

P.W.O.C.

Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee

January 14, 1980

Dear COG:

Your recent letter (undated) raises a number of important questions and addresses a number of significant issues now facing the forces in our tendency. While a full response should be made by the NSC, particularly in relation to your overall evaluation of the national conference, we felt it was important to respond at least in part.

We particularly want to respond to your characterization and evaluation of the struggle against racism. In this area we continue to feel that you do not understand the issues involved.

First of all, your letter continues the defensiveness which comrades from your organization exhibited at the conference itself. This defensiveness, though, has turned from an initial subjective response into an objective defensiveness, which indicates a more severe and deep rooted problem. Your response also reflects a lack of any real understanding of the thrust of the discussions over Labor Day weekend.

Thus, the following comments need to be put in the context of the overall thrust of how this struggle needs to be taken up within the OCIC as a whole, and not viewed as an individual's or an organization's weaknesses only. We need to take this struggle up in a way, and we need to understand in a thorough way there is no reason for any of us to proclaim a victory in our understanding or practice on this question. Any such proclamation would be premature. This perspective was the context in which the criticisms were raised at the conference.

I wanted to focus on a number of key points from your paper:

1. The centrality of the struggle against racism.
2. Theory and practice of the struggle against racism and the OCIC process.
3. Your comments on the national minorities conference.
4. The remarks on moralism and emotion being substituted for reason and analysis.
5. The incident with Comrade Malachi.

Post Office Box 11768

Phila., Pa. 19101

1. The centrality of the struggle against racism is a point which you and most of the tendency agrees to at least in the abstract. I say abstract because your paper is very unclear about taking up the struggle against racism in the concrete, particularly in relation to the OC and the party building movement.

To say the struggle against racism is central means a recognition that racism plays a central role in holding back the development of class unity and class consciousness (the development of a class for itself), that it is the cutting edge in the struggle against facism, and that it is the central question in forging the core of the united front against imperialism in this country. It is the central issue holding back the progress and development of progressive forces in this country--the workers' movement, the women's movement and the mass movement in general.

A point which is less recognized and less consolidated is the central negative role that racism and white chauvinism have played in the communist movement in the U.S. historically and within the OCIC as well. (It is not true that the primary reason for the predominantly white character of the OCIC is a failure for most of the organizations to integrate into the day to day struggles of the multi-national working class, but rather a failure of these organizations and individuals to take up the struggle against racism and an inability because of this to build political unity with national minority Marxists-Leninist and advanced workers.) Your brushing off of the internal direction of our remarks at the conference reflects this weakness. Your position reflects a liquidation of this aspect of the question.

2. This point is quite interrelated with the first, and in the ability to take up the struggle against racism in its concrete manifestations. Your urging the OCIC to focus on mass practice in the struggle against racism undercuts the whole purpose of the OCIC, that is, theoretical struggle and the forging of a Marxist-Leninist trend. It only helps to obscure the discussion.

It fails to put the struggle against racism as a central question within the communist movement and in the question of building a multinational communist party in this country. It fails to see the OCIC as the theoretical center for our movement and is weak on the relationship of the OC process to the role of centers for directing practice.

One function of the OCIC is to consolidate its forces on the understanding of the centrality of the struggle against racism in all our work. The OC is also a place to sum up our practice in this area (particularly the most advanced practice) and to popularize these lessons for the entire tendency. It is not the place, though, to direct our practice.

In addition, we cannot take up the struggle against racism in

a mass way, or in a correct way for that matter, unless we do have a thorough understanding of the centrality of the question and a firm grasp of the national question. This understanding must be internalized by the entire OCIC as a first step in taking up the struggle against racism in a way which is consistent and integrated in all areas of work. Any shallowness or lack of consolidation will only lead to complacency in taking up the struggle against racism.

3. Your remarks concerning the national minorities conference are, quite frankly, hard to understand. While I would agree that a criticism should be raised to any comrades who feared to raise objections (it is a political responsibility to struggle for and put forward your positions as clearly as possible) I can not understand how your feeling that some delegates made that error would lead you to the conclusion that it was the reason for the overwhelming vote of support for the conference. That is an incredible leap.

The national minorities conference received support from the OCIC convention because it deserved support. The conference was a step forward for the anti-revisionist communist movement on the road to party formation. It was a concrete step in drawing national minority Marxist-Leninists into the party building process. It began to provide the basis for these comrades to intervene in the OCIC in a full way, in a way that has been denied them by the white chauvinism of most OCIC organizations up to this point.

This conference received support because it did "represent a real success in carrying concrete developments in the US party building movement to national minority Marxist-Leninists, not because of white guilt or fear. And most delegates did have the basis to make this assessment. In saying this, I basically agree with the points MSU made in response to TMLC and RBSG in relation to the same subject (see page 2 of their paper). The representative from the NSC did make a fairly comprehensive report to the conference and the major questions and controversies related to the conference were explained and addressed. The presentation and the resolution were discussed and overwhelming passed.

It should be further noted that your objections were raised on the floor of the convention and discussed at that time. Only one delegate agreed with the position that we did not have enough information about this conference to voice our support.

By your raising this question with the formulation that "the overwhelming vote of support for the national minority conference... can be understood by assuming that many white delegates were afraid to raise objections is absurd, and in fact unprincipled. It reflects an uncomradely and anti-communist attitude. It says that the delegates were zombies, unable to think for themselves, even more, afraid to think for themselves, and that no one would dare to oppose the party line.

Can you not believe people did in fact support this conference. If there were objections, what were they? If you are sure people hold these objections, you must have some idea of what they are. Do not throw out vague rhetoric about objections, be concrete comrades. If there are objections to the process, let them be aired. If not, be principled.

Let me ask one question in relation to this. If it is any of your delegates who supported the resolution for fear of being branded racist, then why has not this delegate/s written a self criticism as well as written up whatever questions or objections they might have?

4. Again, your remarks on moralism and emotion lack any concreteness and make charges in a way which insinuates people who took up the struggle at the conference lacked reason and analysis. While you also insinuate the OCIC has created an atmosphere of guilt baiting, you do not make specific criticisms of specific instances or people. This kind of "struggle" will not advance our understanding of the process, especially if there are some legitimate criticisms to be raised and understood.

Of course, we would agree that moralism and emotion are no substitute for reason and analysis on any question. But, it would be incorrect to characterize the struggle at the OCIC conference in this way. We would not characterize the taking up the struggle against racism, in its concrete manifestations as they occur in the real world, as emotionalism.

By characterizing them in this way only shows a continuation of the racist and defensive errors which comrades from COG made at the conference. Taking up this struggle may seem like only a moral and emotional response, but only for those who can not reflect on and identify their own errors and weaknesses, and thus will prove incapable of rectifying them.

5. Your remarks concerning Comrade Malachi were particularly disturbing. Saying you would have done the same thing to a white comrade is no excuse for this kind of racist behavior. In essence it was another blatant example of white people telling Black people what to do, of whites "putting Blacks in their place." It was a racist slap in the face for all attending.

While you agree your delegates' behavior was clearly incorrect, defensive, subjective and individualistic, and show a lack of respect for Comrade Malachi, why can't you see it was also racist?

What he said is not the question here. It is only another obfuscation. The real question is whether incorrect, arrogant and abusive behavior toward national minorities is racist or not.

Without a correct answer you will not only be crippled inside your organization, but also in relation to any mass practice.

Think of it comrades. Can you honestly say this kind of behavior would not be racist wherever it reared its ugly head. How can you take up the struggle against racism if you do not understand its concrete manifestations. Whenever incorrect behavior is exhibited we need to be self critical. In the context of incorrect behavior with national minorities the self criticism must be extended to the racism and white chauvinism involved, because in that situation it is objectively racist.

Let me give you an example. At work an advanced white worker is given a leaflet on the Human Rights Agenda and the need to win white workers to this platform. He is won to the position and asks a Black worker he has known for years if he supports the Human Rights Slate. This worker says no based on a belief that the Democratic machine can do more to save the jobs at the plant (it was a runaway shop situation).

The white worker's response is basically condescending, telling the Black man he is stupid for not realizing what his interests are. The remarks are said in a very abrasive tone. He did not try to explain the Human Rights Agenda to the worker, but castigated him for not supporting it.

Our cadre (white), overhearing this "conversation" took up the agenda with the Black worker, gave him a copy of the leaflet, talked to him again and won him over to supporting the slate. During this process, the actions of the white worker were criticized to the Black worker and identified as another example of racism which divided the advanced workers from one another in the shop, even if they held the same positions. The Black worker felt this was the biggest obstacle to joint work.

Anyway, as you might imagine, the white worker did not feel his actions were racist, even though after a short conversation he accepted the criticism that his style was incorrect and did not push forward the building of a shop committee on this issue. He would not accept, at first, that it actually set this work back.

His defense was that he had known this man for years, he would have talked like that to anyone, and besides he was taking an essentially anti-racist position and therefore his remarks could not have been a racist error.

After a prolonged struggle (a couple of hours), he changed his position and accepted the criticism and extended a self criticism to the Black worker. He finally understood it in terms of if the exchange had been heard by other Black workers they would have seen it as racist and rooted in white chauvinism. From this point it was easy to extend his understanding that it was racism toward his friend as well.

Thus, in the end both workers viewed this behavior as racist and as holding back the work in the shop. While the Black worker identified it immediately as the key issue, it took a while to win the white worker to this position.

How do you expect to integrate yourselves "inot the life and struggles of the multi-national working class...in a way which earns the respect and trust of national minority people" if, in instances like the above, you would side with the backwardness and white chauvinism of the white worker (which is a logical extension of your position). Our purpose at the conference in taking up the struggle against racism was not moralizing and guilt baiting, but rather to arm people in taking up this struggle in its concrete manifestations, wherever they occur.

While I think there are a number of other points which can be made on your letter (and feedback should be made concerning other areas you raised) we felt it was important to make at least a limited response on the most central questions raised by both your letter and the struggle at the conference. We too hope that these comments will help stimulate more discussion within your organization and help in the struggle for unity around these questions. We look forward to any further comments which you may have.

Comradely,

Frank Carey
Frank Carey