

December 7, 1979

To: Mike Withey, Ellen Punyon, Shirley Hamburg, Silme Domingo, Dale Borgeson.
From: Tyree Scott, Beverly Sims, Janet Duecy
Re: Response to your letter of September 27, 1979

Dear Comrades:

We are writing this response to your 18-page letter to clarify our position once again to you in particular and also to the broader Seattle Marxist-Leninist (M-L) movement. It is our intention that this not become an ongoing exchange of polemics whereby our time is taken up with negative correspondence over and over again. In other words, after the Local Center Meeting on December 16, 1979 the question of a local liaison committee as you proposed recently will be settled one way or another and the air should then be clear for all of us to go on with the more positive aspects of our communist work.

We recognize that your letter was written in a comradely form though not all of the content was accurate and factual. In responding we will follow the organization of your letter.

I. Our Past Relations.

A. The creation of the core.

It is highly significant that in describing "the creation of the core," you fail to raise the all-important fact that in this early period a proposal similar to the one you are now putting forth was presented by Tyree and another comrade to Dale and Mike Withey. If agreed to this would have laid the basis for "mutual accountability and unity-struggle-unity" among the Seattle M-L forces. But both of you objected flat out to this proposal on the basis that such an organization would be "a fetter on ideological struggle". Even when it was made clear to you both that this committee would not be democratic-centralist (d-c) you both stood firm in your opposition. This occurred before the consolidation of the Clubs and the Seattle Workers Group (SWG). This action taken by both of you served to hold back the process of the core establishing itself in an ongoing consistent fashion. In fact, we never met "regularly" as a core; rather we met as the need arose which was frequent when preparing for a forum or summing one up but otherwise was rather sporadic.

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It is also significant that you failed to raise our differences around Irwin Silber and the establishment of the Clubs. From the beginning we saw through Silber's opportunism which you comrades fail to recognize to this day. This is a fundamental difference that has affected our political unity and hence our relations with you.

B. The joint forums and common work.

We agree the joint forums were positive. However, it is our understanding that the second forum on left internationalism came as a direct result of a local struggle with comrades who failed to see the need to demarcate with left internationalism. In summing up the first forum we agreed we needed to deepen our understanding of left internationalism in hopes of winning these comrades to our point of view. Never was it mentioned that this was a means of preparing for the OCIC Point 18 Conference. We point this out because we know it is misleading for you to put forward that your participation in the second forum was a conscious effort on the part of the Club "to contribute to the struggle within the OC". We hold this was indeed an effect of the forum but never was it a stated purpose of the Club. In fact at this point the Club had not yet made it known to us your position that the line of demarcation with left internationalism had been drawn long ago and therefore that Point 18 was not a primary question. The first we heard of this was after the Clubs' founding conference which was held the same weekend as the OCIC Western Point 18 Conference, which prevented leading comrades in the Clubs from contributing to the Western OCIC Conference. Your priority was to consolidate the Clubs in an attempt to place yourselves in the center of the party-building movement.

C. Club initiatives to study party building line.

Here we must make clear that never did we agree to engage in study with you on party building line. We did agree to a debate on party building but because of Dale's leaving Seattle we were not able to pursue it in any organized fashion. We did agree to study "On Practice" and "On Contradiction" and a date was set whereby we would take up these works in one or two sessions. This was idealistic and downright impossible. We agree that at this point events occurred that prevented us from following up on this. We also agree that by this time we determined our future work would be taken up in the context of the national OCIC process which was taking shape. We wanted to correct our errors of spontaneity and localism.

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It is true we were approached to join the MLEP study. This was at a time when we had already launched a process of recruitment to the SWG which we saw as a priority. Also, by this time our political differences with the Clubs had been sharpened and we knew the MLEP study was a means of circumventing the national OCIC process which you comrades had refused to become a part of.

D. Summation.

1. We must interject that unity among the Seattle M-L movement was undermined by a) the Club members' failure to recognize and thereby break with the organizational opportunism of the Clubs' national leadership who sought to give artificial life to a bankrupt line with the establishment of the Club Network, and by b) the Clubs' successful effort to block the establishment of a local coordinating body for the Seattle M-L movement because "organization is a fetter on ideological struggle".

3. We disagree with the entire thrust of this paragraph. We know our effort to build a cadre organization has aided the Seattle M-L movement. We are also sure that our work as members of the OCIC has served to push forward the Seattle M-L movement and we have determined a critique of left opportunism is the primary question facing our movement in this period.

II. The Present Period.

A. Clay Newlin's April 4th speech in Oakland.

We disagree profoundly with your characterization of Clay's speech as "nonsense", and we unite with them.

B. Our concern that Clay's views would disrupt joint work in Seattle.

It is simplistic and downright inaccurate for you to say Clay's speech prevented us from engaging in joint work. Keep in mind that you comrades refused to join with other forces in the national party building movement to build a single ideological center; rather, you set up your own center to contend with the OCIC.

C. The conference of minority Marxist-Leninists.

You fail to mention an important meeting that occurred between us and national minority comrades who hold the rectification line after this conference was held. Could it be that since no white comrades were present this meeting was considered by you comrades to be "off the record"? At this meeting we were very clear in stating that ideological differences prevented the rectificationists from being on the Planning Committee. In this meeting we asked why is it you comrades raise these differences as cause for not joining the OCIC then minimize these same differences to the point of liquidating them so that you can be in the leadership of a national minority confer-

ence of Marxist-Leninists? Our question was never answered, needless to say. We must make clear one more time that the OCIC Steering Committee had no jurisdiction over this conference. It was the Planning Committee of this conference that did all the work including inviting comrades, establishing the political unity of the conference, etc. We also must make clear that there was more than one proposal put forth by the rectificationists as they jockeyed for a leadership position. For an accurate account of these events we must refer comrades to the correspondence between Fran Beal and Bruce Occena and the Planning Committee which can be requested from the Local Center.

Further, it is not true that "no one holding the rectification line would be invited". It is true that one of the criteria was "no consolidated position against the OCIC process" which did exclude those holding the rectification line. However, from its inception up until the conference was held Bruce Occena was invited as an observer, meaning he could put forth the perspective of the rectificationists but would be unable to vote. Instead he chose to boycott the conference and went on to encourage other independents to do likewise. James Early did attend the conference as an independent and was consistent and principled in putting forth the rectification perspective at the conference (as we knew he would).

We assert your characterization "no principled policy" for determining members of the Planning Committee is subjective based on the fact that you simply did not agree with the criteria.

Where you talk about mass work areas we must state it is not the intent of the OCIC to guide practical work. Comrades enter into these formations independent of the OCIC. You vulgarized Tyree's remarks in the Bay Area. What he actually stated was that in establishing SAOC the rectificationists were creating a parallel organization instead of strengthening those organizations that already existed and were doing work around Southern Africa. We uphold this as a legitimate criticism.

D. The deterioration of relations within the core.

We agreed with the three agenda items but we saw them as building on one another. In other words, failure to arrive at a common summation would undermine discussion of future functioning of the core. This indeed is what happened. In discussing the summation we entered into the most heated disagreement we had ever experienced and which we were unable to resolve, precisely over the organizational opportunism of the Clubs and your refusal to join the OCIC. Your characterization of "overall unity (with some differences)" we see as

an inaccurate, opportunist glossing over of major differences to give the false impression of unity.

The postponement and cancellation of meetings were due to our other political commitments having priority as well as Tyree's illness getting in the way.

III. The Decision to Discontinue Joint Meetings and Work.

By this time we had come to a new stage in the consolidation of the SWG and we had become clear on the need to build a local OCIC center so our priorities were pretty much set.

Never had we had regular meetings of the core and it was at this last meeting you put forth for the first time the need to meet monthly which was firmly rejected by Beverly. We held that we would meet as the need arose. You fail to make this clear in your letter to give a false impression that we said no more joint work would be taken up. We did say we could not commit ourselves to anything in the immediate future because we wanted to take up the Local Center work in the context of the national OCIC process. We said we were open to future forums and debates but that we could not yet determine the when, where and what.

IV. Our Criticisms of the Decision.

We disagree that you do not quarrel with our decision to build a Local Center. Your proposal is precisely to circumvent our decision. We must put forward here that the OCIC is just that, the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center. We do not profess to be the leading center, but the OCIC is the only process that calls for movement-wide involvement in the building of a single center for the party building movement.

A. We are critical of your decision to discontinue regular meetings of the core and to discuss important political line questions with us and others within that context.

Our decision has not been to discontinue regular meetings with you. We never had regular meetings. Meetings were frequent only when we were preparing for a forum and before our fundamental differences were made clear. We still hold we will meet when the need arises to take up political line questions. And we will judge this need based on local developments taken in the context of the national OCIC process.

B. We are critical of your decision to discontinue common joint work and to not engage in one or more of the concrete "future tasks" discussed by Tyree and Mike.

Ideological - We reject this criticism outright. Many who

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attended the regional OCIC conferences on Point 18 throughout the country contrasted the OCIC approach to ideological struggle with the RU and the OL as open and "rigorous". Great effort was made at these conferences to insure that the minority positions would be put forward. Comrades were brought from the East to strengthen the minority position in the West, for example. Locally we have been criticized because we have consistently allowed rectificationists more than what should be your allotted time to put forth your positions in our open forums. At the Chicago OCIC National Conference the OCIC made strides forward in grasping the right of minority positions to exist in the OCIC. The Point 18 Resolution on Membership in the OCIC is a reflection of this.

Be clear - the Seattle Local Center is part of a national process. In taking up the 18 point study we are setting an example for OCIC comrades to follow in other locales. And in so doing we are deepening our ideological basis for joining the OCIC and we are creating a material presence of the OCIC here in Seattle.

It is clear by your letter that you make the mistake of raising the local conditions to the primary, taking them out of the context of the national process of the OCIC and the Clubs. In the Bay Area recently there was a forum on the OCIC Draft Plan conducted jointly by the OCIC group, BAWOC, the Clubs and BASOC (Bay Area Socialist Organizing Committee). You mentioned PWOC's joint work with the Clubs in the Soviet Union Study. And locally we will take up joint work with you; however, we must first consider much more that just what the Clubs see as priorities.

We are not guilty of avoiding struggle. However, we will not submit to Club pressure to do a forum within such a time on a topic we do not assess as primary in this period.

In pointing out the contradiction of the pre-party period you fail to speak to the contradiction that exists between the party building movement and the working class which leaves us to conclude you are interested merely in uniting the existing stock of M-Lists. This became especially clear when you disagreed with us the advanced workers should attend the national minority conference and in the perspective you put out at our forums with the PWOC this past summer both in Seattle and the Bay Area, as well as the Los Angeles area. Because the OCIC recognizes the significance of this contradiction we hold that developing the OCIC will push the entire party building movement forward.

It is interesting that in listing the four distinct party building lines you fail to mention the Tucson M-L Collective

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is a member of the OCIC as is the FWOC. These two groups do not unite with your splittist tactics of refusing to join the OCIC. It is true MINP-El Comite refused to join the OCIC, which we see as an error of localism and small circle spirit; El Comite also has approached party building in a mechanical way, saying it is too soon to establish a national ideological center because we are just now in the ideological period and have not reached the organizational period. We do not see your line as having unity with El Comite's and hope you do not enter into unprincipled unity with them simply because they too oppose the formation of the OCIC.

We are establishing the Local Center on the basis of agreement with the OCIC process and its 18 Points of Unity. This is the minimal level of unity we will allow. Anyone not holding a consolidated position against the OCIC process or the 18 points could study with us because the primary purpose of the study is two-fold - consolidation and outreach. We will not foster false unity in the Local Center as we contribute to the task of forging a single center for our movement, a task you comrades have refused to engage in.

In our prior discussion with you Beverly stated that future forums would happen but that we did not yet have clarity on how this would fit into the OCIC process. It would be localist of us to ignore our national development. And no one said we would complete the 18 point study before we took up joint work though we did say this study was primary. We have a firm grasp on the limitations of our resources to do joint work at this time and we aimed to avoid an idealist error by committing ourselves to something we could not see through.

We agree party building line is interconnected with a critique of ultra leftism. But one leads to the other; one lays a basis for better grasping the essence of the other. We hold this critique must be taken up so that a complete break with ultra leftism can indeed occur in our movement so that we won't continue this legacy of left errors when we take up party building line. We hold that we are part of a single anti-revisionist movement. Our tendency has not demarcated with all aspects of ultra-leftism. In fact, we know you to be guilty of ultra-left errors in party building line and we consider you to be part of the same movement.

We reject your criticism of sectarianism. You make this accusation only to take the heat off yourselves, you who have made sectarian errors in setting up your own center to contend with the OCIC, which depends on circle warfare as its lifeblood. Your failure to join the OC is a failure to uphold the unity

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of the trend, the very thing you accuse us of. You undermine the unity of the trend also when you call for an abstract debate around party building line which we see as a means of deterring the movement from realizing the sectarian opposition of the Clubs to enter into a centralized process that would build a leading ideological center for our movement.

Clearly you want to have your cake and eat it too. You have chosen to stand outside of the OCIC process but have not been prepared to deal with the consequences of your decision. Line struggle has been and will continue to be waged within the OCIC as a priority task. We hold this will occur in the 18 point study as well. The OCIC welcomes struggle with forces outside its ranks also but we reserve the right to determine what is appropriate after assessing the conditions. (If you disagree with our position you too have the right to reject our proposal.) Where Clubs exist the OCIC has developed relations with them though no where has such a Liaison Committee been established.

We should make it clear here that SWG is a member of the OCIC. Our members are not under d-c in the Local Center. Because we see the need to struggle against federationism and localism we do not hold SWG equal to the OCIC but rather it is subordinate to it in the struggle for ideological clarity. Therefore any future proposals for joint theoretical work should be addressed to the Local Center alone.

In summary we see this proposal as merely a shift in tactics but no change in policy for you comrades. It is but another form of organizational opportunism. Before our differences were sharpened you saw it as convenient to block such a formation in Seattle. Now, as you struggle to place yourselves in the center of the movement you hope to pressure us into joining an organization whose principles of unity are weak and vague, glossing over the very differences you have held up as splitting ones. In the future you comrades should not underestimate our ability to see through your schemes for organizational hegemony in the movement.

Sincerely,

Tyree Scott, Beverly Sims, Janet Duecy