

Indochina Peace Campaign

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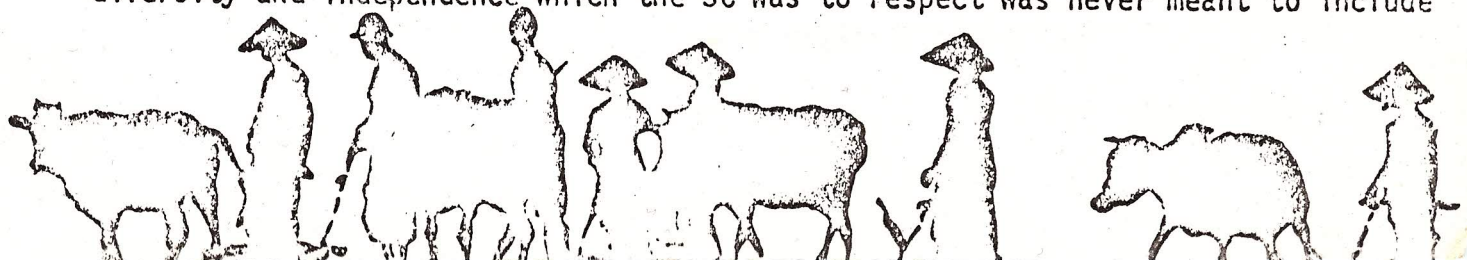
May 13, 1975

Dear IPC members and friends,

The Standing Committee (SC) decided at its last meeting that an element of New York IPC "has followed an ideological position at odds with both IPC and the Vietnamese, and behaved in a destructive factional way inside our organization with the intention of pushing it into the Revolutionary Union's politics..." The SC's unanimous decision was that the RU oriented NY group stop functioning as IPC.

The SC decided not to publicize its decision until those in the NY chapter who agreed with and carried out IPC national policy had prepared and organized themselves sufficiently to continue their work when the RU-oriented faction stopped relating to IPC. As many of you know, the SC decision was publicized ahead of schedule unfortunately catching many IPC members unaware and unprepared. We apologize for the problems this has created in your work, but hope we can proceed with the discussion that this important decision requires.

In deciding to enforce a separation between the RU-oriented NY group and IPC, the SC relied on its original instructions. The minutes of the Pittsburgh Interim Committee meeting (June 26-28, 1974) authorized the SC to "fill a hole in the organization of IPC. At the present time there is no organizational structure to provide continuity in carrying out the policies and decision of the interim and national meetings between these meetings." (emphasis added) No "sweeping powers" were given to the SC because of the "diverse and independent" nature of our chapters, But the diversity and independence which the SC was to respect was never meant to include



outright refusal to implement IPC program or factional attack on the organization.

Consequently, when the RU-oriented NY group ignored specific instructions from the Pittsburgh Interim Committee meeting to "reserve its differences" with the strategy and "go all out" to implement the Congressional pressure program of IPC, the SC felt authorized to separate them from IPC.

Several chapters have questioned, however, whether the SC had the authority to make such an important decision without prior consultation with the chapters. The SC, while feeling it had the "legal" authority, realized that the decision would be meaningless without the support of the chapters. The following paper which reflects the SC's reasoning behind the decision should provide the basis for the discussion we all want.

In the near future, SC members will be consulting with chapters especially concerning the chapters' viewpoints on (1) whether the process which produced this decision was faulty and should be modified for weighty decisions like this in the future; (2) whether the basic decision separating the RU-oriented group was sound; (3) whether the criteria for separation in this case are sound guidelines for future cases should they arise.

While hoping to encourage thorough discussion and debate, the SC feels strongly that the status of the N.Y. chapter should not become a topic on the agenda of the upcoming national meeting. Once before, a national meeting was disrupted by this kind of politics coming from New York, dominating it almost to the exclusion of other concerns. A continuation of this disruptive influence especially in a meeting as important as the next one cannot be permitted if we are to succeed in finding a new political basis for our IPC network.

in solidarity,

IPC Standing Committee

Dear IPC members,

The Standing Committee has decided to instruct an element of our New York City chapter to stop functioning as IPC. This group is directly aligned with the Revolutionary Union, has followed an ideological position at odds with both IPC and the Vietnamese, and behaves in a destructive factional way inside our organization with the intent of pushing it into the RU's politics. Our recommendation is that they openly declare their politics and organizational ties, leave IPC and do their Indochina work within the context of the United Campaign or some other coalition effort.

The history of this problem goes back to the beginning of IPC with its "single issue focus". We have always had to struggle for the protection of our organization from factions of the Left wanting to convert it into something other than it is. Over the 1972-73 years we deepened our commitment to a single-issue united front form of organization, and decided on a political line and program which has served us well. As determined by the October, 1973 Germantown National Meeting, our political line is:

- to build a United Campaign to cut aid to Thieu and Lon Nol, free Saigon's political prisoners, and honor the Paris Agreement;

- Solidarity with Indochina (including efforts to give a human face to the 'enemy,' medical aid programs, and identification with the political program of the Indochinese, e.g. the PRG's program, Paris Agreement, etc.

- Build and defend the anti-war movement.

Out of that meeting grew the United Campaign and our new links with the Coalition to Stop Funding the War (which had just succeeded on the vote to end the Cambodia bombing and direct U.S. participation). We explicitly defined the "Watergate opportunity" as opening a path towards dividing the Congress from the Executive on the war.

It was at the June, 1974 Pittsburgh Interim Committee meeting that a split with New

York over the Congressional strategy began to develop. There, members of the NYC chapter fought for hours to introduce a policy change which would have made IPC an "anti-imperialist" organization and reduced Congressional work to the level of an optional tactic. In the heat of these debates, one NY member now aligned with the RU position (Gina Harmon) took the position that this would be "a step" towards changing IPC into an anti-imperialist coalition in the future. But the majority of those present properly regarded that as a question of policy clearly out of order at an Interim Committee meeting whose business is to implement the political line through deciding on programs, resources, etc. The only immediate issue was that NY IPC opposed the priority given to the Congressional strategy which was then in a critical period.

After often rancorous argument, the issue was resolved by these key votes:

1) "IPC adopts an all out, but not exclusive, effort to pressure Congress to cut military and economic aid to Indochina for FY 1975." NY opposed, but accepted the "all out but not exclusive" formulation.

2) The "all out" emphasis was given teeth by a resolution that: "(1) A coordinator be chosen by every chapter in every region to be the primary contact person with the Coalition. Their task is the full range of organizing tactics on key legislation. (2) The coalition will distribute key contact lists to IPC chapters for the purpose of direct follow-up. (3) Each IPC group will take on a particular district (s). (4) The Indochina Peace Pledge will be used as a tool" NY accepted the instructions but in the months ahead completely disregarded it.

3) At the end of the meeting a heavy criticism session broke out with a large majority critical of NY's style and politics. Finally a resolution was overwhelmingly adopted by roll call, which specified: "There is a lack of unity in places, which weakens our ability to carry out our campaign with maximum effect. We cannot be simply a clearing house, or a collection of many camps, or a magnet for diverse interests. 4

We have to unify our energy so as to strike the most telling blows. For example, around the Congressional pressure work we cannot carry out internal disputes in such a way which weakens the effort or makes it ineffective in important parts of the country. People with disagreements about such a policy should both point out and reserve those disagreements while at the same time encouraging the policy itself. People who believe in the policy, on the other hand, must not defend it as a "faith" of olden times but objectively evaluate it in practice so as to discover shortcomings. Objective people then should be able to either sharpen or revise a line without the drain of factionalism and bitterness." Despite these specific instructions to the N.Y chapter, N.Y. never reserved its judgement, never unified with the Congressional strategy, and never stopped pursuing a different political line.

In the past few months severe internal tensions have broken out in the NY chapter, and incidents of destruction of IPC resources have been exposed. A de facto takeover of the chapter has occurred under the leadership of an RU-oriented element which now uses the facilities and resources of IPC. The same element attended the Ohio Issues Conference as NY-IPC after a divisive internal battle in which they tried to prevent other NY IPCers from coming. The second group, which accepts the national policies and program of IPC, attended only because of a last-minute Standing Committee intervention. The RU-oriented group has on many occasion refused to circulate the National IPC Newsletter within the chapter, and on several occasions destroyed the bundles of Focal Points they have received.

At the Issues Conference, the RU-oriented group presented a position paper outlining their views, and less visibly distributed copies of "Draft Programme for the Party of the US Working Class", an RU pamphlet.

The position paper was, once again, totally at odds with the Congressional strategy and the promises given at Pittsburgh. In describing their work, they omitted any mention of the Congressional emphasis agreed to at Pittsburgh: "We make demands on the government and back it up with agitation, media work of all kinds, demonstrations and direct confrontations, street work and work place organizing." They continue to operate outside the single-issue focus of IPC: "We must participate as IPC in coalition work against US imperialist aggression today. That work is clearly focused on the Middle East, on supporting the liberation struggles of the Palestinian and Omani peoples." While NY IPC is off organizing around these themes, national IPC has no position whatsoever on the Middle East; and the Pittsburgh Interim Committee specifically stated that the basis for coalitions between IPC and other groups was the Indochina Peace Pledge.

As for political focus after the fighting in Indochina ends, the NY group proposed a program which reflects in every respect the RU's "Draft Programme".

NY working paper

1. "Free all US colonies."
2. "End all US military aid and alliances with puppet regimes"
3. "Withdraw all US troops and ships from foreign countries"
4. "dismantle nuclear weapons"
5. "Support just wars of national liberation and revolution against imperialism"

RU "Draft Programme" (p.43)

1. "Withdraw all US forces from foreign soil and the territorial waters of other countries"
2. "Free all colonies in the grip of US imperialism"
3. "End all US military alliances and military aid to US puppets..."
4. "Abolish and destroy all nuclear weapons"
5. "Support just wars for national liberation and revolutionary wars against imperialism..."

In substance and often in language the two programs are the same with only changes in numbering.

What we object to is not the existence of the NY element, nor the RU, and certainly not the politics involved. But they represent a political line quite at odds with the

legitimate and required line of IPC, and a covert and factional style of opportunism which leads to chaos within otherwise open organizations.

Politically, the line of the RU and its allies is quite different from IPC. First, they have continually attacked the Congressional strategy (no matter how well it was working). Second, they have disagreed with and violated the single-issue Indochina focus that has been vital to our survival and success. Third, their view of the world is what they would like to consider a "Chinese" view. IPC has not taken a position on the Russia-China debate although we have studied it in our organizers schools. If anything, we have respected the political line of the Vietnamese revolutionaries which, during the war, has been obviously different from the Chinese and the Russians. The Vietnamese do not view the Soviet Union as "social imperialist". They do not view the US and the Soviet Union as "twin superpowers." They believe the primary contradiction is with US imperialism, not the "superpowers", and that both the Soviet and Chinese governments are socialist. The Will of Ho Chi Minh pledge the Vietnamese Workers Party to seek to harmonize and unify the international communist movement. As long as they maintain this position, groups like RU will have to consider Hanoi "revisionist." The only reason those who hold the RU line do not take this position is because the Vietnamese enjoy such great prestige and popularity in revolutionary circles.

Organizationally, the NY group has operated in a factional manner, like the RU generally. What is factionalism, and how is it distinct from democratic argument? Factionalism is the adoption of one pose to penetrate an organization while holding to a secret identity and agenda. Factionalists inevitably bring about distrust and suspicion, drive out other people and bring about a situation where they have taken over only the shell of the organization with all the members being either secret cadre or allies. Factionalists don't mind destroying organization they can't take over, because they hold the view that there is only one correct line and party for

Left. Here, for example, is how the RU speaks of other tendencies on the Left:

...the proletariat (i.e. the RU) takes a ruthless stand against those petty bourgeois hustlers who refuse to take the stand of the working class...the leaders of these groups are deadly enemies of the working class...

These various agents of imperialism, in and of themselves, amount to nothing more than cockroaches which the working class could squash under its feet. But these types do pose a greater potential danger--they can act as "shock troops" for the development of a phony "socialist" or "progressive" movement....

(Draft Programme, p. 25-26)

Many good organizations have been paralyzed or ruined by this type of political invasion by factions. SDS fell apart in 1969 at the hands of Progressive Labor and others, including the Revolutionary Youth Movement faction, part of which became the RU. More recently, VVAM has turned from a healthy and independent organization into a shambles of factions as the RU moved into its chapters and offices. IPC has largely been spared this fate, although chaos has been created in both NY and in a UCLA-oriented chapter last year.

The way we have succeeded is by keeping these tendencies totally out of our organization, and this policy must be continued, especially in the delicate transition period ahead. We have welcomed anyone into IPC who has accepted our program and policies in good faith (as a box in Focal Point repeats every issue). We have many members with other political notions or affinities (NAM, Prairie Fire, AFSC, etc.) who have kept those politics out of our single issue front. They have not tried to hide their other interests, but neither have they used IPC as a recruiting ground. This has been the basis for our unity and trust, and it has to be preserved against any forces who disrespect it.

Therefore, we have decided that asking the NY group to leave is by far the best of alternatives. We ask them to understand that we have a right to our politics and organizational process, and they to theirs. Those among us interested in the NY group or the RU may seek them out and join. The Left must for now include an unlimited variety of alternatives which people can choose from on the basis of free and un-

manipulated interest. We are happy with our politics, with our process, and with the contribution we have made to changing the climate in this country, changing the foreign policy of this country, which has in turn contributed to the great and historic victory of the Vietnamese and Indochinese people.

Our success -- and our successful future -- lies in avoiding dogmatism of the Left. We started IPC when people thought it was impossible. We kept it going when people thought the war was over, and when most of the Left was closing down its anti-war activity. We adopted a Watergate and Congressional strategy which represented a sharp break from conventional perspectives. We made political prisoners and aid to Indochina into issues the Congress could not avoid even though much of the organized Left would not join us. We have won because we followed our own logic, we did our own study, and we were creative and we knew what we were talking about even when the dead hand of tradition tried to caution that we were "incorrect." As the Vietnamese have done, we have started to chart our own path to revolutionary change. Let us continue on it!