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June 17, 1980

Comrades of the Western Region,

Enclosed is a written self-criticism of some racist errors we made in the Western Regional process. These errors surround the question of the resolution of support for the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference, passed at the OCIC Second National Conference.

As you know, the question of this resolution is a secondary agenda item at the upcoming Western Regional Conference on July 4-6. While our self-criticism does have a wider purpose than contributing to the discussion of this agenda item, we feel that it has much relevancy to this discussion. Therefore, we are asking that each locale distribute our self-criticism, and that it be included in the preparations for this agenda item.

We realize that there is a great deal of preparatory work to be done for the Regional Conference, and that time is getting short. We apologize for sending this out at such a late date.

Comradely,

AS and KD
SCALC

(Who are these people)

SELF-CRITICISM FOR RACIST ERRORS AT THE WESTERN REGIONAL
MEETING

Over the past few weeks, the two of us have come to understand that we made objectively racist errors during the Western Regional Meeting in December 1979. Because we believe that these errors had a negative effect on an important struggle within the OCIC and the Tendency, and because this struggle is still continuing within our region, we are distributing this written self-criticism throughout the Western Region. Furthermore, because the errors that we made reflect forms of white chauvanism that unfortunately are still too common in the party-building movement, we have taken a fair amount of space below to attempt an analysis of our errors, hoping that this analysis can be useful to other comrades in the struggle against racism.

Before going into a discussion of our errors, however, we want to note that the intervention of two Anglo OCIC comrades--an NSC member and a leading member of the Seattle Local Center--played a key role in helping us to understand the character, roots, and effects of our errors. We strongly support these comrades for taking up this struggle with us, and feel that it is a good example of white communists acting on their particular task of struggling with other whites against racism.

Our Errors at the Regional Meeting

During the December Western Regional Meeting there was a discussion evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the Second OCIC National Conference. In this discussion--and at other points during that weekend--we played a leading role in raising sharp criticisms of certain aspects of the OC Conference. In particular we targetted the National Steering Committee's weaknesses in organizing the processes of preparation and ideological struggle. We felt that the NSC had neither sufficiently grasped the vast effects of such mistakes ^{made} on the national leadership level, nor had it fully realized that these errors were not a simple "organizational" matter, but represented political contradictions with the basic OCIC line. One of the examples of these NSC errors that received much attention at the Regional Meeting was the process surrounding the OC resolution of support for the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference. We made especially strong criticisms of this resolution process because we thought that it was one of the areas where preparation was poorest, and the effects of this poor preparation most potentially damaging. We felt that it was necessary to emphasize that this resolution process was objectively racist because it implicitly showed that the leadership had taken a less serious attitude to consolidating support for the NMML Conference than for other agenda items that were better prepared. Moreover the NSC's practice in this regard continued this body's errors of relatively neglecting its duties to support the NMML Conference in the longer run, and that these errors had resulted in more limited gains in the struggle against racism than might otherwise have been the case.

While we still essentially hold the criticisms of the NMML Conference resolution process that are outlined above, we now realize that we made two inter-related errors in the way we put forward our critique at the Regional Meeting. First we failed to see that it was absolutely necessary to make our basic support for the NMML Conference itself crystal clear, while raising criticisms of the OC resolution process. Secondly we failed to articulate fully our essential unity with the content and thrust of the OC resolution. We want to discuss each of these errors.

1) We failed to make our support for the NMML Conference clear. The key to this error is that we narrowly concentrated on our criticisms of the resolution process, and ignored the effect that these criticisms might have in the larger political context. Generally-speaking, the political context we effected was the NMML Conference itself; a process devoted to bringing national minority communists

into the organized facet of the party-building movement, thereby countering some of the disastrous effects of racism in that movement. Given the crucial nature of the goals of the NMML Conference, we should have made certain that our criticisms of the OC resolution process didn't amplify or create skepticism or opposition to the NMML Conference itself. We should have openly and repeatedly expressed and explained our support for the NMML Conference. Also we should have been sensitive to skepticism in other comrades over the Conference, and should have struggled with them over this. We failed to do these things.

More particularly the context for our criticisms was the two-line struggle over the NMML Conference in the Tendency. This struggle was then raging, and continues today. And this struggle is mainly the result of what can only be called an opportunist offensive against the NMML Conference--an offensive that seeks to depict the NMML Conference as sectarian, splittist, and even racist.

The basic thrust of the opportunist critique of the NMML Conference is that, by requiring a certain level of unity on political and party-building line, the NMML Conference excluded some national minority comrades in the Tendency from participation, thus allegedly precipitating an "unprincipled split" among minority communists. The underlying assumption of this critique is that the only really "principled" unity possible among national minorities is unity on the basis of race, not political line: that for minorities skin color is the highest basis of unity. As has been argued a number of times now, this is an objectively racist error that has been common within the communist movement historically.

The opportunist character of this attack on the NMML Conference becomes even more obvious when we observe that this attack has been headquartered in the Rectification Circle, and that it is only one facet of a multi-faceted offensive by this Circle on the OC and OC-related processes. This larger offensive initially took the form of jamming the OC-oriented current with as many criticisms as possible, with little concern for the consistency of the criticisms, their importance, or even their accuracy.

The Rectificationists have since exchanged their tactic of jamming for a less-obviously sectarian policy of piously lecturing the OC and its friends on the need to put the unity of the Tendency first. And the attack on the "sectarianism" and "splittism" of the NMML Conference has been de-emphasized (but not abandoned) and combined with sanctimonious assertions of the "low theoretical level" of the NMML Conference. But the question of the "sectarianism" of the NMML Conference has not really faded, for this line of attack has been increasingly echoed in other quarters of the Tendency--some of them in the OCIC itself.

Now to sum up our first error at the Western Regional Meeting: By failing to express clearly our support for the conception and essence of the NMML Conference, we allowed our criticisms of the OC resolution process to undermine support for this important attempt to strengthen the multinationality of the organized party-building movement. And by ignoring the fact that the opportunist offensive against the NMML Conference was successfully playing ^{on} the weakness around racism of many white Tendency and OCIC comrades, and was thus conditioning all discussions of any issues related to the NMML Conference--plus by our failure to demarcate ourselves sufficiently from the opportunist line--we objectively conciliated the opportunist attack.

2) We failed to articulate fully our support of the thrust and content of the OC resolution itself, while criticizing the process surrounding it. This error is strongly related to the one just discussed, but has certain particularities that demand separate attention. Generally-speaking, we got so involved making our criticisms of the mistakes and unclarities of the text of the resolution, and relating these to the overall errors in the preparation process, that we forgot to sufficiently emphasize our basic unity with the essential content and thrust of the OC resolution. More particularly, we failed to address all of the different parts of the resolution in a balanced manner, and focused mainly on only one or two sections of it.

To exemplify, it may be helpful to review the resolution section by section. The first section endorses the rationale for the NMMML Conference, its autonomy from the OCIC, its basis of unity (rejecting the related "sectarianism" charge), and its basic method of selecting participants. We unite with this endorsement. However at the Regional Meeting our unity with this section was submerged by our criticisms of the textual error present: the basis of unity of the NMMML Conference was inaccurately described as the 18 points and "genuine commitment" to a single ideological center; the actual basis of unity was no consolidated opposition to a single center.

The second section of the resolution reviews the main purpose of the NMMML Conference, and the main topics discussed there. It also supports the success of implementing this purpose. We support the goals of the NMMML Conference, and the fact that the conference, organized to meet these goals, was successfully held. But our basic support for this was obscured by our overemphasis on criticizing the poor wording of this section that could be read to imply support for the theoretical conclusions of the NMMML Conference. Furthermore, we overemphasized the fact that verbal statements to the effect that the resolution was not intended to support the theoretical conclusions of the NMMML Conference were not a fully adequate rectification of the weak text; we stressed that it would have been better if the resolution itself had been amended to say this explicitly. (We did though argue that the NSC alone does not bear the burden of this error, for this amendment process could have been initiated from the floor by the base--including delegates from S. Calif.)

The third section of the resolution makes an initial self-criticism of the racist errors and tendencies within the OC that were exposed by the NMMML Conference process. This is an extremely important section of the resolution, and our support for it was more or less lost by the fact that we all but ignored it. Objectively, we did not support it.

The fourth and final section of the resolution supports the exclusively national-minority character of the NMMML Conference as correct in current circumstances of widespread white chauvanism among current white party builders, and calls for the OC to utilize the gains of the Conference in the struggle against racism in the OC and in the Tendency. This, as we recall, we did openly support, and called for greater NSC guidance to help us fully implement it. But our stress on criticisms of mistakes in other sections of the resolution undoubtedly weakened the support we articulated here.

To be clear, we do not think that the errors in the text of the resolution were insignificant, nor that it is being picky to raise them. It is not simply some form of organizational purism to ask that the wording of a resolution be accurate, and correctly register the unity achieved. After all a resolution is the main form in which decisions are communicated for action in the broader base. Errors in resolutions can have important ideological and political effects. Moreover the sloppiness in the NMMML support resolution, reflects the larger sloppiness in the preparation for the discussion of the agenda item, both of which objectively read out as a denegration of the importance of the NMMML Conference by the NSC.

Nonetheless, in the balance, the textual errors in the resolution are far less important than the correct anti-racist thrust and essence of the resolution. And, also in the balance, the objectively racist errors of the NSC around the resolution process and generally around giving adequate leadership to the OC in supporting the NML Conference, are of less significance than the NSC's strengths in providing leadership in the struggle against racism--especially in leading in the development of a very advanced line on the centrality of racism to party building. Finally the NSC's errors around the NML Conference were far less serious, in the balance, than those committed in the base. That we lost this "balance", in our criticisms of the OC resolution at the Regional Conference, and in the more general discussion, summarizes the character of our error.

The racist nature of our errors

We feel that our errors at the Western Regional Meeting were objectively racist--racist despite our consciously subjective intent. Identifying them as objectively racist is not to minimize them, or to suggest that their racist character can only be seen in their effects of strengthening racism elsewhere. Rather, like all objective racism, our errors both had tangible racist effects, and roots in racist ideology inside ourselves. The fact that we were not "conscious" of this racist ideology makes it no less racist ideology. Specifically our racism had to do with our inability to keep the centrality of strengthening the anti-racist struggle everpresent in our minds. Our inability to assess the situation, and our own practices, from the point of view of the centrality of anti-racism was due to our "white blindspots." We were "blind" to the paramount importance of building support for the NML Conference while raising criticisms of related issues; "blind" to the possibility that our practice conciliated the opportunist attack on this Conference. Furthermore we were "blind" to the importance of stressing our support for the thrust of the OC resolution of support, while raising secondary criticisms of its text. This "blindness" of course, stems from the fact that we are both part of an oppressing nationality, and are thus vulnerable to the white (national) chauvanist ideologies that permeate this nationality.

There are also some secondary roots to our errors. For one thing, both of us have frequently failed to make criticisms in a balanced manner, by placing them in the articulated context of what we support. Additionally, at the Regional Meeting we sometimes made criticisms in an individualistic way, forgetting that by taking leadership in making criticisms that we deeply felt, we had to pay attention to the real effect of these criticisms on others present. But it is important to point out that these secondary roots of our errors do not mitigate the white chauvanism involved. Rather, when racism is at the root of errors, other roots amplify the racist character of these errors,

Conclusion

In closing we want to raise a concern that some white comrades may consider our attempt here to analyze, and partially rectify, our racist errors as "excessive." This concern is based on the fact that some Anglos in the Tendency feel that the leading OCIC line on the centrality of racism and the OC campaign against white chauvanism heralds a "phony war against white chauvanism" or--to put it bluntly--is "race-baiting." This feeling is clearly present in our region, as evidenced, for example, by the statement made by some comrades that "comrades should use extreme care when considering calling one another racist." While, on the surface, there is some truth in the last statement, to our minds it betrays an excessive concern with the feelings of whites, and an underestimation of the strength of white chauvanism and of the effects of "little" racist errors on multinational unity. As Earl Browder--during a period in which he was making positive contributions to the US revolution--once wrote:

Self-criticism/5

These mistakes were contained in what have been described by some comrades as "very little" incidents. But comrades, you must understand that it is precisely such "little" things inside the party that are the most dangerous because most difficult to combat and eradicate. It is comparatively easy to fight open, unashamed white chauvanism. There is no particular merit in that inside the Party, because there is and can be no such manifestations tolerated inside. White chauvanists who happen to find themselves inside our Party are quickly expelled without ceremony. Therefore, all manifestations of the influence of white chauvanism within the Party always and necessarily take on a more or less concealed form, in some "little" incident. We must, as Bolsheviks, have a keen political nose for such hidden chauvanism, drag it out in the open and liquidate it, without vulgarizing struggle or creating anything where it does not really exist. (Earl Browder, The National Liberation of the Negroes! War Against White Chauvanism, 1932, p. 303, our emphasis)*

We think that the above quotation is correct, And we, with the aid of other comrades, are attempting to understand the roots and effects of a "little incident" that we were involved in, and rectify them. We call on all white comrades to take up this perspective, and to take up the struggle against white chauvanism in themselves and in other Anglos.

We also would welcome any responses to our self-criticism, and any deepening of it.

AS and KD of SCALC
6/80

*see DW, Study Manual on Specific Manifestations of White Chauvanism in the Communist Movement, April 1980