

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE
OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE FOR AN IDEOLOGICAL CENTER

CN, TV, BOC, DMLO, and Seattle all present.

Contents:

- 1) Report on the SC elections
- 2) SC Recording Secretary
- 3) February Conference
 - a. Corrections to the minutes
 - b. Approval of the amended proposal
 - c. Criticisms raised about the February conference
 - d. Criticism and self-criticism
 - e. The struggle over internal racism within the OC
- 4) Status of organizations and individuals in relation to the OC
 - a. New organizations
 - b. Process for organizations and individuals to join the OC
 - c. Status of organizations present at the February conference which did not commit themselves to the OC at that time
- 5) Clarification of "spirit of unity"
- 6) Public statement on the constitution of the OC
- 7) Resolution of the contradiction within the OC over principle 18 as a line of demarcation with "left" opportunism
- 8) Development of a plan for an ideological center
- 9) Study of the 18 principles
- 10) Tendency investigation
- 11) Tendency literature and other materials
- 12) Local centers
- 13) Strengthening oppressed nationality participation in the OC
- 14) Conference in the South
- 15) Security
- 16) Finances

Summary of proceedings:

- 1) Report on the SC elections

There was only one negative vote, by the American Workers' Party, on the slate proposed by the Nominating Committee. AWP thought that some of the groups nominated had not demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of centralizing struggle over political line and program. Secondly, they thought that the NC should not have violated its mandate on the selection of organizations, rather than individuals, to the slate.

2) SC Recording Secretary

In an effort to ease some of TV's heavy work load as SC Secretary, the SC asked the BOC to be Recording Secretary. The BOC representative will have responsibility for recording the minutes of SC meetings and preparing them for distribution.

3) February conference

a. Corrections to the minutes:

1. Amendment 1 to the Concrete Proposal was offered by SUB and BOC jointly, not just SUB.
2. Amendment 4 to the Concrete Proposal was offered by BOC, not SUB.
3. In the secondary criteria for SC nominations adopted by the NC, "practical experience" should be changed to "practical ability." (What was at issue was the ability of various organizations to play an active SC role because of time constraints, etc. It was decided that, even though the NC felt very strongly that the needs of the tendency as a whole must be put over the needs of each local organization, this was a correct secondary criterion.)
4. El Comite has raised criticisms of the way in which their position was characterized in the minutes. They will write this up.

b. Approval of the amended proposal

The Proposal as Amended at the February Conference was adopted as reflecting the decisions of that body. The SC agreed that it had wide latitude to pursue the work defined by the Proposal as Amended at the February Conference within the limits set by that proposal.

c. Criticisms raised about the February conference

1. Several informal criticisms were received of the lack of consideration of class composition in the secondary criteria which the NC adopted for SC nominations. The SC agreed that this was a serious error and represents an ideological weakness.
2. The San Francisco Bay Area Co-ordinating Body criticized the election process in that the NC did not include an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the slate it proposed. The SC agreed with the criticism.

They also felt that the minutes of the conference should have better reflected the political character of the discussions. The SC supported this criticism.

In addition, they proposed changes in the wording of the Concrete Proposal as Amended. In particular, that in the breakdown of the various aspects of the OC's work, the designations "primary" and "secondary" be changed to "general" and "particular and related." The SC agreed that this change would alter the thrust of the proposal and would be incorrect.

3. The Buffalo Workers' Movement felt that too much was crammed into a one day conference and that the result was that important political decisions were overly rushed. The SC agreed and will try to use this experience in the future.

BWM also felt that time should have been set aside for informal discussion between the various local organizations. The SC agreed and will attempt to strengthen this aspect of national conferences in the future.

BWM also criticized the lack of criticism and self-criticism at the end of the conference, and also said that they felt the racism discussion was overblown. The SC rejected these criticisms. The SC position on each is given below.

d. Criticism and self-criticism

The SC's perspective is that C/SC is a vital tool in advancing the work of the OC. But that "end of the meeting" C/SC is not what is called for. Criticism of the process should be advanced during the process itself so that rectification can help the process advance. More comprehensive or serious criticism cannot be dealt with at the end of the meeting except in a superficial and spontaneous fashion. In fact, "end of the meeting" C/SC tends to reinforce the tendency not to take C/SC seriously.

Criticism needs consciousness and preparation just as much as any political point. Important political criticisms should be placed on the agenda. The SC urges that criticisms of the OC's work be developed, written, and transmitted to the SC. They will be responded to in some way. Either by accepting them and taking corrective action, rejecting the criticism in some cases with an explanation, or by organizing an appropriate discussion of the issues raised.

The SC has a responsibility to encourage criticism and to take leadership in resolving the contradictions which criticism uncovers. If any OC adherent has a criticism, they are encouraged to transmit it to the SC. If adherents have any difficulty in formulating a criticism or are unsure of how a criticism should be raised, they are encouraged to contact any SC member for assistance.

It is very important to recognize that not only does the SC have responsibilities around criticism, but that the entire OC has a serious responsibility to formulate its criticisms and make them known. As an example, it is worth noting that, in trying to deepen the criticism raised of the method of preparation for the August meeting, the Committee of Five has received no responses to their request for evaluations of this criticism (minutes of the February conference, item I). This in spite of the fact that several organizations informally expressed some level of agreement with the criticism. The struggle against liberalism is part and parcel of the struggle for unity.

e. The struggle over internal racism within the OC

Aside from comments that were raised at the February meeting itself, and the statement of the BWM, several comments were received that the struggle at the February meeting was "overblown." The SC disagrees and considers the struggle against internal racism of vital importance. A SC member was chosen to write a draft position on the events at the February meeting for consideration at the next SC meeting and distribution to the OC. In addition, the SC will take up the general question of how to systematically advance the struggle against racism within the OC.

4) Status of organizations and individuals in relation to the OC

a. New organizations

1. The Tuscon Marxist-Leninist Collective communicated to the OC that they will join the OC and would have attended the February conference except for financial considerations.
2. The Chicago Marxist-Leninist Study Group communicated their desire to join the OC.

b. Process for organizations and individuals to join the OC

New organizations and individuals must express agreement with the 18 principles of unity and the Proposal as Amended. Agreement with the 18 principles is to be interpreted in the same way that it is currently interpreted for OC members.

c. Status of organizations present at the February conference which did not commit themselves to the OC at that time

El Comite: No official word has been received but, on the basis of the differences expressed in February and some informal contact, it is very likely that El Comite will not participate in the OC nationally but will be open to consider participation in local and regional OC activity on a case by case basis.

The SC decided that, in the event that El Comite decides to stay outside of the OC, the OC would establish formal liason with them through the Chairperson of the SC. Ongoing discussion will attempt to resolve the differences. Additionally, the concrete proposals for various OC activities will be presented to El Comite as they are developed and they will be encouraged to participate. The perspective of the SC is that they are still part of the overall process.

Guardian: No official word has been received. The SC agreed to ask the Guardian to make a decision. Further, since no differences have emerged as yet (they supported the 18 principles and the Proposal) which would justify the Guardian's standing outside the OC, the SC agreed to ask the Guardian for a formal explanation in case they decide not to join the OC. If they decide to remain outside the OC, the SC will establish a formal liason as described for El Comite above.

BPO, CUO, and WUO: Their decision depends on their response to the SC's decision on how "spirit of unity" should be interpreted. That decision is included later in this summary.

New Orleans Workers' Collective: They have endorsed the OC.

Louisville Workers' Collective: No word has been received as of yet.

5) Clarification of "spirit of unity"

The following definition of "spirit of unity" was adopted:

The essence of "spirit of unity" is that struggle over differences must be carried out in a spirit of unity-struggle-unity and in such a way that it does not interfere with the ability of the majority to carry out its perspective in an aggressive way. In the present context, the implication is that struggle over principle 18 as a line of demarcation must be carried out in a spirit of unity-struggle-unity and that it must be recognized that there is a time for struggle and a time for unity. In particular;

1. those who disagree with the majority position that principle 18 is a proper line of demarcation with the "lefts" are free to circulate their differences external to the OC or at any internal conferences until the issue is resolved; however
2. at activities designed to reach out to new forces and publicly sponsored by the OC, no organization or individual that is a member of the OC should raise their differences with principle 18 as a line of demarcation; and
3. in order to prevent the possibilities of recruitment to the OC for factional purposes, the minority should make no appeal for those who agree with their perspective to join the OC for the purpose of struggle against the majority position.

6) Public statement on the constitution of the OC

A SC member was chosen to draft a statement for consideration at the next SC meeting.

7) Resolution of the contradiction over principle 18

The SC agreed that it is critical that the contradiction over principle 18 be resolved. In the first place, it makes little sense to establish points of unity for organizing an anti-"left" trend and then not uphold them as lines of demarcation. If they are not correct lines of demarcation, then they should not be points of unity; otherwise we would exclude legitimate sections of the anti-"lefts" and the entire struggle against "left" opportunism would be weakened. And if they are correct, then they must be upheld; otherwise we open the OC to forces that have not really broken with ultra-leftism and inevitably the sharpness of the critique of "left-wing" communism would be blunted. Therefore we must reach unity on whether principle 18 is a proper line of demarcation or not.

Secondly, the failure to demand unity on one of two primary dividing lines with ultra-leftism makes the OC inherently unstable. Since the ultra-left line continues to consolidate its hegemony over the communist movement, we must guard against the penetration of our ranks by forces which although they claim to oppose "left-wing" communism actually serve to advance its credibility. By failing to demand that forces demonstrate their break with ultra-leftism by opposing "left internationalism", we reduce our unity to just a verbal opposition to "left" opportunism. We would then be open to infiltration by those who cover their own "leftism" with phrases of opposition to "left-wing" communism.

In order to resolve the contradiction, the SC adopted theses on why principle 18 should be a line of demarcation with "left" opportunism (enclosed) and decided on the following process of resolution:

1. BPO will be asked to write a fifteen page (twenty maximum) paper representing the minority perspective;
2. the SC will choose a writer to draft a response of the same length;
3. the theses and the two opposing positions will be circulated in the first internal OC discussion bulletin;
4. between one and two months after the papers are circulated, three conferences will be organized to discuss them - one on the East Coast (Philadelphia or Baltimore), one in the Midwest (Chicago or Detroit), and one on the West Coast (San Francisco); the conferences would be open to those who could presently participate in the OC on the basis of the decisions of the February conference; and at the end of the conferences, resolutions on the question would be submitted and considered;
5. at the next general meeting of the OC a short final discussion of the question would be organized and then we would move to resolve the contradiction; additionally
6. the SC will choose a writer to draft a substantial background paper on why principle 18 is correct and why a failure to uphold principle 18 is an integral part of modern "left" opportunism but which will not deal (directly) with why it should be a principle of unity for the OC.

The rough (and tentative) plan for the conferences is:

1. One day conferences which would include:
 - two substantial presentations on principle 18 as a line of demarcation with "left" opportunism, pro and con;
 - workshop discussions around particular aspects of the question;
 - sum-up; and finally
 - consideration of resolutions on the question.

2. Participation would be of two kinds:

- delegations from OC organizations and individual OC members; the delegations representative of different levels of development and points of view within the various organizations and with each delegate representing about five members; and
- selected individuals who could presently participate in the OC on the basis of the decisions of the February conference. (Discretion will have to be exercised in this so that the primary character of the conferences remains that of an OC activity.)

3. The SC is committed to ensuring that the conferences and the discussions at them will be as accessible to advanced workers as possible.

This process should not be seen as the final resolution of the internal contradictions within the OC over Principle 18. Much more will have to be done to consolidate a firm proletarian internationalist perspective and fully grasp its relation to party building. But this process will, hopefully, lead to a qualitative and necessary advance.

The SC encourages a full exchange of views on this question. Apart from the process described above, all OC participants are encouraged to circulate their views to the entire OC.

8) Development of a plan for an ideological center

A small working committee has been selected to begin to draft such a plan.

9) Study of the 18 principles

The development of a concise study curriculum on the 18 principles will be undertaken under the direction of the SC. It will be designed for a 12 session framework and its aims will be to ensure that all OC participants have a real grasp of these principles, at least on a basic level; to clarify the level of unity of the OC by identifying those principles where the level of unity is higher than the essence of the principle and those principles where disunity emerges at a higher level; and to begin to draw out the implications of these principles for communist work in this period. It will be aimed primarily at the less consolidated organizations within the OC and the circles and collectives which are now beginning to be attracted to the OC. All organizations, however, will benefit from such study. It is likely that study and discussion around the study curriculum can be productively taken up by local centers.

All participants in the OC will be urged to undertake study and discussion of the curriculum over a period of six months and at the end of this period, a series of regional conferences will be organized around the 18 principles.

10) Tendency investigation

This will be carried out under the direction of the SC Secretary. A detailed explanation, along with the questionnaires mentioned below, will be forthcoming from the Secretary shortly. What follows is an outline of the process.

The investigation will proceed in two stages. The first stage will seek to gain a broad overview of the current state of the OC, the tendency as a whole, and the broader communist movement. It was decided that it was important to make this investigation broader than just the tendency, because the development and consolidation of the OC will take place in this larger context.

Concise questionnaires will be developed to systematize this process. As local centers develop they can also assist in this investigation.

The second stage will consist of an in-depth investigation of each of the organizations and individuals participating in the OC. An extensive questionnaire has already been developed.

The concise questionnaires and the more extensive questionnaire will all be sent out shortly. The shorter questionnaires should be answered within two months. It is intended that the longer questionnaire should be answered within about six months. There will be systematic in-person follow up.

Additionally, a questionnaire will be developed so that the spontaneous investigation which accompanies outreach work can be made more conscious, the results systematized, and reported back to the SC. This will be for use by the entire OC.

11) Tendency literature and other materials

The SC Secretary will compile a list of the most advanced materials of the tendency. The Secretary will be writing to OC members soon requesting a list of their most advanced materials, both internal and external, which they think would be helpful to others in the tendency and which they would be willing to share with others in the tendency. These will be compiled into a single list and sent to all OC members.

12) Local centers

The SC urges all OC adherents to establish local centers around the eighteen points where possible. These centers should include both organizations and individuals and should be formed according to local conditions. Their purpose should be to bring together all adherents of the OC for regular meetings and joint discussions of the questions being taken up at the national level. They should also serve as information centers and contact points for the OC at the local level. Other activities (joint study, summation of practice, joint action, etc.) should be encouraged but seen as a secondary priority. In addition, each local center should take initiative to develop relations with forces that agree with the eighteen points but for one reason or another, stand outside the OC.

The SC will take an active role in guiding the development of such local centers, projecting plans for their activities, summing up advanced experience, supplying resources, etc. DML0 was appointed to take leadership in this area. There is already some experience in Detroit at establishing such a center. DML0 will send out shortly some more concrete suggestions on how to proceed with the development of local centers.

13) Strengthening oppressed nationality participation in the OC

As one aspect of this thrust, the SC has taken the initiative of proposing the formation of a committee of national minority Marxist-Leninists which could organize a small conference of Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian, and Native American communists who agree with the 18 principles. The committee would operate independently of the SC in developing the conference agenda, deciding who to invite, what proposals to present to the conference, etc.

The following objectives of the conference were suggested:

1. to present and discuss the history, development, and basic conception of the OC;
2. to discuss the special role of national minority communists in the development of a Marxist-Leninist trend;
3. to discuss what steps the OC should take to ensure that it becomes a setting where national minority communists can participate with confidence that their white comrades take the struggle against racism seriously; and

4. to discuss what special steps the SC should take to develop relationships with other national minority Marxist-Leninists who presently stand outside the OC.

The SC views this conference as a high priority and is committed to provide whatever financial or logistical support is necessary.

Preliminary steps towards forming such a committee have been taken and an announcement from that committee will be circulated in the near future.

14) Conference in the South

The SC has taken the initiative of attempting to pull together a conference of various contacts in the South in the late summer, probably in Atlanta. It is intended to help overcome some of the isolation of our comrades in the South. It would bring the various contacts in the region together so as to collectively discuss the OC and its activities and develop plans for building its influence.

15) Security

The SC agreed on the following security restrictions for the OC:

1. names of OC adherents (unless public representatives), their addresses, workplaces, organizational affiliations, and telephone numbers should not be discussed or circulated without the express approval of the individual involved;
2. the telephone should be avoided as a vehicle for communicating any matters concerning the OC; as much as possible, discussion should be confined to face to face meetings. Pay phone connections should be established where needed;
3. any non-public political differences or personal antagonisms should be kept internal to the OC;
4. all comrades should avoid any loose talk; especially avoiding a false sense of security at left political and social gatherings since the intelligence apparatus of the state has been particularly successful at exploiting these situations; and finally
5. the time and place of OC or SC meetings should not be revealed to anyone outside the OC and should only be known to people inside the OC on a need to know basis.

The following, however, can be discussed freely with comradely forces outside the OC:

1. the existence of the OC and an outline of its history;
2. the 18 principles of unity;
3. the general plan to develop an ideological center;
4. the political questions facing the OC, but not which organizations represent the various perspectives;
5. the names of the organizations and individuals in the OC who have made it explicit that they wish to be open members (a list will be developed);
6. the existence of a SC and the identity of its public representative, but not the identity of the other individuals or organizations on the SC; and
7. the mailing address of the SC.

16) Finances

In order to create a starting fund for OC activities, the SC agreed that each participating organization, collective, or study group should contribute \$50 for each 10 members (or part thereof) and that individuals should contribute \$5.

A treasurer was selected to develop a secure method for carrying this out and to develop longer range fund raising plans.