

Statement by Joseph Hansen on reasons for postponing congress

1. A democratic congress requires making the documents available to the membership well in advance so that the discussion can be properly organized. This applies not only to the main initial documents voted on by the leading bodies, but also to the contributions that are made in response to them. The unfortunate fact is that we continue to be faced with inordinate delays in the preparation of documents and above all in translating them.

It is true that considerable technical difficulties stand in the way of speedy translation and circulation of the documents. These difficulties, however, are not insuperable; and we have been promised that every effort will be made to overcome, particularly in the case of translations into French. However, the same promise has been made repeatedly in the past three years. The promise has not been kept. In light of the record it is doubtful that it can be kept now, whatever the intentions of those who do the promising. The deadline is too near.

In all likelihood, we will face a repetition of the situation that occurred at the last world congress in which many delegates arrives without having had an opportunity to read in advance, still less discuss, the documents on which they had to vote. If that situation is repeated, the coming congress would not be a democratic one, in my opinion.

To postpone the congress for several months would help avoid such a situation. It would increase the possibility of setting up a better functioning technical apparatus so as to assure translation and circulation of the documents in time.

2. It may be felt that the present apparatus can catch up with the accumulation. The comrades should be reminded of the fact that the documents of the PRT (Combatiente) are only first now being made available in English. To translate them into French and German and to circulate them in Spanish, as scheduled, is a big job. Moreover, it must be anticipated that there will be an increase in the submission of new documents in the months immediately ahead. The positions of the PRT (Combatiente) alone are bound to provoke intense discussion once the comrades have had an opportunity to study them.

On top of this, the new documents presented at this IEC meeting are certain to engender replies and counterreplies, as is normal in a democratic discussion, further increasing the translation load.

3. We must take into consideration still another problem; that is the fact that two tendencies have been forming internationally. This is a consequence of the deepening of the differences that appeared at the last world congress. Such a development, as everyone knows, is a normal part of the internal life of our movement. Nevertheless, every experienced comrade is aware of the fact that such a development involves certain

dangers. We should note the recent splits that have taken place in some areas -- Canada, Australia, more recently in Mexico, and now Spain. These constitute a warning sign.

To speed up the pace of the discussion, as will certainly happen in face of an imminent deadline, can add to the danger, particularly if no way is found to break the bottleneck on translating and circulating the documents.

It is in the obvious interest of both tendencies to seek to establish better control of the situation so as to be able to more effectively counter ill-considered actions or flare-ups that would foster a mood favoring a split.

It is all the more necessary to do this in view of the fact that the differences have already become public knowledge to a certain degree, and further spillovers into the public, exacerbating the situation, can hardly be avoided whether through carelessness or through accident. We have already had some examples of this. If better control can be established, this danger can be reduced. But time is required for that.

We need more time to permit the movement to become adjusted to the existence of tendencies, and to find ways of working together with the least possible friction despite this complication in the life of the International. If we had more time at our disposal it would be easier to do this while at the same time conducting a model discussion that would permit a resolution of the differences in accordance with the objective test of events and without a split that might be precipitated out of a subjective reaction. This is exceedingly important, as I see it.

4. All these reasons for postponement would seem to call for subordinating such secondary considerations as the fact that the congress has already been postponed beyond the normal time or that it is technically awkward to organize a congress later in the year when the weather is colder and when it is more inconvenient for delegates to get off the job in Europe.

5. The decision, of course, is up to the comrades of the majority. I hope they will weigh the matter carefully and decide that it is worth providing more time to help counter the possibilities of a split and to help ensure that the coming congress will be a democratic one and thus one with authority in the eyes of the world movement.

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