

21 July 1979

Bruce Odgena

Comrad :

Under the circumstances, it is impossible to honor your request that we "spare" you a response to your letter of June 6th. In our view, it would not be correct to allow you to submerge a discussion of your particular "practice, method and approach to the struggle with the OCIC" in the general ideological struggle between the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs and the OC. We do agree that our tendency must promote thoroughgoing ideological struggle focusing primarily on key divergences around political line. And we think our practice clearly demonstrates our commitment to this task. But we cannot agree that the way in which that struggle is conducted is unimportant. Whether two-line struggle is open, aboveboard and conducive to principled unification of Marxist-Leninists or, on the other hand, characterized by intrigue, conspiracy and splittism can make all the difference.

We are aware that there is a danger that line differences can be obscured by an effort to expose unprincipled behavior on the part of one's opponents. This danger must be combatted first because it blurs the ideological landscape by elevating secondary questions above primary ones. But, even more significantly, it also does not reveal the connection between opportunist conduct and an opportunist line. As our own anti-revisionist movement demonstrates so well, a bankrupt line is often coupled with the most unscrupulous and unprincipled methods of struggle. For both these reasons we are committed to avoiding this danger.

Our May 15 letter was designed to solicit a self-critical attitude on your part in relation to your conduct following the April 4th speech of our chairperson. Admittedly it was phrased diplomatically and we were in error to have come across so certain of your principled intentions. It is true that reports of your relations with the Planning Committee for the National Minority Conference gave us cause to question your openness to criticism. And it is also true that your agitated conduct in relation to the April 4th speech did raise concerns about your commitment to principle. Still we thought it was our responsibility to give you every opportunity to rectify your errors.

Your response to our letter makes it quite clear that you are unwilling to even consider the possibility that you had behaved incorrectly. Given this, our only alternative is to proceed and elaborate our criticisms of your unprincipled conduct.

Your actions following the April 4th speech were characterized by subjectivism and subtle manipulation. Knowing full well that none of the comrades in the Midwest region of the OC could have possibly seen a transcript of that speech, you characterized it as "unprincipled," "demagogic," "sectarian" and a "broadside attack" on the Club Network. You distorted its content to such an extent that when a transcript was made available a number of OC comrades expressed disbelief that you were talking about the same speech. You also carefully avoided any attempt to raise these criticisms -- criticisms which had never been previously raised to the OC, its Steering Committee or Chair-

person -- with members of the Steering Committee. In addition, you exploited the fact that your narrow circle unity with Irwin Silber was not widely known, attempting to give your criticisms added weight by posturing as a comrade "independent" of the NNMLC.

Frankly, your June 6th letter stands as confirmation of our criticisms. You go to great lengths to point out meetings that you have had with various OC members expressing your differences with "the fusion line" but cannot elicit one example where you raised your criticisms of the April 4th speech to a member of the Steering Committee. And this is what our letter was about! You mention the numerous meetings you held "informally" with our Chairperson but never recall that each one was held "off the record" at your request. You make repeated references to your attempts to struggle over the OC's line but conveniently fail to recall that on several distinct occasions you refused to put your views in writing because the "time was not ripe." And your admission that you "have every intention of undermining the OCIC's 'unity'" speaks for itself.

One more point on the April 4th speech. You charge that OC comrades were reluctant to discuss the contents of this speech and that this is indicative of a general tendency within the OC to avoid sharp ideological struggle. This is ridiculous. In the first place, we do not find it particularly surprising that OC comrades were cautious about defending a speech that they had neither heard nor seen a transcript of -- particularly given your distorted picture of its content. We do not think that anyone should be expected to pass judgement on the correctness of any statement that they have had no opportunity to even read, let alone study. And we are confident that no OC group would fail to advance their views of the speech "on the record" once they had reviewed it.

Secondly, we cannot help but be amused at your contention that the OC seeks to avoid ideological struggle. It is not the OC that has opposed on principle centralized, public and movement-wide ideological struggle. It is not the OC which seeks to add a dynamic of competition between organizations to the contention between lines. And it is not the OC which binds its membership to uphold every shade and nuance of its leaderships party-building line. In short, it is not the OC, but you and the NNMLC leaders who seek to reduce principled ideological struggle to third-rate circle wrangling.

If your conduct in relation to the April 4th speech had been a momentary lapse in an otherwise principled approach to our differences, then it might have been overlooked. Unfortunately, it was not such a lapse. In fact it was proceeded by two other manifestations of what seems to be an escalating tendency towards shoddy conduct.

First was your role in what you have termed the "famous Sylvia controversy." Sylvia had been involved in political activities unconnected with the OC but related to your own organization's work. In the course of these activities, she expressed disunity with the views of supporters of your organization and made some errors in the course of struggling around her disunity. To our knowledge, she has made a full self-criticism for her mistakes.

The whole incident would have been forgotten had you not attempted to turn it into a controversy between the Clubs and the OC. Apparently based on the fact that Sylvia had expressed unity with the OC's approach to party-building, you jumped to the conclusion that she was receiving direction from a member of the OC Steering Committee, a leading member of FWOOC and the local organization

affiliated with the OC in the Bay area. You interpreted events as if the OC was consciously attempting to disrupt the work of your organization solely because you had decided to stand aside from the OC. To this day ugly rumours to this effect -- rumours which you know to be false but, to our knowledge, have made no attempt to stop -- still circulate.

The manner in which you handled this affair shows a shocking lack of principle. To assume that an OC member who disagrees with your organization is an agent of conscious OC disruption shows a high degree of subjectivism. To raise criticisms of leading OC members based on what you acknowledged to be "third and fourth hand" information and when challenged to pretend that you were not really raising any criticisms after all is unprincipled. And to encourage rumours which only serve to poison the atmosphere surrounding OC activities is, quite frankly, intrigue.

Your approach to the National Minority Planning Committee demonstrates a similar lack of principle. As revealed in your exchange of letters with that body, rather than present a firm perspective on how you think the Planning Committee should take up its work, it seems that you are willing to advance any proposal that would serve to promote you and your circle of supporters to the center of its activities. Rather than consistently advocate the NNMLC's line of splitting the tendency on the basis of "rectification vs. fusion," you are willing to make the most demagogic appeals for "third world unity" if it serves your purposes. And rather than adopt a principled stand in opposition to racism, you engaged in some of the basest race-baiting that has come from the hand of one who claims to adhere to Marxism-Leninism.

All three of these incidents are rooted in your unity with a narrow circle approach to the anti-"left" tendency. Like the rest of the leading ideologists of the NNMLC, you are convinced that your own ideological influence will be best served by promoting a deep split in our tendency. Like the rest of these leaders, you have, in effect, abandoned the struggle for a common party-building line and seek to promote your own line at all costs. And like these leaders, you have objectively reduced our party-building tasks to a struggle for seats on the future Party's central committee.

All posturing about "forging a party spirit" aside, such a line could only lead to foster the most unprincipled methods of struggle. History shows that once the "central task" becomes winning organizational hegemony for one's own narrow circle, anything goes -- including manipulation and intrigue. That this is true is amply demonstrated by the practice of CL, RU, MLOC, WVO, etc.

However, such methods of struggle cannot succeed. While they will serve to impede our tendency's development by severely distorting the struggle over party-building line, in the end they will lead to defeat. As the tendency matures it will surely perceive who makes use of unprincipled methods of struggle and why their line cannot be put across without them. Once this occurs the tendency for the incorrect line to isolate its adherents will snowball, and principled unity among Marxist-Leninists will again prevail.

We hope that you will give serious thought to our remarks. We are, of course, prepared to discuss the incidents raised in this letter further if you so desire.

Comradely,

The Steering Committee/OCIC