

April 10, 1974

TO PC MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

The following is a letter to the National Office from San Francisco organizer Steve Chainey concerning some observations on the CP in the bay area.

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March 26

Dear Comrades,

In the last few weeks, I've discovered some things about the internal life of the S.F. Communist Party which is quite interesting. First of all, Roland Sheppard, a comrade in Painters local #4 active in the Sears strike, had a discussion on a picket line with Joe Figaretto, an older leading member of the CP here. He's a business agent for ILWU local #10 and is the only CP'er who regularly attends the United Labor Action Committee meetings. Roland asked why the CP wasn't more actively supporting the Sears strike. To make a long story short, "Joe" was unusually open and frank, agreeing that the CP should be doing more but that they were having some problems, especially with young Black members in relation to a recent dispute in WAPAC (an influential Black poverty group) where a person was shot during a heated meeting over control and allocation of government funds. In general, the CP here seems to be heavily immersed in all sorts of poverty pimp organizations and neighborhood issues.

A few weeks later, I had a discussion with a young CP woman selling Peoples World on a Sears picket line. While she knew I was in the SWP, she was very non-sectarian. We had a long discussion which I'll summarize as follows:

1. Agreed that the CP was sectarian for not joining our California ballot suit and that the Voters Choice Initiative is a waste of time and not a serious attempt to change election laws.
2. Thought our forum series was impressive and wished the CP had one.
3. Said she reads the Militant often because it's the best movement newspaper, though she disagrees with editorial policy, especially on Solzhenitsyn.
4. She felt many older CP'ers were too sectarian and hung up on Stalin. She said Stalin means nothing to the younger members. She thinks the left should work more together on common projects.

5. She can't stand Angela Davis, for unclear reasons.

6. Finally and most revealing, she explained that the CP in S.F. is plagued by a "violent internal factional dispute" polarized into two basic camps. One, she explained, thinks the CP should "support every liberation movement that comes down the pike" and the other side thinks the CP should "become more involved in workers' struggles." She adheres to the latter faction which she said is based in the Joe Hill Warehouse Club. This is one of the CP cells which Joe Figaretto is a leader of.

This young CP'er I talked to seemed to be a serious active member who was deeply disturbed by the factional dispute and couldn't help but talk about it, even with an SWP'er. She was beginning to raise doubts in her mind about the feasibility of a centralist organization, no doubt because of the way the internal differences are handled. She gave no indication whether this was just a local dispute or true nationally.

The final incident was a discussion between Vincent Hallinan, our CoDEL suit lawyer, and a comrade doing CoDEL work. He said his son, "K.O." Hallinan (a member of the Political Committee) told him the CP "isn't doing a godamn thing."

According to the young CP woman I spoke with, the internal dispute over the CP's basic orientation to the radicalization seemed to be far more prominent than Czechoslovakia, Solzhenitzyn or the Democratic Party. What exactly that means, I can't explain any more clearly. I was trying not to sound too nosey.

Comradely,

s/ Steve Chainey
S.F. Organizer