

14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014

July 5, 1973

SEATTLE

Executive Committee

Dear Comrades,

We have received a letter from Comrade Robin David, addressed to Lew Jones.

The letter says that your executive committee has had a discussion concerning tactics in relation to the goon-squad attacks the National Caucus of Labor Committees has launched on us, the CP, and others. Comrade Robin indicated that he was asked by several members of the executive committee to write to us for further explanation and clarification. Comrade Robin writes:

"The last two issues of The Militant (nos. 24 and 25) indicate that we are calling on the police, the DA, and other bourgeois authorities to take action against NCLC members who participated in attacks upon us; that we are circulating a statement calling for their arrest; and that our comrades are actually pressing criminal charges.

"Members of the branch executive committee disagree about the correctness of this course of action. Questions have been raised on the branch floor -- and in a YSA meeting, I think, as well -- although no full discussion has yet taken place. We plan to organize one.

"Several of the exec comrades thought it would be a good idea for me to write to you on the subject for two reasons. First, we all agree, regardless of our positions on the question that it is important to know why this course of action was chosen. No explanation has yet appeared either internally or externally.

"Secondly, most comrades felt I should write since I represent a position most in opposition to this course and could best clarify it. Thinking runs from defense of the position, to questioning it on a tactical level, to challenging it as a breach of principle. No positions on this are yet firm."

I will attempt to provide the executive committee with an explanation of my thinking on the question.

Let me first take up the questions of principle involved and then the tactical aspects relating to the specific situation before us.

Comrade Robin indicates as his own tentative opinion: "It has been my training in our movement that as a matter of principle we never appeal to any agency of the bourgeois state to settle disputes within the working class movement. This was and is true because they could only be counted on to use the opening to disorient and discredit the working class movement. In addition we can be sure that they will make every attempt to settle any dispute to the disadvantage of revolutionary socialists.

"We certainly never called on the cops to defend us in the '20s and '30s against the Stalinists and they certainly had more

to throw at us than NCLC. More recently, we strongly warned the opposition in the UMW against calling on the courts to intervene in their struggle with the Boyle bureaucracy. I also remember that we attacked Healy for breaching the most elementary working class principles by going to the courts in the Ernie Tate affair. What is now different?"

First of all, we have to recognize that when we talk of principles, they do not exist by themselves or in a vacuum. In actual situations one principle at times conflicts with another. The class position of Marxism is in principle against strike-breaking. But not all strike actions have a progressive content that must be defended. We have opposed reactionary strikes in theory and in practice. One example was the 1968 teachers' strike in New York, which we characterized as a racist strike against the Black community. During that strike our presidential candidate, Fred Halstead, led a group of parents in breaking into a school shut down by the strike to open it for ad-hoc classes organized by Black and Puerto Rican parents.

Does the point Comrade Robin raised about never appealing "to any agency of the bourgeois state to settle disputes within the working class movement" have a more categorical character? We are in general against any interference by the government into the affairs of the unions. But we have allowed for exceptions to this rule where the circumstances warranted.

The NAACP recently brought a suit against both the steel bosses and the United Steelworkers, charging extensive racial discrimination against Blacks by the bosses and unions. We have supported this suit. The same is true of some other legal actions taken by Blacks against racist union officials.

We have also supported suits brought by women workers under Title Six of the Civil Rights Act, against sexist practices by both bosses and union bureaucrats. If the ERA passes, we can be sure there will be other legal actions of this type.

Supporting such individual concrete legal actions does not mean that we give up our principle of opposition to government interference in the unions, or that we place emphasis on such legal actions as our main method of struggle. To the contrary, we remain convinced that the unions can only be transformed by the action of the workers themselves. Utilizing such justifiable suits, however, can be part of a process leading toward such action by the workers.

Let us now look more closely at the problem posed by the NCLC attacks involving the use of violence by one tendency in the working class against other tendencies. This, of course, is a violation of the most elementary principles of workers democracy. The utilization of such hooligan methods proper to the fascists was introduced on a large scale into the socialist movement by the Stalinists, but, as we have seen, has been picked up by others, the latest example being the NCLC. Such methods discredit the working-class movement and provide openings for attacks by the cops and other agencies of the capitalist state, parties, politicians, etc., upon the workers movement as a whole and the revolutionary socialist movement in particular. In the case under discussion, we should be clear that it is the NCLC that has provided these openings for the bourgeoisie, and not those, like ourselves, who must defend them-

selves from their attacks.

Comrade Robin raises the point whether in defending ourselves from such attacks, we must rule out as a matter of principle, at all costs and under all circumstances, demands for the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators.

To answer this question, we have first to look at the principle involved, and then see what other principles also come into play that contravene it. The basic motivation behind the "principle that we never appeal to any agency of the bourgeois state to settle disputes within the working class movement" is one of class solidarity against any and all attacks by the bourgeoisie against any section of the working-class movement, and opposition to utilizing the courts, cops, etc., to settle disputes within the movement. We never call upon any agency of the bourgeoisie or the bourgeois state to settle political disputes inside the working class, as the Stalinists did during the first Smith Act trials, for example. At that time, you will recall, they called for the conviction of the SWP members on trial. We are against the capitalist authorities illegalizing the CP, NCLC, etc.

But there is another principle involved in demanding the arrest and conviction of individuals who use violence against us. That principle is the right of equality before the law, a right raised by the bourgeois-democratic revolution. In demanding that the bourgeois state grant us equal protection and equal rights before the law, we are appealing to this democratic principle. We know that this democratic right is never completely defended by the capitalist state, and especially in relation to us. Nevertheless, there is nothing wrong with demanding that this right apply to us. On the contrary.

This has been important in defending our organization in a number of instances in the past period. You will remember that in Chicago we pressed for the arrest and conviction of members of the right-wing Legion for Justice that carried out attacks against us. We did the same in relation to the Klan's armed attacks in Houston, and in relation to a number of armed attacks by gusanos in Los Angeles. In the given context, this was an important supplementary tactic to use in defending ourselves, as we mobilized political support for our rights.

Are such tactics permissible only in dealing with physical attacks from the right wing or other bourgeois forces, but impermissible when dealing with tendencies in the working-class movement who carry out violent attacks on other sections of that movement? Comrade Robin writes: "Some comrades suggest that because NCLC has made itself wide open to police agents, it no longer is a working class organization or that we are really battling the police. This kind of argument doesn't seem to hold water. We didn't read the UMW out of the working class movement because they hired assassins. During the '30s and '40s the Stalinists around the world worked very closely with police agencies in order to eliminate us. It could be argued that at least these organizations rested on real working class bases, while the NCLC rest solely on police agency at this time. This seems a very dangerous line of argument. We should know. It's been directed against us often enough."

If we believe a tendency is outside the working-class move-

ment we will say so. However, that does not apply to the NCLC. Comrade Robin is right to indicate that this is not pertinent to the issue.

He also says that the current case of the NCLC is "quite different than dealing with the gusanos or other right wingers." Let us assume for a moment that we would hold that we could in principle demand equal protection under the law against attacks by right wingers, but could never do this in relation to attacks by tendencies in the working-class movement. This would put us in a peculiar position. For example, a few years ago, our national office was fire-bombed. We notified the police and put pressure on them to find and prosecute the culprits. They never did much -- an example of a violation of our rights to equal protection under the law. We attempted to scandalize them for that. We thought that the attack was carried out by the ultra-right-wing Minutemen.

Suppose, after we had prodded the police and city administration to act to defend our rights, it was discovered that the Stalinists, or a section of the labor bureaucracy, or the NCLC had actually carried out the attack? We would not then say, "Oh, sorry, we withdraw our charges, please do not arrest these people, because, you see, they are a working-class tendency. We want capitalist-class tendencies who bomb us to be arrested and convicted, but not working-class tendencies."

In this connection it could be useful to consider some examples from the past where we have demanded equal protection from the authorities, in cases where a tendency in the working class physically attacked us. Two important ones out of many are the defense of Trotsky in Mexico, and the struggle we led against Tobin's goons in the Teamsters union in the '30s.

Our defense of Trotsky when he was in Mexico, from both the Stalinists and fascists, comprised different aspects. Of prime importance was our political defense, our attempt to mobilize radical and working-class opinion against the Moscow trials, assassinations of Trotskyists, and the threat of assassination of Trotsky. But there was also a physical side to our defense, including an armed guard. In addition, we cooperated with the Mexican police, who stationed a police guard at Trotsky's home. The Mexican authorities helped in other ways.

When the attempt on Trotsky's life was made by Siqueiros and his gang, which resulted in the murder of SWP member Sheldon Harte, we and Trotsky demanded that the police hunt down and prosecute the criminals and Trotsky publicly intervened in the police investigation, demanding that the police investigate the Stalinists. It was necessary for Trotsky to do this in order to counter Stalinist attempts to cover up their role in that attack, and forestall new ones.

After the assassination of Trotsky, we cooperated with the police investigation, attempting to help uncover the real culprits. You can find extensive reports on the progress of the cops' investigation week after week in The Militant of 1940.

The defense of Trotsky was the most important instance of defense of our movement from violence by members of a tendency in the working-class movement we have yet undertaken. The question of how to relate to the police, as you can see, was not

considered to be a principled question, but a tactical one. In the given situation, which included the nature of the Cardenas regime, we accepted a police guard, cooperated with investigations by the police and other authorities, and waged as vigorous a campaign as we could against the Stalinist assassins, a campaign which included urging the police to arrest and convict the culprits.

Farrell Dobbs' new book, Teamster Power, has a section describing the struggle with the Teamster international bureaucracy, a struggle in which Tobin sent thugs into Minneapolis as part of his attempt to destroy the leadership of Local 574. It's worth quoting from the book:

"On the morning of May 21 the new offensive began. Ray Dunne and George Frosig were distributing leaflets and talking to drivers in the freight yards of the Omaha railway. Suddenly a Buick sedan drove up and a gang of Tobin's thugs jumped out of it and assaulted Ray and George with blackjacks. They were severely beaten.

"Ownership of the Buick was traced to L.A. Murphy through a check with the automobile license bureau. This fact, along with an account of the atrocity, was published in the Northwest Organizer to inform the labor movement of the new danger. For the record, a protest was also made to the public authorities. But they did nothing about it, as was to be expected.

"Local 574 immediately called a mass protest meeting. Word of the outrage had spread rapidly and the hall was jammed with union members, many of them accompanied by their wives. As the latter development indicated, not since the 1934 strikes had the workers been so aroused. They were more than ready to fight back, and combat veterans that they were by now, they knew it had to be done intelligently.

"Accepting the executive board's advice, the membership adopted a three-point plan of action: efforts were redoubled to obtain speedy renewal of contracts that were about to expire; an assessment was voted to provide a special defense fund; and a resolution was adopted setting forth the basic line for a campaign to mobilize the city's working class against the new goon attack.

"The resolution condemned the gangsterism introduced by Tobin, calling it an open invitation to the enemies of the labor movement. If it could be made to work against Local 574, the other unions were warned, the same methods would be used against them as well. Thus an open challenge had been hurled at the leaders and members of all AFL organizations. It was their duty, acting in their own self-interest, to join in the struggle to free the movement from the menace of thuggery.

"Our appeal fell upon responsive ears. Officers, and especially rank-and-file members of AFL locals, poured heat on the right-wing officials of the Central Labor Union and the Teamsters Joint Council. They also brought heavy pressure to bear on Mayor Latimer, as did Farmer-Labor Party ward clubs. Finding himself under heavy fire, the mayor felt he had to do something -- so he set out to smear us.

"Late in May a small army of police made a surprise raid on Local 574, charging into our headquarters with drawn guns. They were accompanied by news reporters and photographers.

Bearing John Doe warrants for illegal sale of liquor, they searched the premises for evidence. Nothing was to be found, except part of a keg of beer which had been stored away after being left over from a social. Twice more in the next few days the cops descended upon us, but they were unable to spot anything that could be used against the union.

"It was in connection with these smear attempts that Frosig was arrested on the gun charge mentioned previously.

"Taking advantage of the propoganda cover Latimer sought to provide for him, Murphy resumed the physical assaults. In broad daylight on the afternoon of June 3, four rank-and-file members of Local 574 driving along Washington Avenue in a passenger car were forced to the curb and ordered out of their vehicle by two carloads of Tobin's musclemen. Some held guns on the union members, while others pulled out blackjacks and beat them. When the victims ran to escape, a volley of shots followed them.

"Bystanders had gotten the license numbers of the thugs' cars, and this information was reported to Latimer with a demand that he take action. As usual though, no arrests were made.

"Instead the mayor held a conference with Murphy and Meyer Lewis. Reporters were then summoned and Murphy issued a statement to them. According to the Minneapolis Tribune account, he brazenly accused the victims of 'firing the shots themselves,' falsely asserting that they had done so 'after losing a fight with the employes of Stanchfield Transfer Company,' a firm located near the scene of the crime.

"A week later a Local 574 job steward Harold Haynes was attacked while at work. He had just got back into the cab of his truck after making a delivery. Then the Buick sedan, registered in Murphy's name, pulled up and blocked his way. Five goons leaped out of it. One pointed a gun at Haynes. The other four dragged him out of the car and beat him with blackjacks and gun butts.

"We made a strong protest to Governor Olson. In a letter signed by Bill Brown he was informed that we were holding a special meeting of Local 574 on June 15. We demanded an official answer by then as to what Olson proposed to do about Tobin's criminal attempt, with Latimer's collusion, to destroy a section of the labor movement.

"Coming immediately to our support, the fifth ward Farmer-Labor club insisted that Olson take prompt action. Demands were made that he invoke the executive power of the state to put a stop to acts of vandalism in Minneapolis, and that he uncover the instigators of the plot against organized labor.

"Similar demands upon the governor came from elsewhere in the unions and the Farmer-Labor Party. Since he was coming up for reelection in the fall, it was politically dangerous for him to ignore these pressures, and he knew it. So he passed word along that he would look into the situation right away, pretending that he hadn't known what was going on. Apparently Olson convinced Latimer that it was politically expedient to quiet things down inside the labor movement, because the physical attacks on us now abated."

So we see that demanding that the authorities "invoke the executive power of the state to put a stop to acts of vandalism"

perpetrated by the union bureaucracy was considered a tactical question. In one instance, we notified the authorities "for the record" -- a point that helped our case. Later, we were able to put enough pressure on the governor to get the attacks called off. Utilizing this tactic helped our primary objective of mobilizing the union ranks and working class in Minneapolis to come to the defense of Local 574. It was this power that forced the authorities to do something to end the attacks.

Both these examples show that it is possible, under certain conditions, to demand that the state protect our rights as citizens and mobilize pressure to get partial results.

Many other examples could be cited, but we should look at two current ones. Comrade Robin referred to the opposition in the UMW and our attitude towards the tactics it used against the Boyle machine. It is true that we warned the rank and file of the UMW against the danger of interference by the government in their union. But we certainly did not imply that we thought that the rank and file should not press the authorities to investigate and prosecute the killers of Yablonsky, whether these killers were in the working-class movement or not. It does the workers movement no good to try and cover up in any way the criminal murders carried out by components of the Boyle machine. On the contrary, it is in the interests of the union and the workers that every bureaucrat involved be brought to book and convicted.

Right now, the United Farm Workers Union is facing attacks by the Teamster goons. The cops are cooperating with the goons. We are certainly not opposed to the UFWU demanding that the cops stop collaborating with the growers and goons, and demanding that the authorities take action against them.

These examples show that neither in the past or present have we considered tactical moves to demand that the authorities grant us equal protection in the face of violent attacks by goons belonging to tendencies in the working-class movement to be an impermissible violation of the principle of working-class solidarity against any attack by the bourgeoisie against any section of the workers movement. We make a distinction between the government arresting, prosecuting and convicting Trotsky's assassin, and the government prosecuting the CP under the Smith Act, for example. The former is not an attack on the rights of the working class, the latter is, although the Foley Square defendants and Mercader were members of the same Stalinist tendency in the international working-class movement.

What about the ~~Ernie Tate~~ affair? Here Comrade Robin has unintentionally turned the analogy inside out. Healy sent his goons to beat up Ernie Tate, who was distributing literature in front of an SLL meeting. When Tate and other Fourth Internationalists began a campaign to expose this thuggery, Healy started libel proceedings against those left newspapers who printed Tate's accusations. He did this simultaneously with refusing to present his case in front of an independent commission of inquiry composed of reputable figures in the socialist movement in Britain. We scandalized him for hiding behind this libel suit. A more accurate analogy would be if the NCLC began libel proceedings against The Militant for exposing their goon attacks.

It was not the mere fact of bringing a libel suit against another tendency in the working class that we criticized. In

this regard, let us recall that Trotsky threatened to bring libel suits against certain sectarian groups in France who were re-printing his articles without his permission (see Writings, 1938).

There is another aspect of this question to be taken into account in deciding our tactics. Everything we do, we do with class-struggle methods. We attempt to further the independence and self-reliance of the working class, and oppose placing confidence in or reliance upon any agencies of the bourgeoisie. In the case of violent attacks upon us or other workers organizations, whether or not they emanate from other tendencies in the working class, we attempt to mobilize the left and working class to the extent possible in defense against these attacks. While in given situations we may include, as part of our campaign against such attacks, demands upon the bourgeois state that our rights be protected, we do not place any reliance upon or create illusions that the capitalist authorities will dispense justice equally. Such demands, in fact, can help us expose capitalist "justice."

In deciding upon our tactics, we begin with our understanding of the nature of the state as an instrument of class rule. We know that when it comes to conflicts between the bosses and the workers, between racists and Blacks, between reactionaries and socialists, etc., the state will not be neutral. Whatever justice we get from the capitalists will be dispensed grudgingly and only if we make it politically difficult for them not to. In the case of the NCLC attacks, we must assume -- and this has been borne out by the record so far -- that the authorities are "neutral" on the side of the NCLC. They are utilizing the NCLC anticommunist campaign to attempt to strike some blows of their own against us and the CP.

In responding to violent attacks upon us by members of other tendencies in the working-class movement, therefore, we seek first of all to mobilize ourselves and others in the movement to counter the attacks, including the physical side of the defense. However, the very reasons why we do not place reliance upon the bourgeois authorities also places limits on what we can do in our own defense physically in any given situation, without inviting the authorities to utilize our defense as a pretext to attack us. For example, we have been able to handle NCLC attacks on our meetings, given the level of weapons they have utilized. If these attacks were to escalate to the use of lethal weapons, we could not, in the present situation in the country, respond in kind because this would make us vulnerable to a murderous police attack.

Returning now to the tactical questions involved in our current campaign to counter and stop the NCLC's violent attacks upon us and other tendencies, we must first of all note that we do not present tactical prescriptions for all times and circumstances. Tactical questions must be considered in the concrete.

The axis of our campaign against the NCLC has been an attempt to mobilize the left to repudiate the NCLC and its violent attacks as alien to the traditions of the socialist movement. Included in this drive to isolate the NCLC on the left politically has been an attempt to form a united front physical defense of meetings threatened by the NCLC goons. We have tried to convince others on the left to exclude all NCLC members from campus meetings, radical meetings, meetings planning the May 5

actions, etc. We have excluded them from all our meetings, and educated them on the wisdom of moving away from our headquarters when they came there to pass out their threats to put SWP members "in the hospital."

The comrades in Detroit are to be specially commended for organizing an effective defense of an educational conference which was attacked by the NCLC. The thugs who carried out that attack were given some important education that set back their drive against us.

In the situation we faced, we rejected calling on the police to defend radical meetings, including our own. We have already discussed some of the factors we took into account in making this decision. Comrade Robin also points out that the cops could try to utilize any NCLC attack to break up the meeting and possibly arrest the victims of the NCLC violence. We avoid having the cops poking their nose around our own headquarters, because they could try to utilize their presence to attempt undemocratic acts against us.

The CP's policy contrasted sharply with our own. In line with their general class collaborationism, the CP placed primary reliance upon the police for defense of their meetings. In one instance, this resulted in the cops coming to a CP-called meeting early, searching the hall and removing table legs and anything else the CP might use to defend itself in the event of an attack. The cops then left -- and the NCLC showed up with clubs and managed to hurt some of the CP members and disrupt the meeting. The national CP refused to join a united front against the NCLC (although we were successful in certain local situations in drawing their members into common action), and failed to mobilize the left to counter these attacks.

This CP policy is opposite to the one we followed. They subordinated independent and united mobilization of the left to primary dependence on the cops. In relation to the police and city authorities, the same difference can be observed. Where they relied upon the police to defend them, in our campaign demanding the arrest and conviction of the NCLC thugs, we are attempting to mobilize as much support as we can to bring pressure to bear on the authorities to defend our rights. This can help our expose of the role the police agents-provocateurs are playing in the NCLC, and can inhibit the police utilization of the NCLC's goon campaign.

One of the lessons the NCLC has to be taught is that it cannot break up the CP or SWP by physical force. Thus our tactics were much more effective in countering the NCLC attacks than the CP's reliance on the police to defend their meetings. The Detroit experience, the Columbia University experience, and our general preparedness did more to further our objective of stopping the NCLC than anything the CP did. We have a longer-range objective to educate as many as we can against the use of violence within the working-class movement, and, as far as we can, to help organize the left to counter such attacks by and for itself.

One element of our decision not to call the police to defend such meetings, however, concerned the real relation of forces. We knew that with proper organization we could stop the NCLC from breaking up meetings. If the NCLC had gone from the use of

clubs, chains, etc., to knives and guns, we would have had to review that decision, because it would be a tactical blunder of the worst sort to attempt to counter them at that level in the given conditions in this country.

However, we certainly did not exclude bringing charges against the NCLC thugs, if we could do so, in conjunction with our political and physical defense. This would not have hurt but helped us in our struggle against the police complicity with the NCLC attacks. It would complement, not harm, our campaign to expose the police agents-provocateurs.

Our proven readiness to defend our meetings around the country has apparently caused the NCLC to shift tactics. (We must continue to keep our guard up and defend our meetings, of course.) After Detroit, the NCLC began making threats to pick off our people on the streets. This is what they did in New York when a bunch of armed NCLC goons jumped three of our comrades and severely injured Jessie Smith. This faced us with a new problem. We cannot organize a permanent defense guard for every comrade throughout the day, although we have taken certain precautions regarding how comrades enter and leave the headquarters, etc.

Should we retaliate by using these same tactics against the NCLC? There is no principle involved of course. But we think that would be a blunder and could lead to falling into a police trap. Doing nothing to effectively defend our comrades is impermissible. Consequently, while we stepped up our campaign in the left to expose the NCLC, we added to it demands that the city and county authorities prosecute these thugs.

Comrade Robin warns that the cops will attempt to utilize the situation created by the NCLC attacks against us. That is true. But what is the best way to counter this? If we fail to report something like the maiming of Comrade Jessie Smith, wouldn't that play into the hands of police charges that we have some responsibility for these attacks?

Pressing these charges should also help demoralize members of the NCLC. We must make no mistake about it -- these attacks by the NCLC must be stopped, and we must utilize every effective tactic we have to do this. We can't afford any nonsense about the "democratic rights" of the NCLC that threatens to hospitalize us, or allow any false notions that we bear any responsibility whatsoever for the NCLC actions that bring discredit upon socialists, to prevent us from pursuing whatever course is necessary to stop them.

Comrade Robin points out that in Philadelphia and Seattle, the administrations at two colleges have utilized the NCLC attacks to ban all selling of political newspapers on sections of the campus. But the way to counter this is not to refrain from demanding that these NCLC thugs be arrested. That won't stop the administration. We have to mobilize the students to both repudiate the NCLC and prevent the administration from falsely utilizing the NCLC's actions to attack the rights of students on the campus.

Finally, Comrade Robin says: "The branch here already decided not to support a move by the YWLL to call on the student government to recommend to the UW administration that the NCLC be banned from campus. Instead we counterposed that the

student government call upon the students to defend everybody's democratic rights." The letter was not more specific.

We do not call on the administration to ban any organization. But we should be careful that our formulations do not imply that we think it is wrong for students to organize to keep the NCLC out of all meetings, etc., under any phony pretext that they have the "democratic right" to "advocate" the physical destruction of those they disagree with. Given the actions and stated goals of the NCLC to physically destroy their opponents, their rights must be subordinated to the democratic rights of the student movement to defend itself. The same applies to us.

Comradely,

Barry Sheppard

cc: Robin David

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Dear
JUN 27 1973

1417 N.E. 55th St.
Seattle, Washington
June 24, 1973

Dear Lew,

The last two issues of The Militant (nos. 24 & 25) indicate that we are calling on the police, the DA, and other bourgeois authorities to take action against NCLC members who participated in attacks upon us; that we are circulating a statement calling for their arrest; and that our comrades are actually pressing criminal charges.

Members of the branch executive committee disagree about the correctness of this course of action. Questions have also been raised on the branch floor -- and in a YSA meeting, I think, as well -- although no full discussion has yet taken place. We plan to organize one.

Several of the exec comrades thought it would be a good idea for me to write to you on the subject for two reasons. First, we all agree, regardless of our positions on the question that it is important to know why this course of action was chosen. No explanation has yet appeared either internally or externally.

Secondly, comrades felt I should write since I represent a position most in opposition to this course and could best clarify it.. Thinking runs from defense of the position, to questioning it on a tactical level, to challenging it as a breach of principle. No positions on this are yet firm.

It has been my training in our movement that as a matter of principle we never appeal to any agency of the bourgeois state to settle disputes within the working class movement. This was and is true because they could only be counted on to use the opening to disorient and discredit the working class movement. In addition we can be sure that they will make every attempt to settle any dispute to the disadvantage of revolutionary socialists.

We certainly never called on the cops to defend us in the '20s and '30s against the Stalinists and they certainly had more to throw at us than NCLC. More recently, we strongly warned the opposition in the UMW against calling on the courts to intervene in their struggle with the Boyle bureaucracy. I also remember that we attacked Healy for breaching the most elementary working class principles by going to the courts in the Ernie Tate affair. What is now different ?

Some comrades suggest that because NCLC has made itself wide open to police agents, it no longer is a working class organization or that we are really battling the police. ~~This~~ This kind of argument doesn't seem to hold water. We didn't read the UMW out of the working class movement because they hired assassins. During the '30s and '40s the Stalinists

around the world worked very closely with police agencies in order to eliminate us. It could be argued that at least these organizations rested on real working class bases, while the NCLC rest solely on police agency at this time. This seems a very dangerous line of argument. We should know. It's been directed against us often enough.

Some comrades have insisted that it's only a tactical question. Principle isn't involved. However, even on the tactical level -- and of course, it 's highly unlikely that correct tactics would flow from a violation of principle -- I think we are making a mistake. Relying on the bourgeois forces of law and order would, of course, be a mistake, especially since they are heavily involved in attacking us. The idea that we will be able to force them to take action by mobilizing democratic public opinion also seems false. This is quite different than dealing with the gusansos or other right wingers. The state apparatus is only going to wait for the right moment, when we are involved in a defensive skuffle with NCLC, to swoop down in order to bring "peace to the warring leftist faction."

We may be trying to cover ourselves by making the record before they swoop down, but I think the only result will have been to legitimize their role as "peacemakers". After all didn't we call on them to make arrests of the law-breakers? I think this logic has been born out by what happened at Temple (or was it Columbia; I haven't had the time to go back and check) and also what happened here at the University of Washington. The now famous Black Panther meeting followed a skuffle between the Panthers and NCLC. Several of their member accosted a Panther selling their paper in the student union. A fight broke out. The administration used the incident as an excuse to ban all selling (and of course only the left sells its papers) from the building.

The branch here already decided not to support a move by the YWLL to call on the student government to recommend to the UW administration that the NCLC be banned from campus. Instead we counterposed that the student government call on the students to defend everybody's democratic rights. We had various specific proposals.

All of us who have discussed this feel that it's very important to straighten out. However, we feel it is also quite secondary to the issues raised in the pre-convention discussion, especially the international discussion. We want to maintain the proper sense of proportion. If you have any ideas on how to maintain the right balance they'd be more than welcome.

I've been considering writing something for pre-convention discussion but several things have held me back. First, I'm anxious to understand the motivation for the policy. That's why I've decided, with the other comrades, that this letter is a better first step. Secondly, with pre-convention discussion, time is precious. Even this letter is slow in coming because I'm in the midst of preparing the Europe report. I'm also quite concerned with the question of pro-

portion.

As a supporter of the Leninist-Trotskyist tendency, I'm also concerned that this issue will be latched onto by the Massey amalgam to further "prove" our turn away from the "proletarian orientation." That, of course, is no reason not to raise the issue, but if you have any thinking on how best to handle it in this light we would all be interested.

Please answer as soon as possible since we are holding up the branch discussion until we here from you.

Comradely,



Robin David