

To: the TMLC, RBSG, SC-OCIC, and all OCIC members
From: the Milwaukee Socialist Union

This letter is in response to the TMLC's and RBSG's letter of 9-18-79, criticizing the OCIC national conference. The TMLC and RBSG have asked that comrades reply to their letter, and have stated that their continued participation in the OCIC rests, in part, upon this. We feel that it is necessary to respond for this reason, but also because we feel they are making serious political errors and that their ability to unite with the OCIC rests on our collective ability to help them correct these errors.

Throughout their letter TMLC makes various vague, and for the most part unsubstantiated, charges against the SC, such as 'bureaucratic centralism,' 'sectarianism,' and 'demagogy.' The first specific criticism they raise, however, is that delegates were limited to speaking for three minutes regardless of whether they were repeating someone else, making a minor point, or posing a completely different line. If this were true then it would have been bureaucratic and would, in fact, have stifled the debate to a large extent. However, the chairs were aware of this problem and the rule was not rigidly enforced. When a comrade was in the middle of a line of thought that was making a positive contribution to the debate, they were allowed to continue, sometimes substantially longer than three minutes. In another case, comrades from Louisville had substantial proposals they wanted to make and contacted the chairs requesting and extended speaking time, which they received.

In a situation such as the conference, to not have a limit on speaking, which the chairs could use to move along debate would have had the effect not of encouraging 'freedom of debate,' but of stifling it. TMLC and RBSG must be aware that among MLists there is an all too common tendency for speaker to fill up whatever time they have available, whether their comments are entirely relevant or not. To allow the most articulate and most practiced in debate to dominate discussion by not allowing the chairs to cut off comments when they were becoming too lengthy would have severely lessened the democratic character of the debate.

We would have to agree with the TMLC's criticism to the extent that it should have been made clearer at the beginning, what the policy on time limits was. However, the main error must rest with those comrades (such as the TMLC and RBSG delegates) who felt it was more appropriate to raise those criticisms only after the conference was ended. If comrades disagreed with the rules of the conference, the time to raise that was when the rules were announced, or at the latest, when the negative affect of these rules became apparent. Neither the delegates from TMLC or RBSG, raised any question or criticism to the conference floor or to the chairpeople.

TMLC and RBSG are also critical of the lack of preparation members had for the conference. They feel that members were not made aware of minority positions. We feel that 2 principles have to be affirmed in regard to minority positions. The first is that the minority has the responsibility to make their position known, struggle for it, and not hide it. The second is that the leadership body(ies) have the responsibility to draw out minority positions, assist comrades in clarifying the debate, and make all positions known to the membership. The SC erred in its responsibility in that it did a poor job of preparing

comrades for the conference. Documents arrived too late for many to circulate their responses. However, the SC was self critical of this error, and once they were at the conference they tried very hard to bring out the minority opinion, particularly in regard to the comrades from the southern California LC. We would say the the error of the SC wasn't rooted in 'burreaucratic centrlaism,' but more in a rather spontaneous and sloppy style of work. This doesn't mean the error is unimportant, but an error must be identified correctly for it to be rectified. We feel that the characterization of 'burreacratic centralism' is incorrect and will do little to help the SC correct their error.

More important than the SC error, is the error of the minority. The minority in the conference, both TMLC-RBSG and the comrades in the southern California LC, did not struggle to bring out their position at the conference. We beleive this is a most serious error. The comrades from TMLC-RBSG had serious criticisms of the conference, so serious that they felt they had to leave after the first day. Yet, they did not raise these criticisms to the conference floor or to the chairpeople. The fact that the minority didn't struggle to bring out their position, is the primary factor which held back the members abilities to assess minority positions. While we agree that the SC made errors, and errors which must be criticisized and corrected, we feel the minority must also seriously assess the error they made and also offer a self criticism.

Next we would like to deal with TMLC's and RBSG's criticisms of the discussion around the national minorities' conference. We find it hard to believe that they listened carefully to comrade Tyree's remarks on it. He spent a great deal of time explaining why the basis of unity of the conference was the 18 points and unity on the necessity to construct a single center. He went to great lengths to explain that the unity of the conference wasn't based on skin color but upon the same basis of unity as the OCIC, and that the unity necessary for a prediminantly white group of communists (OCIC) isn't higher than the unity necessary for a grouping of national minority comrades. He also drew out the inherent racism in denying the fact that national minority comrades must base their conference on political unity and not on an appeal for national minority communists to 'unite.' And while this is not a definative sum up of Tyree's presentation, we feel that all of these points were very clear (at least clear enough for us to grasp them). We find it hard to understand how the TMLC and RBSG missed these points and urge them to write to the SC for a transcript of the speech so that they can re-study it.

The comrades also object to the resolution which states in part, "The conference represented a real success in carrying concrete developments in the US party building movement to national minority MLists." This is not the same as declaring the conference a success, as TMLC and RBSG claim. The resolution was debated for about 20 minutes, and the majority felt that based upon the report Tyree made, and the discussion (in which many national minority conference delegates spoke), that it could state that the conference was a success in carrying the party building movement's developments to national minority MLists. Surely, we can sum this much up based on our knowledge of the unity reached at the conference and the descriptions of the comrades attending, and their reactions to it.

The TMLC and RBSG also criticisized the conference for the way it dealt with the criticism of Phil. Phil proposed that the NNMLC and all observers be allowed to speak in the discussion of the national minorities conference. This resolution was defeated. In no other section of the conference was it raised that the NNMLC be allowed to speak, despite the fact that discussion of them came up in a number of places. Some comrades felt that the call for them to speak in regard to the national minorities conference reflected a

paternalism and lack of trust in the planning committee of the national minorities conference. We don't feel that Phil was denounced. We feel that he was criticized. The comrades from TMLC and RBSG find it strange that comrades asked him to criticize himself when the OCIC isn't a democratic centralist organization. We don't find it strange at all. If one comrade feels another has made an error of racism, it is that comrade's duty to raise the criticism. If the comrade feels that the criticism hasn't been dealt with adequately, it is her/his duty to continue to struggle around it. The only other alternative is to take the attitude of, "oh well, I think it's racist and you don't so let's drop it." Such an attitude would be liberal and a gross underestimation of the importance of struggling around all aspects of racism. One doesn't have to be in a ~~dem. centralist org.~~ to take the struggle against racism up seriously. We feel the delegates who called on Phil to reflect further upon the criticism were correct.

In one section of TMLC-RBSG's letter they make reference to the way the debate on the NNMLC was carried out. Specifically, they refer to some of the comments certain comrades made during the debate such as, 'smash the right wing, unite with the left, and win over the center.' Of course, we have to agree that slogan-mongering is no substitute for principled political debate. The above comment did not serve to move forward the debate. Other comrades also made some snide remarks at various points in the debate. However, to say on that basis that, 'the attack on the NNMLC was characterized by the most extreme sectarianism and demogogy,' does not follow. The delegates did not unite on the basis of a few unfortunate remarks made by some of our less experienced comrades, but rather on the basis of what was contained in the first year sum up and the resolution on the OC's first year.

We must also distinguish between the kind of baiting remarks some comrades made and the sharp criticisms that many comrades, especially those involved in the national minority conference made. These comrades have some of the most extensive practice in struggling with the NNMLC and while their criticisms were sharp we feel they backed them up with reasoning and sound analysis.

TMLC and RBSG charge the conference with bureaucratic centralism. It is unfortunate that they did not stay for the entire conference. If they had, they would have witnessed two examples of just how unbureaucratic the conference was. The first example is around the struggle against racism. A comrade approached the chairs and stated that she felt she needed to raise a criticism around the racist way some comrades characterized the neighborhood. When the chairs heard her criticism they immediately knew this wasn't going to be a 15 or 20 minute discussion. They arranged for it to come up at a time when there would be adequate time to deal with it. The discussion of this criticism lasted for over one hour (perhaps closer to 2 hours). There was a great deal of struggle over the criticism, and most comrades learned a great deal from the struggle. If the conference had been guided by a bureaucratic approach this discussion would have been cut short, as it wasn't planned into the agenda, or raised by a person in leadership. The second example of a lack of bureaucratism is in the struggle with the minority in the southern California local center. This struggle went on for hours, and resulted in the fact that the entire agenda on local centers was never completed. The gist of this extensive struggle was to try to get the comrades in the minority to explain their views to the conference and to understand their

responsibility to do so. Great attention was paid to trying to win these comrades over and get them to articulate their views. Had the conference been guided by a bureaucratic centralism, these comrades would have been denounced, shut up, and we would have continued with the agenda. We feel it is most unfortunate that TMLC-RBSG didn't raise their criticisms at the conference. We feel sure that the conference would have taken whatever time necessary to struggle with them and hear their criticisms out.

Although we cannot agree with the TMLC-RBSG assessment of the NNMLC debate, there is one aspect of their general criticism we can agree with. We feel that at times the delegates at the conference dealt with minority views in a somewhat offhanded manner, as if they were annoyances and not legitimate questions. We feel the best example of this is around the question of when revisionsim was consolidated in the CPUSA. The sum up of the first year stated that it was consolidated in 1957. A delegate questioned whether or not the OCIC needed to state a date, as it hadn't been studied, and is subject to much debate in the movement. The conference body, in an extremely short amount of time affirmed the date and went on to other business. We are self critical for not further raising a question on this point. Instead we went along with an attitude of, "of course it was 1957, let's not spend time on this because we have other business to attend to."

However, we cannot unite with the general charge of bureaucratic centralism. Although we hold a few criticisms of the method of struggle carried out by the conference delegates' majority, we are clear on two things. One, the criticisms we hold are secondary. In the main we feel both the SC and the majority of the conference delegates were extremely patient in going through struggle and tried very hard to bring out minority views. The examples we've stated of this are the struggle against racism and around local centers. Second, we feel that in terms of method of struggle, the primary errors were made by the minority. We feel that the primary thing which held back the minority position, was the fact that the minority didn't struggle to bring it out.

In regard to the method of struggle of the TMLC-RBSG on these points, we have to be extremely critical. At no time during the conference did they raise their criticisms to the conference floor. Yet, they criticize the SC throughout their letter for not coming to their defense. For example at one point they say, "one OC member attacked us personally as 'conciliators with opportunism'... this statement and others like it went unopposed by the SC." In the main, they also went unopposed by the TMLC-RBSG. Perhaps it is audacious for us to think that the main responsibility for defending the views of the TMLC-RBSG rests not with the SC but with themselves, but that is what we believe. This apparent fear of sharp struggle on the part of the TMLC-RBSG was culminated by their leaving the conference at the end of the first day, without announcing they were leaving or making it clear why. In fact, one comrade who knew why they were leaving was asked not to tell why. This action more than any other inhibited the debate. It denied the conference the opportunity to deal with the TMLC-RBSG criticisms first hand. Now we are forced to deal with them through written letter, which is slower and involves fewer people.

This action shows that the TMLC-RBSG lacks faith in the ability of their comrades to deal with their criticisms and engage in principled struggle. It places their subjective desire to leave above the objective need of the OCIC to debate questions such as, what constitutes bureaucratic centralism, what is an unprincipled attack etc. For the views of TMLC-RBSG are not isolated. Other comrades have voiced such criticisms. Yet, we were not afforded an opportunity to work these criticisms out collectively at the conference. In addition, this action shows that the TMLC-RBSG comrades do not understand how to struggle for their line. When comrades have a position which is different than the leadership's, it is their obligation to struggle for that position, to attempt to win others to it, and to change if necessary. Last year the MSU held some mistaken criticisms of the OCIC. We traveled throughout the midwest discussing these criticisms and finally traveled to Philadelphia to discuss them with the chairperson of the OCIC. During these discussions, we were convinced that our criticisms were wrong, and we went home to sum them up in writing and share this struggle with other OCIC members. The point is, when one is in the minority, one has a high responsibility to struggle to put forward the minority line, and to make sure its heard. It is improper to back your bags, and go home, and reply in writing later. TMLC-RBSG delegates should have stayed at the conference and struggled over their criticisms. The TMLC-RBSG action was a break with the party spirit, and we sharply criticize it for the undemocratic attitude it reflects.

The TMLC-RBSG letter raises one final criticism which we would like to deal with in depth. It is the criticism around the way the conference dealt with the critique of the NNMLC. The essence of the criticism is that the OCIC conference united on an analysis of the NNMLC which the TMLC-RBSG cannot agree to at this time. What is this analysis?

Simply stated it says that a manifestation of ultra-leftism, retarding the development of the anti-'left' tendency is the circle spirit; that the circle spirit is headquartered in the leadership of the NNMLC, that the NNMLC has refused to commit itself to the struggle to build a single center in the anti-'left' tendency and has abandoned the struggle for a common party building strategy.

This analysis focuses on the organizational chauvinism of the NNMLC in remaining outside of the OCIC. Nowhere is a "definitive view on fundamental questions of party building as they relate to the rectification line and the NNMLC," put forward in the resolution and the SC did not ask the delegates to agree to anything further than what was in the resolution.

It isn't that TMLC-RBSG don't agree with the criticism of organizational chauvinism. In Theoretical Review, number 11, in a joint statement on the party building line of the NNMLC, issued by both TMLC and RBSG, the first criticism of the NNMLC's party building line is precisely on the NNMLC's formulation of the so-called necessity of a multiplicity of organization forms, a formulation which the NNMLC uses to hide their small circle and anti-party spirit. It seems that the source of TMLC-RBSG's problem is that while they agree that it is incorrect for the NNMLC to stay outside of the OCIC, they feel that the main blow should be aimed at criticisizing the rectification line and not their small circle spirit. Hence they are extremely critical of the OCIC for not critiquing the rectification line, and instead aiming all its fire on the small circle mentality. They feel this is a manifestation of organizational chauvinism on the part of the OCIC. But this is where they are wrong. The OCIC is not debating party building line at this time. The debate over party building line is a task for the ideological center. In other words, the tendency wide debate on party building line should not occur until the tendency as a whole is organized to participate in it, so that the largest number of forces can contribute to the debate and learn from it. This is why our present task is the work to unify the tendency on the basis of the 18 points, into a single center. It is also why our present task is not to promote a debate between the OCIC and the NNMLC on party building line. For the OCIC to debate the rectification line now, would be premature. This is why the NNMLC's refusal to join the OCIC is opportunist. In refusing to join, they are rejecting the idea that the tendency as a whole should unite in order to take up its ideological tasks. They are promoting a split in the movement along party building lines, when the movement is not yet mature enough to take up this question. In addition they are following the approach used by previous party building efforts, which was to ~~put~~ forward a party building line developed by one circle, and attempt to win all other circles over to this line. The last 10 years show us what a dismal failure this approach has been. It is not correct for one small circle to assert that it has the correct line on party building at this time and then attempt to win over the entire tendency to this line. What is correct is for different circles to unite in an attempt to form an ideological center, not under the control of any one circle, which would organize the debate around party building line (and other political lines). Within this process it will be correct and necessary for different circles to put forward their views on party building line, and for these lines to be debated. But this will be done as part of an organized study in full view of, and with the full participation of, the entire tendency.

Only if we take up the debate around party building line in this way, ensuring the broadest possible participation and input, will we have the chance of truly uniting all ML forces and rectifying the errors of the communist movement. What is crucial to understand, (and what the forces who advocate the immediate taking up of party building line are misunderstanding) is that previous party building efforts have failed not only because their line was wrong, but also because their approach to uniting MLists was wrong. Therefore, in order to have a successful party building movement, we must not only reject the incorrect past party building lines, but also the incorrect past methodology for arriving at those lines. An insistence that the OCIC take up party building line now, negates the necessity to correct party building methodology.

We feel that the root of TMLC-RBSG's criticisms lay in their incorrect view that we should be debating party building line now. We say to the TMLC and RBSG, our unity with you on the necessity to build a single center is primary now. There will be a time when our differences over party building line will come to the fore, but in order for this to come out in the most productive way, we must first unite in an effort to break the small circle spirit and unite the tendency. For this reason we sincerely hope that you will be won over to the idea that we must first unify the tendency on an approach to party building, before we take up line questions. We hope that you will be able to see the errors that you have been making and the the corrections of these errors will enable you to continue in the OCIC.

Sincerely,

The Milwaukee Socialist Union