

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ADVANCES ANTI-BAKKE STRUGGLE

The first national conference of the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition was held in Los Angeles on February 19 and was a good success. Roughly 750 people turned out. The conference was multinational in composition and reflected a broad character of representation from different regions of the country.

At the conference the ABDC decided on a plan of activities for a spring offensive to be timed to coincide roughly with the Supreme Court decision in the Bakke case.

First, there will be a national demonstration now set for April 15 in Washington, D.C. This demonstration will strive to mobilize the entire anti-Bakke movement.

Second, a week of struggle/semana de lucha is planned for May 6-13 which will begin with regional demonstrations in Atlanta, New York and other cities. During the week following these demonstrations, there will be education programs on the impact of the Bakke decision.

Finally, there will be a national demonstration held on May 13 in either San Francisco or Los Angeles.

All these activities will be coordinated with events held to celebrate the revolutionary holiday of the Mexican people, Cinco de Mayo. Also, suggestions were made at the conference to connect the week of struggle with events to commemorate Malcolm X's birthday, May 19, and African Liberation Day on May 26.

The mobilization as a whole will make it possible to respond most effectively to the Supreme Court decision in the Bakke case which will be decided sometime this spring.

ANTI-IMPERIALIST UNITY

The conference reflected a strong spirit of anti-imperialist resistance on the part of participants. This spirit was reflected in solidarity messages, such as the presentation of the ABDC representative from Atlanta, who exposed national oppression in the Black Belt South, as well as in the eagerness of conference members to take up political discus-

sions in the workshops and informally on the floor of the conference. Local groups with different backgrounds and from different regions all reflected a militant and enthusiastic desire to take up work. In addition, there was a strong sentiment for building unity among all anti-Bakke forces.

All these aspects of the conference represent strengths which provide a strong foundation for members of the coalition to unite and move forward and, in particular, a good basis for building and expanding militant actions for the spring offensive.

STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION FOR NATIONAL WORK

Nonetheless, there were also certain weaknesses reflected in the work of the conference. For example, it was a weakness of the conference that the principles of unity of the ABDC were not taken up for political discussion. These principles have served well as the basis of the statewide ABDC, but need to be reevaluated in light of the decision to give the coalition a national character. The principle concerning the UC Regents, for example, has a historical justification in terms of the origins of the statewide coalition (particularly in opposition to the line that the UC Regents should be counted on as "tactical allies" in the fight to overturn the Bakke decision!), but it is not a principle of unity adequate to the task of mobilizing nationwide resistance -- first because it tends to suggest that Bakke is mainly about university admissions programs and second because it tends to suggest that Bakke has some specific local impact on California. Obviously these points narrow unnecessarily the national scope of the coalition.

In order that the principles of the coalition could more effectively serve as a basis for mobilizing national resistance to the Bakke decision, the Workers Congress (M-L) presented to the conference specific criticisms and suggestions for modifying them. While we have supported the present principles of unity in our propaganda and activity in the

coalition, we felt they could be broadened and improved. The document we distributed at the conference is reprinted at p. 8.

Two examples of the importance of taking up this question were reflected in the conference workshops. In the OUTREACH workshop, the biggest question raised was how to build multinational unity. In particular, members of the coalition wanted to know how to reach white workers and how to draw them into the struggle. This has also been a question which has troubled some locals. The failure of the coalition to provide good leadership on this reflects the narrowness of the present principles of unity. While the principles correctly call for reliance on the masses of oppressed people which are the target of the Bakke attack, they fail to point to the working class as a leader in the struggle for democracy. However, it is the role of the proletariat as a vanguard fighter for democracy that is the key to giving guidance on the question of building multinational unity in a democratic struggle.

In both the OUTREACH and in the IMPACT OF THE BAKKE DECISION workshops, criticisms were raised of ABDC work on the woman question, and the conference pledged to place greater emphasis on this issue. But what is important in this connection is that the principles of unity themselves do not speak directly to the special oppression of women or to the fact that the anti-Bakke movement must fight against sex as well as national oppression.

Overall these points make clear that the ABDC can only strengthen the basis for its work by taking up a constructive political discussion of the principles of unity as quickly as possible.

THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE BAKKE ATTACK

A second weakness of the conference was in the failure of leadership to organize political discussion around the major questions facing the conference. While there was a thirst for political discussion among partici-

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factors, it will inevitably tail events and narrow the movement.

METHODS OF ORGANIZATION

Another example of the failure of leadership to organize effective political discussion around basic issues was reflected in the presentation of the plan for the spring offensive. While this presentation was good, it would have been stronger if the basic political issues concerning the offensive had been focused for debate and resolution. In particular, there were no draft proposals circulated to ABDC locals prior to the conference itself.

The workshops also were not adequately prepared. The list of workshops, for example, was handed out only prior to the conference and there were no concrete proposals for the activity of these workshops either. As a result, participants could not come to the conference prepared to make the workshops working bodies.

In general no materials for discussion and decision were circulated prior to the conference so that informed judgments could be made on basic issues.

Leadership's failure to organize broad political discussion was compounded by other poor methods of organization. The fact that the one-day session started two and one-half hours late meant that the time available for workshops was cut short and restricted. With too little time to deal with scheduled topics, some workshops took up only general comments on how the conference was going.

The importance of the question of preparation, style of work and lack of political substance is that every mass organization should be a training ground for democracy. There was a tendency in the ABDC conference to treat this question in a formal and ultra democratic way -- that is assuming there is democracy if everybody votes. But genuine mass democracy requires lively political debate on substantive questions of policy. In turn this must be well prepared in advance and organized in a centralized and disciplined fashion. That is the decisive role of leadership in preparing conditions for democracy in a mass organization. Members of the coalition should be encouraged to raise

questions and criticisms, to voice opinions and identify defects in work. With a good democratic style of leadership based on centralism and effective organization, this will raise the initiative and enthusiasm of the masses and strengthen leadership's ability to give guidance.

It is a fundamental principle of united front work to combine unity with struggle and to seek unity through struggle. Mao Tse-tung criticized those who thought that struggle would split the united front and instead fostered a style of work where activists become good at uniting with those who differ with them and good at carrying out common activity with them, but at the same time good at struggling to strengthen the common fight or to overcome signs of vacillation or compromise in struggle. Seeking unity through struggle in a mass organization demands a good democratic style. A democratic style in turn requires good preparation and organization of struggle on basic issues of policy.

START WITH THE STRUGGLE AS A WHOLE

The criticisms that we have made of the first national conference of the ABDC do not negate its overall positive character or the step forward taken by the coalition in taking up national work. But there is a tendency in a mass organization, particularly as it expands, to see the struggle it has taken up from the viewpoint of its own history and to build its work on that basis. Instead it needs to take the full scope of the struggle as its starting point and to see its connection with the democratic and revolutionary movement as a whole. The organization needs to be viewed in that light, not the other way around.

For example, in our view, hesitation in taking up improvements in the principles of unity of the ABDC would reflect this kind of error.

In other words, there is a tendency to focus on what has been built rather than what must be built.

Moreover, this is reinforced by the fragmented character which any particular struggle will have if it is taken in isolation from the overall struggle of working and

oppressed people.

It can also be reinforced by organizational amateurishness which often develops when methods of work are informal and based on personal ties.

Inevitably such tendencies hold back the work of a mass organization, narrowing the range of its political impact.

PERSPECTIVE IN MASS WORK

To build in terms of what exists, for Marxist-Leninists, is to bow to spontaneity. It means to build in terms of spontaneous demands without an overall perspective on the struggle.

Perspective in mass work comes from the ability to grasp the objective forces which drive a crisis forward and, as a result, to know the path to build resistance. The proletariat is the leading force in the united front because, under the leadership of a vanguard party basing itself on the science of Marxism-Leninism, it is able to show the perspective of the struggle and give sure guidance to its course.

The Bakke decision represents an extremely important and far-reaching attack on the democratic struggles of women and oppressed nationalities, threatening significant advances made in recent years. Spontaneous resistance to the impact of the decision will also be extremely broad and far-reaching.

The question for Marxist-Leninists is whether our young organizations will grow to meet the scope of this resistance or whether organizations will try to restrict the scope of resistance to fit some present level of work. The main danger for communists in the ABDC, as well as for communists in mass organizations generally, is to belittle the responsibility to give the most advanced leadership possible to the movement, that is to belittle the conscious element.

In ABDC, Marxist-Leninists will play a leading role to the degree that they can provide perspective and guidance for the movement. Our influence will be felt to the extent that we can build the broadest possible resistance to the Bakke decision and connect it to the united front against US imperialism in this country and against superpower hegemonism worldwide.

pants, this was not adequately met by the formal work of the conference.

This was reflected first of all in the failure of the conference to bring out the full political framework for the Bakke attack. Monetary crisis, inflation, unemployment, overproduction in agriculture and other symptoms of the domestic crisis of US imperialism provide the background for stepped up efforts to throw the burden of the crisis on the backs of working and oppressed people. In 1977, for example, there were 4,686 strikes with 26.7 million workdays lost. In this situation a first priority of the ruling class has historically been to foment divisions based on sex and nationality -- to force women and oppressed nationalities from the workforce or into second class jobs and to put a brake on the struggle for wage equality and other efforts to overcome economic and social discrimination. This lays the basis for intensifying superexploitation and for dragging down the working conditions, organization and standard of life of all laboring people.

The war policies and war preparations of US imperialism also lead to an intensification of national and sex oppression and to a general attack on the democratic struggles of the masses.

Unless we show the connection between the Bakke attack of the ruling class and the external and internal crisis of US imperialism, we cannot bring out the full significance of the Bakke decision or its relationship to other attacks on the oppressed masses. Above all, if we do not bring out this connection, we will not grasp the full scope of resistance which can be mobilized or how that resistance can be linked to other democratic struggles, not only in the US, but worldwide.

By grasping objective factors which push the crisis forward and which therefore provoke popular resistance, we can provide leadership to the struggle at every stage, whatever its twists and turns. But if the coalition does not take into account these

task - bowing to spontaneity

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