

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE MOTOR CITY LABOR LEAGUE
REGARDING THE SEPTEMBER 1972 SPLIT

In 1972 we are still in the very early and primitive stages of building the American socialist revolution. At some time between now and the seizure of power a hegemonic communist party will be built by American revolutionaries. This will not happen next year. Such a task may indeed take a decade or more. At least until the time when a real Leninist party is achieved in the United States our movement will be largely characterized by the continuing growth and decay of revolutionary organizations. Some organizations with mature leadership and practice may survive for years, combine with others, and become the building blocks of a vanguard party. Others will have temporary success around a particular line and program, then fail to adapt and grow, and disintegrate. Still others may be kept "alive" by people wedded by conviction or vanity to a name, a collection of people, or merely a memory.

We believe that the nearly two year experiment in building a Motor City Labor League which would cohere the talents and energies of serious white revolutionaries in Detroit is now at an end. The termination of this particular experiment is perhaps unfortunate. It is certainly, in our view, necessary. On September 3, we left MCLL but pledged that for a period of time the matter would remain "internal" while we all reflected, exchanged papers, and observed practice. For three weeks this process has gone on and nothing significant has occurred which would convince us we should return to MCLL. On the contrary, the interim period has been useful in bringing forward and better defining some differences which do divide us.

Nobody pretends that these differences amount to a "split between two lines." Neither camp is that mature.

Nobody should pretend that intense mistrust and enmity are not one source of the division. Criticism/self-criticism, sincere or otherwise, is not a universal panacea.

But political differences are there and this paper will attempt to define them.

Whatever view of these differences may be held by MCLL members each and all should understand that we who have left see no current basis for reunification. We will meet with you to discuss the subjects of the recent period but our decision is firm. A split is now actual. A reintegration of the two groups would not, in our view, be in the best interests of the socialist movement in Detroit.

We do believe there is a basis for continuing relations between the two groups provided that certain functional agreements can be reached. We hope this will be possible. We respect the practice of many in MCLL. Each of us counts good friends among MCLL's membership. And there are mass activities (CCC, the anti-war movement, the Ravitz campaign. . .) for which both groups obviously feel responsibility.

Before we proceed to your communications and the issues they raise we would like to make some criticisms of our practice and review in as sharp and precise manner as possible our criticisms of your collective and individual conduct during the recent period.

Our self-criticisms are directed at two aspects of our practice: our share of responsibility for the preconditions of the crisis (1-3) and certain aspects of our conduct during the crisis (4-7). They are as follows:

1.) During the past months we, as well as others, did not do things which should have been done to move toward a mature praxis of criticism/self-criticism. Whatever explanations might be made (the press of external work, a liberal concern for cadre's morale, etc.) it is clear that we ultimately should share some of the responsibility for the pathetic performances of recent weeks. This extends, of course, beyond the question of criticisms of individuals. Had we been more persistent in raising partially formulated criticisms of say, PPT leadership during May or the half-year non-motion around WEU we might all have taken steps we didn't.

2.) Believing that the poverty of organizational debate around basic MCLL objectives is one of the conditioning factors of the past crisis, we acknowledge our share of this failure. Had this discussion been richer and more extensive it is possible that we would have emerged with a more coherent and shared view of common objectives and that others would have found it less easy to fall into parancia about the "Murphy Bloc."

3.) In particular we accept responsibility, perhaps even primary responsibility, for the inflated view which the organization has of itself. The way in which say, Jack Russell held out visions of the future party or Sheila Murphy attempted to transform middle-class lack of self-respect have very probably led to a situation in which folks are acting on an unreal sense of themselves and the organization. If "no truth can harm the party" then conversely flights of fancy and living on futures surely can. We think we have learned a hard lesson here.

4.) At the August 27 GM meeting, members of the "Murphy Bloc" (present and future) participated in a discussion which introduced the concept of "blocs" in an undefined and sloppy way. Since (with the wisdom of hindsight) the situation created was very confusing. An effort should have been made to force a clarification of what the term meant and what people's practice had really been. At this same meeting Jack Russell was clearly liberal in not pursuing the real meaning of Frank Joyce's comment about GS members having been coerced into not bringing differences to the membership.

5.) Also at the August 27 GM meeting and perhaps thereafter some of us were not sufficiently clear about our criticisms of the convention and especially the CC elections. Given the general level of organizational development it was not enough to say that a failure of initiative and leadership had occurred. Such formulations should have been much more developed and better communicated. We acknowledge that this may have been one precondition for people's fantasies about the Murphy Bloc and its intentions.

6.) For a period of time some of us held (but did not act on) the erroneous view that there had been an organized "Joyce" voting bloc at the convention.

7.) Concerning the matter of Jack and Sheila's resignations:

a.) It was correct to state from the beginning of the discussion of Valerie's disciplining that their view was her resignation or their's - if in discussion their view of the either/or changed they could so state.

b.) The intention to resign if Val remained on the CC was styled in such a way (in anger, at the end of the meeting) as to be inherently disruptive.

c.) However disruptive, it did not lead at that point to any "organizational crisis." What Sunday September 3 would have held had there been no illegitimate meeting on Saturday night we do not know for clearly that meeting created the primary conditions for the split.

Although you are by now aware of most of our criticisms of your practice and disagreements about the facts and their interpretation, it may still be of some use to review them in the present context.

1. Certainly Frank Joyce, Valerie Snook, Buck Davis, Lynda Ann Ewen, Ron Glotta and perhaps many others held (and apparently still partially hold!) a view of our attitude toward the Central Committee elections which is insulting, baseless, and paranoid. In the Report of the Central Committee you wrote, "We can only interpret the resignations by Jack and Sheila as proof of our original assertion that the election was being sabotaged and that people were unwilling and unable to accept the results."

All of us had criticisms of the election process and results and each of us accepted the results. Old GS members might recall who first called for an elected leadership and who first argued that provisional members might be allowed to stand for any office. Jack and Sheila's stand on the Snook question had to do with what it meant for one comrade to lie to another and what is necessary when this happens. Those who could not accept this reality produce baseless and contemptible theories of sabotage.

It was at points our impression that you had discarded this position. But when Frank Joyce asserted that Jack Russell encouraged Lynda Ann Ewen to run for CC because this would undercut Valerie's power (incredible!) and when Frank Joyce observed that he didn't get eight votes and there are eight people in the Murphy bloc (more than half of us who resigned voted for Frank) then we wondered how much of this bullshit had been discarded. Then we read in the introduction to Struggle Within:

The organization, let alone the class, cannot tolerate the destructive and corrosive effect of bourgeois conflict. It must demand respect for itself, its capacity to select leaders and procedures and structures it creates to distribute power within the organization and resolve the wealthy disputes which inevitably arise within its ranks.

Despite the unspecific and generalized tone the implications of this seem clear to us. You still, despite protestations to the contrary, think we were out to sabotage the CC elections. And you ask us for a leap in revolutionary trust to save the organization!

2. Valerie Snook consciously and deliberately lied to another comrade on the CC about organizational matters. This is not "liberal" or merely "incorrect" but unprincipled, uncomradely, and intolerable behavior for leadership. In none of your documents do you sufficiently speak to the matter of Valerie's conduct.

3. You have characterized the September 2 Saturday night meeting as completely legitimate.

This was a meeting which deliberately excluded eight members who were understood to have positions different from those of the CC members who called the meeting. This was a meeting where those who attended were pledged to secrecy if they intended to seek out our view of things before the Sunday meetings. This was a meeting where Buck and Ron got together with at least Val and Frank and decided to hustle Hugh White out of his GS seat to insure one more pro-Snook vote on our call for expulsion. This was a meeting where folks were being organized by those who were afraid to have us present. The Saturday night meeting was no doubt "liberating" for some. It was also illegitimate.

4. As you have acknowledged, you misused and abused criticism/self-criticism, particularly with regard to Sheila. But your category of reasons seems very soft to us. We would add some harder ones: the suppressed hostility of those who dislike persons more advanced than themselves, the opportunism of weaklings who jump at the chance to get in a kick when the kicking seems safe, and the sexism of some men who have a constitutional difficulty in dealing straight up with strong women.

Some of you had (and no doubt have) honest and legitimate criticisms of us and we respect that. But none of you had the comradely decency to blow the whistle on the shit being run on Sheila.

We could go on with criticisms major and minor of specific individuals but if this is still useful it can be done in many ways more productive than through this paper. One more matter, however, does need to be spoken to directly: the question of Frank Joyce's motivations and conduct.

Your view is clear: Frank was acting in the best interests of the organization but once in a while let personality get in the way and slipped into "personal, bourgeois conflict."

We believe Frank Joyce is a particularly complex fellow who was acting from several motives at the same time. Since we do not regard Frank as a pig we acknowledge that some of his actions were motivated by a desire to serve the best interests of the organization. But we also regard Frank as someone particularly prone to the very kind of devious, personalized, and - if you wish - "bourgeois" machinations which you identify in Struggle Within.

In describing this aspect of his conduct we are not retreating into personalized conflict but insisting on a cold assessment of some very unsocialist, behavior, an assessment which some of the cant about "personality" has been intended to deflect.

1.) Frank thought Sheila had "too much" power in MCLL and wished to reduce this in favor of himself. Although he surely must have thought Sheila belonged on the Central Committee he didn't vote for her so as to reduce the difference between their votes and (hope against hope) even perhaps come in first. In his Friday, September 1 meeting with Justin he remarked that "Sheila doesn't have to have all the power, does she?" and was clearly trying to enlist Justin in a "let's reduce Red's power" campaign.

2.) Frank was operating from a long standing personal dislike and resentment of Jack and wished to reduce the power of another male whose "status" in MCLL was not less than his own. Further, he had the view that much of Jack's status was based on his personal and political association with Sheila and wished to drive a wedge between them. Thus he eagerly pursued the opportunity when BP expressed some disenchantment with Jack and tried to enlist Sheila in a covert "dump Junior" campaign. When Red didn't bite and when Frank found out Jack had substantial support Frank also discovered that he "had no political basis for opposing Jack's membership on the CC."

3.) Frank saw Justin as a crucially located person who, if delicately organized, would be very useful in reducing Sheila's power. Thus the overtures of the September 1 meeting

[REDACTED]

4.) Frank thought that many members had long and liberally suppressed problems with Sheila's style and if carefully mobilized might swing behind his leadership in attacking her and "her bloc."

We understand that in the past three weeks, as a result of the crisis, many in MCLL may have advanced substantially in self-confidence, sophistication, and willingness to struggle internally. We salute such growth if it has occurred. We can even believe it is possible Frank Joyce is one among many who have helped achieve this growth. But this does not for one minute change our view of Frank's complex motivations during the past month. In our opinion he has engaged in a strategem which is as contemptible as it is temporarily successful.

Some Remarks on the Document Struggle Within

Our understanding is that while Struggle Within was authored by diverse hands it does represent MCIL's organizational position on the questions it addresses.

Your Struggle Within has five sections which can be usefully grouped into two elements: the introduction which apparently presents your current view of the sources and nature of the split and the four essays which are apparently an attempt to establish areas of discussion which might lead to clarification and possible reunion.

Our reply to the subjects of the introduction is primarily conveyed in the previous sections of this paper. But one contention of the introduction does require some further commentary. It is implied that we may remain mired in personalized conflict, conflict which is inherently "bourgeois." If that is your contention (your paper is almost totally devoid of specifically directed criticism -- the only useful kind) we reject it.

The question of the role of "personality" or "character" in socialist struggle and conflict is complex. Surely we are all familiar with the kind of "conflict" which is based totally on personal animosity masquerading as political position. The attitude of "I don't like your motherfucking ass and I'm gonna trash it!" has no place in a socialist organization.

And of course many of us by now have engaged in struggles which are usually (but not always!) devoid of any element of personality. For example, honest differences about questions of political economic analysis (What were the sources of Nixon's NEP? Is inter-capitalist competition a rising contradiction?...)

But many struggles between socialists do and must involve the personalities and characters of the protagonists. In the main the Mensheviks were different from the Bolsheviks; they had different characters! (Please -- no silly comparisons with our split are intended). Real political differences are fought out between real people who live in and are conditioned by actual social forces. Fighting necessary fights in terms which do involve individual personalities is not a retreat into bourgeois behavior but an advance from bourgeois liberalism. Can anyone read Lenin's Last Testament or the attacks on Liu Shao-Chi, can anyone honestly contemplate the recent BMC split and the role of Foreman's personality in it and doubt this?

Sometimes these struggles result in change, unity, and advancement. Sometimes these struggles result in splits and advancement. The latter is often the case during the earlier stages of movement and party building.

We regard your desire to move away from the question of the specific personalities a liberal aversion to the kind of struggle which was precisely necessary.

...

We are honestly somewhat confused as to how to best respond to the contents of the four essays. We certainly regard them as a sincere effort to establish the kind of dialog which might have conceivably led to reunification. But they don't begin to achieve that goal. They are in the main either obvious or so general as to say little or nothing useful to the present circumstances. At points where the essays do take specific and currently relevant positions with which we disagree we have so stated already. If we thought that general theoretical discussions of such questions as "leadership" or "criticism/self-criticism" would hold any promise of really resolving the issues which divide us we would gladly lavish the time on such activity. We don't.

Perhaps at some future time it may be mutually beneficial to take up such questions. We suspect that should we do so we will discover quite substantial areas of disagreement. But we did not leave MCLL because of any issue which is concretely taken up in the essays. We left because we had ceased to trust and respect some of you and because of the specific series of actions and events to which we have referred in our papers. Clearly the different positions of the two groups on these matters seem to be at least as deeply held as they were on September 3rd.

Upon much reflection and close study of the position of the Motor City Labor League - both its perspective on the events beginning August 31, 1972 and recapitulated in the so-called "Central Committee Report" of September 3, 1972, and the 21 page political paper titled "Struggle Within" - we are convinced that reunification is not possible. However, even if the apparent political differences (see "Struggle Within" and our response) are substantive and of long duration - we believe that a coalition is possible - indeed politically correct, at this time. The coalition will be premised on the assumption that all of us share a fundamental commitment to the building of a revolutionary white movement. This movement will require the unification of numerous tendencies - more sharply divided than even we are at this time. It would appear that we are divided on the proper course to be followed in the achievement of this shared assumption. Therefore we propose first generally and then specifically the following:

That a four person Coalition Steering Committee be formed - with two representatives from each group, to meet on a fortnightly basis. The purpose of this committee is to administer the coalition - to be a forum for exploring new methods of work in new arenas. Further, to be a place for complaints and criticisms.

Specifics:

CHANGEOVER:

We have legally assumed the name Changeover. We have incorporated as such. Hereafter we will be referred to as Changeover in this paper. We will have at the joint meeting a check for \$450.00 - the down payment of the typesetting equipment. We claim all layout equipment that has been made or bought by Changeover Productions.

As part of the coalition we offer:

- 1.) Machines and personnel as required and for the cost of materials and services to: Open Forum
WEU
The Alliance
- 2.) We are prepared to negotiate some access to machines and personnel (for the cost of materials) with the People's Peace Treaty.

CONTROL, CONFLICT AND CHANGE

This program being one of the most sensitive areas of mutual work we offer as part of the coalition:

- 1.) At the next printing of the brochure there will be three sponsors: Changeover, the Motor City Labor League and The Alliance.
- 2.) That, at this time, the split should not be publicly raised in the CCC arena.
- 3.) That the Planning Committee have representation as follows:
3 reps from Changeover
3 reps from the Motor City Labor League
6 reps from The Alliance
2 reps from the Women's Book Club
2 reps from the Practical Action Committee
(Obviously some explanation will be necessary in the Planning Committee and the General Staff).
- 4.) That the office staff remain the same.