

# DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 8 OF 16

FOLDER 2

MCLL POLICY STATEMENTS  
1972

REPORT OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
September 2, 1972

On Thursday, August 31, 1972, following the completion of the formal agenda of the Central Committee of the Motor City Labor League, Jack Russell initiated a discussion around the question of organizational tensions and power. Sheila Murphy, a member of the Central Committee, had left the meeting prior to completion of the formal agenda and was not present.

During the discussion some criticisms were made of Sheila Murphy and the bloc which at the preceding General Membership meeting she had admitted existed under her leadership. The question of whether her bloc could accept the results of the election in which three members of her bloc, including Brian Flanigan, were defeated, was raised. Frank Joyce expressed the formulation that the organization was being "punished" for the defeat of Brian Flanigan. The view was also expressed that the bloc in general did not encourage internal struggle in the organization, the raisings of disagreements, etc. Jack Russell took exception to that view and held that it was possible to struggle and that people should do so. He also agreed that although unhappy with the role, for reasons of being clearly identified with neither the Murphy bloc nor the "Joyce-Snook" bloc, he was thrust into a role as go-between and intermediary. He said that he would raise the matters that had been discussed with Sheila.

At a point more than midway through the discussion, Sheila Murphy called for Valerie at whose apartment this meeting was taking place. She asked if the meeting were still going on. Valerie said no. Sheila then asked who was there. Valerie replied that Jack was. Jack then spoke with Sheila - whether indicating that the discussion was continuing we do not know. Valerie was criticised by Jack and Frank for having been incorrect and liberal for not having told Sheila that the discussion was continuing. The discussion then continued for approximately another 45 minutes to an hour.

Subsequently, under various circumstances, Sheila spoke with Frank and Buck, prior to being spoken to by Jack as agreed, without either Frank or Buck mentioning the substance or fact of the afternoon's discussion. Following a conversation with Jack, Sheila called Valerie and suggested that apparently there were some problems and that although she was unsure she thought that a meeting of the Central Committee was the appropriate channel for dealing with them.

Late Friday morning, Frank reached Sheila to suggest that the central committee meet at 10 a. m. Saturday morning. He also asked Sheila for a private meeting prior to Saturday morning to which she agreed.

At the Saturday Central Committee meeting three or more hours of discussion took place, which centered around the substance of democratic centralism in the organization, the nature of Sheila's reaction to the election, the methods and difficulty of internal struggle in MCLL. It was held by Jack and Sheila that anyone's inability to struggle with Sheila, was their problem and not Sheila's. Sheila characterized the points raised at various times as insane, paranoid, bizzare and flimsy and of far lower quality than those raised by members of her own bloc among other things. Following a stalemate on the substantive issue, the matter of how the discussion had originated and the fact of the telephone call by Sheila, answered by Valerie, was raised. Sheila took the position that Valerie's behavior was unprincipled and uncomradely. Valerie admitted that it was incorrect and liberal. Sheila indicated that she felt that Valerie should resign.

Valerie declined to do so and characterized the relationship that had obtained between she and Sheila as having been uncomradely for some time. Neither offered any definition of uncomradely behavior. Frank then indicated that if Sheila wished to pursue the matter that the proper procedure seemed to be to raise in the General Staff, the issue of whether Valerie's behavior was unprincipled and uncomradely and if so whether it was sufficient grounds for expulsion from the Central Committee.

Buck and Linda Ann agreed that this was the proper procedure and further took the view along with Frank and Valerie that however the action(s) were characterized, they were not sufficient grounds for expulsion. Jack indicated a desire to discuss the matter. Sheila said that the discussion was already tedious. Frank agreed. Sheila then said she could not be a member of the same leadership body as Valerie and resigned. Jack followed suit.

The remaining members of the Central Committee take the position that the method of struggle engaged in in this matter was completely typical and representative of precisely the criticism which had been made earlier in the meeting and in the Thursday discussion.

It is typical to characterize most criticism as baseless and, or unprincipled and, or as having been improperly raised and, or as having impugned the integrity of the person being criticized or disagreed with. We believe that to resign rather than take the issue properly before the appropriated body is characteristic of a "taking the marbles and going home attitude" which discourages the very struggle and criticism to which leadership in particular must be most open.

We believe that the Motor City Labor League has much to learn about disagreement, criticism, self-criticism, internal struggle, party building and democratic centralism. We are inexperienced. We make many mistakes. We improve. We must,

concentrated exclusively on minor faults, and everyone will become timid and overcautious and forget the Party's political tasks." (Pg 263).

We find the organization to be a thing as though crippled, rather than strengthened since the Central Committee elections. Not only is there a work crisis in the organization, but unpolitical conflict and hostility seems to have multiplied. Blocs are admitted to exist for no political basis other than "shared practice" which presumably we all have. The election process and results, while admittedly primitive and underdeveloped have been delegitimized through a subtle program of sniping, involving implications that blocs existed which did not and that some didn't which should or whatever. Who knows. We do know that the expectations about what is "political" and comradely behavior seem at best unclear and at worst show contempt, departmentalism and commandism. There is no member of the organization with whom we have talked who does not feel that they have been disrespected and consequently indeed, intimidated by the very people whom until recently they - and indeed we - respected most.

We do not believe that there are fundamental political disagreements within the Motor City Labor League except possibly around matters of internal struggle and methods of party building. We not only accept the results of the Central Committee elections, we respect them even though we disagree with them. Not one of us

voted for every person who is a member. We can only interpret the readiness to resign 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.

Even though one of our comrade's political integrity has been explicitly impugned, we continue to accept Jack and Sheila as political comrades with whom we wish to continue struggle. We believe that both of them, along with us, have contributed enormously to the development of the organization to its present unparalleled power and practice. We believe that every part of the organization including the Alliance, the Ravitz Campaign, ..... contributes and will continue to contribute to the common interest of organizing and leading our class to victory. We recognize many problems of uneven development and unequal work within the organization. The real power of MCLL is expanding as the result of the work of all sectors of the organization. The internal power and leadership of the organization should reflect that reality.

We believe there is much more to be gained by remaining intact than by splitting. However, we also believe that the leadership of the organization should be shared and the membership's wishes respected even if comrades are simultaneously struggled against as liberal, non-struggle and under-developed as indeed, recent events have shown our own to be.

We are fully prepared to accept if necessary, that the divisions around methods of internal work are so severe that a split is necessary. We would all be the losers - not least of which those with whom we would have unsuccessfully and perhaps incorrectly or hesitantly struggled around these questions. We respect ourselves and our political work and are prepared to carry on with the many programs and organizations which we have initiated or to which we have made contributions.

"We have the Marxist-Leninist weapon of criticism and self-criticism. We can get rid of a bad style and keep the good." *ibid.*, p259.

Should a split occur we will not only survive, we will prosper. In merely contemplating the possibility with the membership, we have grown more in one day than in any preceding period.

We believe that the organization can, admittedly with difficulty, stay together. We respect the talent, skill, leadership, experience, insight, power and commitment of Sheila, and her closest political allies. We re-affirm that it should and that it is in the best interests of the working class in Detroit and the nation that it do so. We believe it would best serve the purposes of achieving a new level of struggle and unity if the General Staff were to accept the resignation of Jack and Sheila,



which we assume will be tendered, that a full discussion within the membership of these events take place on Sunday, Sept. 2, and that the General Staff, on Sept. 10, fill the two vacancies on the Central Committee.

## NOTES ON DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

(for internal use only)

The term "democratic centralism" does not describe some list of precise, detailed, and encompassing organizational rules which can be applied uniformly to any cadre formation arising in any historical context. The very notion of such a list is un-Marxist. The Bolshevik Party, the Chinese Communist Party, the Workers Party of the DRV, Fidel's band in the mountains, the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the USA, and the Black Workers Congress all are examples of democratic centralist organizations, but their internal governance and structure obviously could not be reduced to any uniform code of "laws." Differing historical situations, differing tactical and strategic tasks, differing conclusions about the history of the communist movement, and many other conjunctural differences are all reflected in the dissimilar organizational characters of these groups.

But neither is democratic centralism some vague slogan. The concept has definite ideological content. In these notes I'll try to present my general understanding of democratic centralism and some of the critiques which are commonly brought against it.

### Democratic Centralism

#### 1. The necessity of a vanguard formation

Marxists are not determinists. We believe that people make things happen, that within the limits of a given historical situation human agency can effect the course of events decisively. We revere those who have organized progressive human forces, recognized the arrival of a period when the possibility of transformation was immediate, and seized the time. Because of the inevitable uneven development of consciousness, will, and discipline in the working class and its allies, and because of the requirements of revolutionary activity, the "spontaneous", relatively unorganized opposition of the proletariat has never even come close to permanently defeating any national bourgeoisie. Every socialist revolution has been led by a vanguard force which cohered the most advanced and disciplined individuals from among the progressive forces and forged them into an organization capable of entering into the battle between capital and labor with one powerful will. The vanguard force, the cadre party, is the highest expression of the capacity of human agency to make history. It does not "make" the revolution, but without it the revolution cannot be made.

to periodically revise majority decisions in the light of subsequent experiences, i.e., the right of minorities to periodically attempt to reverse decisions made by the majority; the right of political initiative by minorities and members at conventions." Each of these provisions seems correct to me, though their concrete application both as constitutional principles and in practice obviously require careful thought.

Further, the organizational character of a revolutionary cadre party is not only a matter of formal statutes and procedures. The real spirit of egalitarianism among all comrades, the consistent practice of criticism/self-criticism, and the depth of our mutual commitment (we are prepared to die in each others defense) all condition the life of a party in a manner profound if difficult to define.

#### Four Common Objections to Democratic Centralism

Not everyone thinks democratic centralism is good! The theory and practice have been attacked from several positions, among them:

##### 1) Ultra-democratic

This position has been common in youth culture "organizations" and in certain new left forms. Any structure is viewed as "elitist" and "non-participatory". The concept of leadership is rejected. Business is taken care of informally as it arises. Meetings, if ever called, are for the purpose of exchanging vibes and smearing "love" on one another. What really happens is that an informal, uncontrolled, and thus very powerful leadership always emerges. These formations reject democratic centralism (if they've heard of it) because they fear it to be manipulative. Those who are in fact manipulating reject democratic centralism because they know, consciously or not, that it is a democratic threat to their own illegitimate and uncontrolled power.

##### 2) Liberal or Sentimental

Certain formations which often arise from petit-bourgeois or culturally middle-class elements may have elaborate systems of accountability yet remain in reality hostile to leadership. Constant and mechanical rotation of offices, the continual and petty revision of organizational principles, an excessive fascination with the superficial process of meetings, and a concentration on the "development" of one another to the exclusion of really doing anything else -- these are some of the characteristics exhibited by such groups. They reject democratic centralism as "authoritarian" and "stifling" because they view

the "revolution" in terms of their own personal transformation. They have very little if any understanding of how the external tasks of an organization necessarily condition its internal structure, for often their organizations simply do not have external tasks.

### 3) Syndicalist or Anarcho-Syndicalist

This position holds that the transition from capitalism to socialism can be achieved by the self-organization of working people without the aid and direction of any vanguard formation. Syndicalists believe that soviets or workers' councils at the level of the individual plant can wage the struggle and administer the victory successfully and that certain minimal state functions can briefly be exercised by voluntary federations of soviets until full communism is achieved. Rejecting the theory of the vanguard party, syndicalists also reject democratic centralism. In my opinion, their critiques are usually based upon indelistic conceptions of the working class and the requirements of socialist construction. Nevertheless, many syndicalists have been courageous proletarian fighters and in its most developed form the ideology of anarcho-syndicalism can be a good watch-dog for the possible degeneration of democratic centralism and proletarian dictatorship.

### 4) The theory of "inevitable degeneration"

Among socialists, this is both the most wide-spread and the most serious critique of democratic centralism and the vanguard party. While highly centralized vanguard formations may have played a crucial role in defeating the bourgeoisie, the critique runs, by their very nature they inevitably begin to substitute themselves for the working class in exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat. Still worse, the pressures of this substitution destroy the internal democracy of the party, and the central committee is substituted for the party, the dictator for the central committee.

Those who hold this belief are not without historical evidence. Clearly something like "substitutionism" occurred in the Soviet Union, culminating in the horror of the Stalin regime. Just as clearly, it is the communist parties and not the independent representative bodies of the proletariat and peasantry which exercise decisive influence in People's China, the DRV, Cuba, and all other extant socialist states. While there are profound political and cultural differences between the situations, say, in contemporary China and Stalinist Russia, a Leninist is still confronted with a basic question: is it the inherent nature of centralist vanguards to substitute themselves for the working class in the proletarian dictatorship?

## 2. The organizational character of the vanguard formation: democratic centralism

To achieve an organization which can act with one will, the authority to make fundamental decisions must be centralized in a body whose directives are carried out by the cadre. To maximize the possibility of the central body making correct decisions and to pre-figure the kind of society we are building even as we struggle, the governance of the organization (including the generation of the central body) must be organized democratically. The working out of the tension between centralism and democracy will vary with the historical context (taking one form for a temporarily isolated band of thirteen guerillas in the high Sierra and quite another for a party of several thousand spread across a continent and fighting the class struggle on many fronts simultaneously) but there are certain norms which are fundamental. Perhaps the three most important are, 1) that at regular congresses of the party the central body is elected directly by the membership or by their directly elected representatives and that certain fundamental matters of perspective or "line" are endorsed or rejected by the membership, 2) that between such congresses, the authority of the central body is supreme: it makes the basic decisions, it commits forces, it governs itself and the party as a whole, and 3) that all significant changes in strategy and program made by the central body are preceded by a prolonged, open discussion which involves all members of the party. The central body may not dictate arbitrarily. For example, in matters such as expulsion, there must be a due process available to the cadre charged which the central body or its delegates must follow. But between congresses, all decisions are made by or can be reversed by the central body, which governs itself. Concepts such as referendum and recall have no place in a cadre party. Should a member of the central body commit a serious breach of discipline, it is the central body which must consider the case. Should a crisis arise, it is the central body which must decide to call an extraordinary congress. Party statutes may shape the method by which the central body makes and exercises decisions, but they cannot compromise its authority to decide.

These rather simple observations by no means exhaust the structural refinements necessary to meet the problems which arise from the tension between centralism and democracy. The constitution of the party we wish to build will not be a matter of a few paragraphs. In his essay, "the Leninist Theory of Organization", Mandel lists some of the procedural norms which would characterize a fully developed democratic centralist organization: "the right of all members to be completely informed about differences of opinion in the leadership; the right to form tendencies and to present contradictory points of view to the membership before leadership elections and conventions; the regular convening of conventions; the right

Only the rudiments of an answer can be suggested here. First, any ahistorical cant about the "inevitable" social consequences of an organizational form must be rejected. How should Marxists analyze the sources of Stalinism? Surely we would look beyond the dangers inherent in the high centralism of the Bolshevik Party. We would ask how the underdevelopment of capitalism in tsarist Russia effected the capacity of the proletariat to play the leading role both in the October Revolution and in the initial attempts to construct a socialist economy. Surely, too, the effects of the Civil War and the deaths of thousands upon thousands of workers would be considered. Nor could one ignore even so particular a matter as the time of Lenin's incapacitation and death. The centralism of the party was only one of a number of conditions which made Stalinism possible. It was certainly not decisive, as the history of subsequent revolutions should indicate.

Imperialism breaks at its weakest link. In the unfolding of the dynamics of uneven and combined development in the 20th century the weakest links have been, up to the present, the imperialized nations of the so-called underdeveloped world. Here the national bourgeoisie has been weakest, here imperialism has been least able to contain and suppress insurgency, here the first victories of world revolution have been won. But the very circumstances which have made possible the victories in China, Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere have also placed limitations on how far these revolutions can advance toward a fully developed socialism. Capitalism in the imperialized countries did not develop a mass proletariat with high technical and cultural levels, and only on such a foundation can full socialism be built. In the absence of such a mature proletariat, the vanguard party has had to play an even more crucial role than it will in the coming revolutions in the advanced countries. It has been the only force organized on a scale sufficient to meet the imperatives of a post-revolutionary yet still primitive society. For the revolution to survive, it has been necessary that the party temporarily become the state, or at least the dominant element in the state. But this does not mean that the party must become Stalinized. The dangers of degeneration into bureaucratic collectivism are always there, but it has been possible for the state-party, itself, to initiate and lead offensives which check and defeat such tendencies, as the cultural revolution in China seems to confirm.

What will the future of the state-party formations in the partially completed socialist revolutions? Will they rigidify into proto-ruling classes who administer in their own narrow interests and thus place on the agenda an inevitable confrontation with the working masses of their own societies? Or will the completion of the world revolution rapidly exasperate their liberation from underdevelopment and the consequent deformations of the proletarian dictatorship? History will not be forced into such a neat either/or, but which tendency is dominant will depend in large part on the ability of revolutionaries in the West to succeed. It may not be overstatement to say that the future of the present socialist states will be settled in the streets of America.

JACK RUSSELL

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES FOR MCLL WORK  
IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

This document should be considered as the preliminary report of the education workers section. We have met three times and will need at least that many more meetings before we'll be ready to submit a full perspective for discussion and adoption by the organization.

1. Why should MCLL organize in the schools and colleges?

The basic argument for such work is given on pages 35-38 of the LSD. Cadre should reread this section a few times before Sunday. Further points which can be added at this time:

a. Roth has ruled and some form of busing will begin this fall. Thus the majority of the population in the tri-county area will be directly involved in a fundamental lock which raises (potentially) all possible public education issues. The probable teacher transfer policy will lead to all hell within the AFT and NEA locals. The resistance organizing of whites in the suburbs is already evident. MCPI has embarked on an attempt to create local chapters in several communities. The shit's in the air on the way to the fan.

b. The rejection of the millage proposals this spring and their uncertain fate on August 8th means that the fiscal problems of the Detroit Public Schools will be even more acute with obvious consequences for teacher job security, special programs, etc..

c. KVC's probable candidacy will give us the opportunity raise every school issue within the context of a major electoral campaign involving hundreds of thousands.

2. What resources do we presently have for work in the education sector?

a. We have seven to nine cadre with some direct relationship to the educational system: PC, KB, LB, BE, SK, JR, MW, JD?, and LAE?. This is of course a small base for aggressive mass work but the mix of experience and location is excellent: Detroit and suburban; K-12 and Community colleges; teachers and "consultants." Several of the working cadre have high status and immediate legitimacy with their peers which can be easily transformed into "organizing" relationships where this is not already the case. Initial meetings of the section indicate that all cadre have a firm grasp of the basic socialist critique of public education. An understanding of how to organize is less well developed but we are advancing quickly with this.

b. The research and production capacities and the mobilizing talents of the organization as a whole are relatively well developed.

c. The Alliance has some (it's unclear how many) education workers in its ranks. It also has the beginnings of a schools task force. At this point there does not seem to be much overlap between task force and workers in the sector.

d. CCC has several folks who work in the school systems as current members and will very likely increase the number rapidly this fall. Our speculation is that our section can staff at least two and perhaps four or five special "occupational tables" for education workers.

e. Through a number of sources (Ravitz campaign, LDC some-time workers, Free School, CCC, PPE, PE's work, cadre offspring, etc.) we have fairly substantial student/youth contacts.

f. Primarily through JR we have access to a informal network of folks who are doing the serious radical research on education and the political economy.

g. Through one cadre and some trusted friends we have a potentially very important influence on the development of MCPI and the possible Metropolitan Training Authority (MTA) to be described below.

3. How should we assess our present situation and what general conclusions does this suggest about our organizing perspective?

Despite the extensive individual experience of some cadre MCLL has no history of organizational praxis in public education. Two cadre (PC & LB) have done substantial political work in their institutions and we have the circle of potential contacts suggested above, but we are at the very beginning of serious organizing. Thus we must make very careful choices about how we invest our limited resources. What we do must realize every possibility for mass work while at the same time preparing the basis for more stable, regular, day-by-day forms of organizing at work places and within "intermediary forms".

"Mass work" probably means a major effort at "intercession" in the busing issue/controversy and prosecuting the KVC campaign in our arena; there are obvious potential interconnections here.

"Preparing the Basis" for other work means, among other tasks, the production of research and analysis, the cultivation of a group of education worker contacts on their way left, the further development of our own cadre, and -- most importantly -- the creation of some "exemplary pilot projects" examples of which are given among the listings in #4. It is probable that OCC will be the target for our first such project.

4. What should MCLL education worker cadre do to implement this general organizing perspective?

Several possible forms of work are suggested here in no particular order of importance.

a. We should attempt to influence the development of MCPI as much as we can. This means placing our friends (or even cadre) in situations where they can become the leadership of local "chapters" and maintaining some network of such folks so that we can aid them in their grass roots work. The work will be inherently "reformist" but may also establish an audience of active people ready to listen and even act on a left perspective as the contradictions of busing and the schools begins to unfold.

b. The Roth implementation panel will probably recommend the creation of something called the MTA (Metropolitan Training Authority) whose function will be to select one or two teachers from every school in the desegregation area and bring them into workshops, etc., for training in how to deal with the consequences of busing. These teachers will be considered in turn leader/trainers in their local situations. Friends of ours may well have a major influence on the implementation of MTA. We should try to assure that every progressive teacher with whom we have contact becomes a trainee. We may be able to create some form of core group within MTA whose function will be to inject as much of our perspective as is possible. Obviously MTA would be a fertile group for recruiting into CCC, the Alliance, PPT, etc..

① Use existing forms or create new forms  
② Do use some "comparative" approach to im. filtration  
③ How do we project MCLL?



c. We should produce a major pamphlet publication (30 to 50 pages) on busing, metropolitan public education, and the political economy of southeastern Michigan. This can be used in MCPI, MTA, and several other forums. On the basis of such a document we should try to get media exposure for our perspective on the issue. A shorter and more popular version of such a publication might be produced in very large numbers for mass distribution.

d. As previously noted, the section should establish three or four education worker tables at CCC. It is here that some of the most important cultivation of potential "close-ins" will be done.

e. The section should draft and submit a proposed public education "platform plank" for the KVC candidacy and accompany it with proposals on the mobilization of education workers, students, etc.. This should be the first step in working out our campaign activities.

f. The section should develop a one year plan of action for organizing at Oakland County Community College. We have two full time folks there each of whom has some base. The school is a proto-typical CC and very vulnerable to muck-raking. A union is established and influenced by cadre and close-ins (who is sometimes far out). Not much organizing (good or bad) has gone down among the students in recent years. It's a good place to begin. Possible actions:

- build a campaign/movement for full-time, school funded, client-controlled child care for students, employees, faculty and all others directly effected by the institution.

- build a progressive bloc in the union which would attempt links with organizing students, "non-academic" employees, community groups, etc., which would inject "non-school" issue into the life of the Union (PPT, strike support, resolutions) and carry out critique of and agitation against reactionary school policies.

- build a student and left faculty group around Les and our other which would do research on the school and eventually produce a disorientation handbook embodying our analysis of OCC and its functions. This could obviously become a core group of leaders for mobilizing around the critique.

- to the extent possible turn the classrooms of friendly teachers into organizing workshops a la Les.

Whatever we begin at OCC it should be viewed as a pilot project which will give us legitimacy as we make contact with folks at the other area CCs.

g. If possible by mid-year, the section should establish a a four page tabloid occasional newspaper whose function would be to report on and integrate existing work by us (and others) while at the same time being our most "mass" projection in the sector.

h. The section should, in cooperation with RAAG and DARG, perform the basic research task necessary for cohering a five-year organizing plan.