

C

Response to CH's Criticism

At the recent OCIC Conference, a criticism was raised by the Chairman of the OCIC concerning the political content of a procedural motion made by me in relation to the body's discussion of the National Minority Conference. The criticism was that the content of this motion was racist in that it took a liberal and paternalist stance toward the observers who were at the Conference from the MNMLC and El Comite-MINP. As a part of an ongoing effort by the OCIC to deepen its understanding of errors made in the conference around the question of racism, it is my personal task to deepen my response to this comrade's criticism in the spirit of moving our Tendency forward around one of our principal weaknesses.

First, let me review my understanding of the context in which the criticism was raised, so that the motion, the criticism, and the response are placed within the process of the Conference. Otherwise the discussion must be an abstract one, centering on "intent" rather than objective content and objective results of comrade's positions.

In preparatory discussions for the Conference, it was decided by the SC that observers would not have speaking or voting privileges. Conference rules passed on the morning of the first day of the Conference reflected this decision; and, unless I am incorrect, there was no opposition.

Observers at the Conference included representatives of other formations within the Tendency (Guardian, MNMLC, and El Comite-MINP), members of OCIC organizations who were not sent as delegates, and individuals who for various reasons have not joined the OCIC but who have been active in their various localities, etc.

The status of observers as decided in the Conference rules was followed through the first agenda discussion: on "The OC's First Year", as well as during a lengthy discussion centering on criticisms raised of materials distributed by the organization hosting the Conference (OCG), comments made by these comrades about the neighborhood surrounding the Conference site, and elements of racism contained in those materials and comments.

The next agenda item was to be a presentation and discussion on the National Minority Conference. At this point, the Chair announced that the rules on observers were to be suspended ONLY for the duration of the discussion on the National Minority Conference, and ONLY for those members of the National Minority Conference Planning Committee who were not delegates. Again, unless I am incorrect, there was no call for a vote on this decision, but there was no opposition raised either.

After the presentation on the Conference by TS, there was discussion on the floor. When I was called by the Chair, I raised a motion that the rule on observers speaking be suspended for all observers. The Chair ruled that my motion was out of order at that point, and the Chair's ruling was upheld on appeal by a vote of 7 for, 65 against.

Later in the continued discussion of the National Minority Conference, Comrade Newlin raised that he thought my resolution was racist in that it took a liberal and paternalist view of the National minority comrades who were the object of my resolution...the comrades from the NMMLC and from EL Comite-MIMP. If I understand the Comrade's criticism correctly, it is based on a view that I did not consider it important for the comrades referred to above to speak to other questions on the agenda (i.e. party building as a whole), but had only raised my resolution in reference to the National Minority Conference discussion. For Comrade Newlin this represented a continuation of the error of our movement of "ghettoizing" the role of national minority M-L's into questions which have to do with the role in our struggle of people of color. In other words, these comrades are equipped to discuss racism but not revisionism, national oppression but not party building line.

I raised at the Conference that I did not accept Comrade Newlin's criticisms, and I do not accept them now. This is based partially on my conception of a democratic process, but more importantly on questions related to the growth and development of our Tendency as a whole.

First, on the level of the process, it must be remembered that it was the SC which raised that the rules on observers should be suspended. The intent obviously was to gain the input of those Planning Committee members who were not delegates into the discussion. This must be seen as positive, but it ignores two questions: first, why were the Planning Committee's non-delegate members' views only to be given on this limited portion of the agenda? and why were non-delegate views solicited only as far as the Planning Committee members when it must be seen that the observer's from NMMLC and EL-Comite had both greater knowledge of the issues involved in the process of the National Minority Conf. and a greater role in that struggle than the overwhelming majority of the delegates to the Conference.

It was definitely an error on my part that I did not raise my resolution on broadening observer speaking privileges at the time it was raised by the SC. This was a liberal error in not overcoming a tremendous feeling of isolation and a consequent unwillingness to struggle after being in such a tir

minority on an earlier resolution which also had to do with our(OCIC) relations with other forces in the Tendency, specifically the NNMLC. Nonetheless weaknesses in the way I carried out the struggle do not change the situation.

On the larger question of the process of development of our Tendency as a whole, there are a number of aspects which relate to the criticism raised and which dictate my response.

First, is the specific issue under discussion. The National Minority Conference represented a tangible step toward resolving one of the key weaknesses in our movement: the lack of involvement of large numbers of National Minority M-L's in the party building movement brought about by the heritage and continuation of racism within our movement and the consequent low level of development of the party building movement toward achieving true multi-nationality. The Conference was proposed as a means reaching out to National Minority M-L's within the Tendency as a whole.

This was not a Conference of activists from the broad national movements to discuss strategy and tactics within those movements. This was not a Conference of national minority trade unionists or community activists. It was, again, a conference of Communists to take up the special tasks of National Minority Communists within our movement. I am raising this because we must be clear that the leadership of the Planning Committee as well as the comrades from the NNMLC and El-Comite who raised differences with the Planning Committee emerged from the National movements but play leadership roles in the party building movement as a whole. This is known to me; it is also known to Comrade Newlin.

Secondly, from the beginning of the work around the National Minority Conference, there has been (and continues to be) confusion over a number of significant questions: the basis of the Conference (its specific politics), criteria for participation, whether this was an "OC Conference" or not, etc. I don't believe this confusion is only in my head but is also reflected by: The SC/OCIC taking no public responsibility for the Conference until the Labor Day OCIC conference, a member of the Planning Committee as late as the Mid-West PT 10 Conference in Detroit stating that "this was not an OCIC event", the attendance at the Conference being much less than expected, and finally, the absence to this point of any full summation documents from the Conference Planning Committee at the same time the SC moves a resolution endorsing not only the internal developments of the Conference, but also the role of the Conference vis-a-vis the rest of the Tendency.

It must be clear from the report of TS and the resolution of the SC that the National Minority Conference carries enormous significance in relation to the developing differences within our Tendency around party building line in this period. Rather than take the opportunity presented by the presence of comrades representing opposing views of the National Minority Conference to clarify the different proposals offered, positions taken, etc in open debate we chose a route which downplayed the party building questions involved in relation to the Tendency. We chose the route which led to unity on incomplete information, even to the absence of the major papers from the Conference. This can only lead to the most fragile unity.

I believe the Chairman of the SC/OCIC compounded this error by labelling a proposal which would have moved this struggle ahead as being objectively racist.

In the interests of building the Party spirit while building toward the Party, the OCIC must move to resolve the questions remaining from the National Minority Conference. This Conference and the lessons to be learned from it are crucial to our Tendency as a whole, not just to those comrades who participated in it...or did not participate in it. Differences over party building will emerge in each and every major question undertaken by our Tendency. If these are to be resolved in the best interests of the party building movement they must be approached forthrightly, and must be summed up completely.

I submit this response to further our understanding of the questions involved, and look forward to responses of my comrades to carry that understanding still further.

Phil Clark