

A BRIEF STATEMENT ON THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

At the February Conference the sharpest political struggle developed during the discussion on how to choose candidates for the Steering Committee. The Committee of Five, who called the meeting, had proposed that an elected nominations committee "should be charged with presenting a slate of organizations" (emphasis added) for election. The intent of this suggestion became clear when the gathering discussed an alternative motion that "slots on the Steering Committee (should) be filled by individuals and not organizations." By a two to one majority, the bulk of the delegates endorsed the view that organizations should be elected and that these organizations should be given the prerogative to determine their representatives.

After the motion in favor of electing individuals was voted down, it was pointed out that a provision exclusively limiting elections to organizations would bear disproportionately on national minority Marxist-Leninists and was therefore objectively racist. The majority of organizations represented at the conference were either exclusively or predominantly white and it was also a fact that a large portion of national minority communists stood outside local organizations altogether. Given these two facts, it was argued, limitation of Steering Committee positions to organizations inevitably served to impede the participation of qualified national minority comrades. After a heated discussion, the delegates reached unity on the following formulation: "organizations and individuals who are not members of organizations may be elected to the Steering Committee."

While substantial progress was made in the conference discussion, the Steering Committee feels that more reflection on the issue is in order. In particular, there are a number of unresolved questions that should be followed up. First, in our opinion, the Committee of Five's proposal was clearly both incorrect and objectively racist. It failed to take into consideration the special effect its nomination proposal would have on national minority comrades. Its suggested procedure did not reflect consciousness that a disproportionate number of Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian, and Native American comrades stand outside on the existing Marxist-Leninist organizations. And it failed to demonstrate an understanding that the main reason for this stems from the significant ideological weaknesses of those organizations, particularly in their grasp of the realities of national oppression and the centrality of the struggle against racism. Objectively, the Committee of Five failed to take any steps to counteract the influence of racism in the elections and thus capitulated to chauvanist ideology.

Second, it is our contention that the discussion around objective racism was, by and large, positive. We do agree that the comrade who raised the question of objective racism should have begun his initial remarks with a self-criticism for his role in developing the original Committee of Five proposal. In addition, he should have developed the political content of his criticism more carefully, anticipating that it might be taken as a personal attack.

Nevertheless, the question needed to be considered and it was definitely appropriate to point out the objective impact of the proposal that only organizations be nominated. And it is clear that, by the end of the discussion, most of the delegates had been won to opening nominations to individuals on the grounds that it would allow for more flexibility in developing multinational leadership.

In addition, we do not feel that the importance of the question was overblown as some comrades have suggested. Although the discussion did slip into subjectivism at some points, real strides were made towards bringing forward the particular question of oppressed nationality participation and consolidating

agreement that special steps must be taken to ensure that the context for even stronger participation develops. In our view, unity on the need for such special steps is of profound importance to the whole viability of the Organizing Committee.

A third point that needs further consideration concerns the hesitancy displayed by both white and national minority comrades in discussing the question of racism. As could be expected, the main foot-dragging came from the white side of the fence. Although some whites addressed the question forthrightly, most stayed entirely silent and many even responded defensively, allowing their political vision to become clouded by subjectivism. The clearest example of the latter came when, after a Puerto Rican delegate argued that the issue of racism should not have been raised, a group of white comrades applauded loudly--the only occasion when any statement evoked a physical demonstration during the entire fourteen hour meeting. Subjectivism was also exhibited when some comrades came close to engaging in breast-beating over their error. Neither response, of course, served to advance the struggle against racism.

Wavering in response to chauvanist errors demonstrates a clear failure to grasp the centrality of the question of racism. If comrades fully understood the historic role of white chauvanism in the maintenance of bourgeois rule, and if they really internalized the vital material interest of the white workers in combating racism, there would be no temporizing. On the contrary, conciliation of racism would be as roundly condemned as conciliation of opportunism in general.

The hesitancy of national minority comrades came from a different source. As a number pointed out, their past experience with the response of white comrades to criticisms of racism was not exactly a cause for confidence; even among the most conscious whites the tendency towards subjectivism had proven to be quite strong. Thus, it was not surprising that--for fear that precisely the kind of defensiveness and breast-beating that did emerge would become dominant--several oppressed nationality comrades were uncertain about engaging in the discussion of objective racism.

In our view, the foot-dragging on the part of whites and the lack of confidence from national minority comrades are the most dangerous weaknesses displayed in the discussion--even more significant than the lack of understanding demonstrated by many delegates on the nature of national oppression. Unless we develop the ability to bluntly and objectively confront racism in each and every one of its manifestations, then we can forget about developing any viable multi-national unity. History has shown a thousand times that only a direct and systematic struggle against white chauvanism can provide the foundation for developing real communist and working class unity. If we can not overcome tendencies towards defensiveness, emotionalism and pessimism with respect to racist errors then we can forget about attempting to assume leadership of the struggles of the working class and the oppressed nationalities.

Rectification must be two-fold. The main burden, like the main weakness, falls on the shoulder of white comrades. White Marxist-Leninists must combat subjectivism when objective racism is identified and must strive to assume a leading role in the struggle against chauvanist ideology and practice among other whites. For it is only by demonstrating the capability to assume such a role that national minority comrades will come to have confidence in white Marxist-Leninists' ability to confront racism objectively. Secondarily, national minority communists must combat tendencies towards pessimism. Such pessimism--while definitely rooted in actual reality--inevitably becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since whites are not forced to grapple with racism, they never develop any ability to confront it scientifically.

What the struggle at the February Conference demonstrates most of all, however, is the need to focus real attention on strengthening our grasp of the reality of national oppression, its various forms and manifestations, and the correct method to combat it. In particular, the Steering Committee must develop a programmatic approach to deepening the knowledge and practice of all its member organizations, study groups and individuals in the struggle against racism. Careful attention should be given to the effect of all OC decisions on national minority comrades. And the Steering Committee should see that a series of special conferences, programs and activities geared towards developing national minority participation in the OC is developed. It is of utmost importance that what was begun in February be followed up in a systematic manner.

1 August 1978/CN