

LAE

To Cadre:

This paper is still an internal paper of MCLL. It has been discussed in the CC and there has not been any fundamental disagreement with it, but we have not adopted it as a position paper of MCLL. It is being given to you now to assist in your own preparation for the weekend. The politics contained in it should in no way be internal.

LENINISM AND THE MOTOR CITY LABOR LEAGUE

The Motor City Labor League began in the fall of 1970, under the leadership of Ronald Glotta, Sheila Murphy, Buck Davis, Mike Adelman and others as a continuation of a task force of the defunct Motor City Coalition. The general atmosphere within the "new left" at that time, was one of anarchy, disarray, spontaneity, middle and ruling class adventurism (Weatherman) and theoretical underdevelopment. The Motor City Coalition, itself an attempt to unify virtually every white left group in the City, had foundered on some of the same tendencies. There were few viable organizational forms in Detroit or elsewhere.

The Motor City Labor League soon identified itself as being committed to the development of a Marxist-Leninist pre-party organization, yet without a clear definition, analysis, or strategy. The founders and those who joined later were all activists and practitioners who knew that some "primary" political organization was necessary. It was assumed that it was the substantive politics of the old left which had led to its errors, defeats and irrelevance --not its organizational form.

On the strength of its concrete practice, MCLL and its programs grew. Two weeks after the organization's first internal election of its leadership in September of 1972, MCLL split. One quarter of the members under the leadership of Sheila Murphy left MCLL and subsequently abandoned and apparently repudiate the cadre form of organization in favor of an amorphous and we believe less democratic "mass" form.

That split and subsequent developments have made necessary an examination (not a re-examination, one never really took place) of the meaning of Leninism and the concepts of cadre, leadership, and democratic centralism and vanguard party.

Some things are clear. The need for revolutionary organization is as strong, if not more so, in 1973 as in 1970. While working class militancy grows, the development of revolutionary class struggle continues to be undermined by the splintered, anarchistic, petty-bourgeois, or revisionist politics of many organizations and individuals "on the left." Equally important, the tendency of non-democratic centralist forms of organization is often to be susceptible to manipulation from without or within by self-perpetuating elites

unwilling or unable to accept the will of the majority when it disagrees with them. The need for discipline as a step beyond mere voluntarism in study, practice and theoretical development is also apparent. Serious revolutionaries must in short create revolutionary organization and undertake the responsibilities of revolutionary leadership. It is a life-time commitment and a way of life. Whether the word is used or not, there is an essential need for cadre.

Properly exercised, democratic centralism maximizes political struggle and debate within the organization and protects the rights of minorities, and more importantly, the majority. We do not view, based on our experience since September of 1972, the centralism of democratic centralism to be inherently contradictory to democracy but rather an essential form by which cadre growth and leadership develops. We do believe, through our own organizational experiences, that democratic centralism is necessary for prioritizing objectives, and organizing disciplined responsible resources around specific decisions and struggles. It creates the possibility for the training of cadre, the growth of commitment, and a conceptual approach to discipline and the development of responsible discipline in practice.

We do believe that revolutionary organization must be disciplined organization. We are engaged in class struggle, and because we are, even now, engaged in self-conscious struggle against the bourgeoisie, our organizational forms require not only political analysis and strategy, but the discipline necessary to carry out our politics in practice.

Our greatest differences, as we examine our own and historic left experience applied to conditions as we presently understand them are with two "left" political tendencies: the Trotskeist model of "vanguard party," and what we would characterize as "new left free socialism."

We explicitly reject the formulation of "vanguard party" as outlined by Ernest Mandel in "The Leninist Theory of Organization." We do not believe that a revolutionary party of the working class is based on a bourgeois social strata of "intellectuals." We reject the mechanistic model of "intellectuals" intervening in the struggles of the working class. We reject the assumption that the responsibility of the "vanguard party" is to develop revolutionary theory while

the working class produces the material requirements of life. We reject the notion of a self-proclaimed self-perpetuating "vanguard party." We reject the method of work implicit in such a model: sporadic forays of "trained revolutionaries" into the organizations and struggles of the working class. The theory and practice of such self-proclaimed "vanguard parties" has led to sectarianism, and elitism and stands more as a barrier to our achieving revolutionary Marxist-Leninist consciousness than an attraction.

The MCLL split itself and the history and present practice of the old left suggests that there may be something inherent in the self-proclaimed party or pre-party form which produces the most destructive and esoteric effects of internal conflict. There is no question for example that the anti-war movement suffered enormously from the age old dispute between the SWP and the CP which was imposed upon it almost from its inception. The evidence does not suggest that their struggle produced a clearer or healthier anti-war movement. Nor does there appear to be much gained by the Left from the dogmatic "intervention" of groups such as the Spartacist League and the National Caucus of Labor Committees seeking to insure "correct" ideological struggle.

The notion of a self-proclaimed, self-perpetuating vanguard party (or "pre-party") at least as it has been used by Trotskyists, inevitably produces attitudes of moral superiority which are elitist. The same mentality has contributed to a history of "vanguardism" and "liberationism" which has characterized the U.S. struggles of the 1960's into debates about blacks as vanguard, women as vanguard, production workers as vanguard, students as vanguard, etc. etc. which has merely reproduced existing capitalist divisions in new forms.

Most importantly, self-proclaimed "vanguardism" makes extremely difficult relations between organizations and particularly "vanguard" and "non-vanguard" or "mass" forms. Non-vanguard groups are apparently vulnerable to manipulation (or attempted manipulation) by the vanguard group. The anti-war movement again comes to mind regarding the use of the war as an issue to build the SWP and the YSA, in which what was primary was the interests and "principles" of those organizations and what was in the interest of the Vietnamese and American people or even the anti-war rank and file was secondary. Ironically, however, it is from Vietnamese theory and practice that we learn the most about the possible close and non-exploitative relationships between a communist party and the broadest conceivable range of non-communist groups.

These issues are complicated, of course, by the reality of anti-communism including anti-Leninism which are inherent in bourgeois democracies and the U.S. in particular. Despite trade and recognition of China and the USSR, the Herbert Philbrick "I led Three Lives" caricature of communist parties is deeply inbedded in the minds of virtually everyone (aided doubtless by the Herbert Philbrick-like behavior, including unnecessary secrecy, of some communist practice). Frequently, it is our experience that opposition to the socialist substance of MCLL politics takes the form of opposition to the form. Indeed the statement "we agree with your objectives but disagree with your methods" has proven over and over again to be a smokescreen for people who actually disagreed with our objectives.

We are also familiar with the problem of "proximity." The alienation inherent in racist, capitalist society tends to get taken out on those closest whether or not they are responsible. In fact, that is how we are kept divided. Blacks, for example, attacked whites within the movement with far greater effect than those who by virtue of their ruling class power were inaccessible. Individual males with chauvinist practice within the movement have certainly been caused more intense and personal conflict than has so far reached Hugh Hefner or Henry Ford. Similarly, resentment at the daily manipulation of capitalist society intensifies the reaction to real and imagined manipulation within one's own organizations. Within limits this is a necessary part of struggle -- the method by which we change. Uncontrolled, however, it leads to one destructive implosion after another in which the real manipulators go untouched.

New left free socialism includes the following: repudiating discipline, repudiating the necessity for a broad based revolutionary party of the working class, organizing around a series of issues as opposed to class power, repudiating and disavowing the material and historical connection between the struggle of the proletariat in the U.S. with socialist struggle and society in the international proletariat, claiming exceptionalism (of a petti-bourgeois nature) for the working class in this country. In other words, "free socialism" contends that the U.S. or even more narrowly, Detroit, is somehow excepted from working class struggles in other parts of the world. Often the U.S. is somehow separated from Marxist-Leninist analysis. Of course we do not disparage the need to analyze the specific material conditions in the U.S. or Detroit, but "free socialists eliminate the need for Marxist-Leninist analysis and historical connection at all. In fact, often, free socialists blame problems in this country more on "the left" than on the ruling class. Generally, they refer to "the left" as any organized and disciplined group with which they disagree.