward agitation. It is the political leadership that is going to make the IS take more of a public face.

For example, for a long time, leaders of the organization would write documents, but would write very little for external use. Now that is beginning to change. In addition, Workers Power, which for a long time was not a useful tool, is so good that people actually like to sell it. They like to sell it not because someone exhorts them to, but because they can see the value.

If we are to succeed in becoming more externally oriented, the leadership needs to expand this aspect of what it is doing ^{more} than it does the "chain of command."

One thing the EC is quite right in stressing is that if and when we get to be a serious threat, we will be facing equally serious repression from the state. At such time, democracy within the organization will become more difficult (as will centralism). Moreover, in the normal course of growth, conventions will, obviously, get to be more distant from the average member, who will thus exert less influence over the organization. The organization should expect these things to happen, and be prepared. But in critical periods, our comrades will accept whatever discipline is necessary. There is no point in taking some of the steps now that the EC is proposing. They will not make the organization more effective, unless one can argue that control from the national office equals effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

I fully support the EC's attempt to get the organization to become more serious about what it is doing. However, this seriousness is not the same as all of the organizational measures that they are suggesting.

A document supporting such a position of the leadership body of the IS should have considerably more discussion of some past examples. Most members are not well, if at all, acquainted with what the Bolsheviks did (and to what extent that is relevant because of the different conditions), what the Workers' Party did, or even how the British IS functions. For example, Lenin wrote in 1906, after a mild liberalization of Tsarist repression, "we Bolsheviks have always recognized that in new conditions, when political liberties were acquired, it would be essential to adopt the elective principle."

Of course, it's true that we can get weighted down in "tons of documents". But if our past has taught us anything, it is that we need a certain greater respect for theory, for what has happened and why. We recognize the need for a revolutionary party and the disaster that can occur if one is not built. But do we understand the organizational methods involved?

AMENDMENTS: (These are minor amendments because I support the major thrust of the document -- the role of the I.S. in building the revolutionary party, the need to take ourselves and our tasks seriously, preventing an "old boys" network from developing and bringing in new leadership, especially black and ~~black~~ ^{working class}, the need to use the potential of all of our members. I do not feel that these amendments take away from this aspect of the document.)

1. p. 11, first sentence under section on centralism: Delete "The current period demands the speediest moves to tight centralization." (I generally support the moves of the organization to tighten up. The purpose of deleting this sentence is to take away an implication that any and every move toward centralization is automatically correct and that these moves are the top priority of the organization.)

2. p. 13, delete last 3 sentences of first (partial) paragraph beginning "The Constitution should be altered . . ." (Part of the history of the IS is that in the formation of the Workers Party in 1940, one of the reasons for the split from the SWP was that the minority (the W.P.) was unable to make its position known publicly. This right of minorities to make known its positions in the public press of the organization is important. As the EC document says about factions, we try to discourage it not by forbidding them, but by making them unnecessary. The organization has been functioning positions must first come up for debate inside the IS before occurring in WP; and as we have seen, publishing minority opinions in WP has not been a top priority for members. Nevertheless, it should remain up to the minority, and the editorial committee, if the minority feels it has something that must be said (something that does not affect our immediate work).

~~sentence~~ 3. p. 14 second paragraph under leadership. Delete everything but the first paragraph. Replace with KP's motion of NC: "We seek a leadership which openly represents the range of political differences in the organization and insist that it collaborate."

4. Third full paragraph, p. 15 Add the underlined words to the first sentence. "To create a national staff, comrades should be periodically moved from one branch to another with the approval of the member or the local branch involved."

5. p. 15, last full paragraph, Delete full paragraph. (This paragraph refers to appointment of local organizers by the EC)

6. last paragraph, p. 20; change "The cadres must win . . . etc" so it reads simply "The cadres must win the new members to the positions of the group". (Deletes stuff about "sowing doubts, etc".