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RESPONSE TO PHIL C'S "RESPONSE TO CN'S CRITICISM"

by Pat Fry

Since the OCIC's second national conference held over the Labor Day weekend, comrades around the country have been involved in debate and struggle over the content and gains of the conference. Summations and position papers are being exchanged on a number of subjects of importance to the party building movement. It is important that we learn all lessons possible. This paper is written to that end.

Specifically, I would like to respond to a paper written by Phil C who attended the national conference as a delegate of the Detroit Marxist-Leninist Organization (DMLO). His paper, entitled "Response to CN's Criticism", was written in response to a criticism of racism made at the national conference initially raised by the chairperson of the OCIC, Clay Newlin. In Phil's response (see attached), he rejects the criticism. There are other comrades around the country who also question the accuracy of the criticism. Since the struggle against racism is of major concern internally in the OCIC, and since the criticism was made at a national OCIC meeting, it is appropriate that this struggle continue outside of the small circle of DMLO and into a movement-wide arena.

Therefore, I am submitting this paper to the Local Center membership in Detroit, and ask that it be distributed nationally, in order to further the struggle against racism in the OCIC.

The Criticism at the 2nd National OCIC Conference

At the conclusion of the National Steering Committee's presentation on the history and purpose of the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference (NMM-LC), the first order of business was a motion put forward by Phil C. He moved that those who were observers at the OCIC Conference from the National Network of Marxist-Leninist Clubs (NNMLC) and the El-Comite (MINP) be allowed to speak during the discussion of the National Steering Committee's (NSC) resolution in support of the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference. The intent of Phil's motion, as he stated it, was that the conference participants needed to have all the facts concerning the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference and that "in no way could we leave out of here saying, 'well, I didn't hear all of the facts, or I didn't understand it, or it wasn't clear.'" (quoted from transcript of OC conference.) The motion failed and Phil was criticised for racism during the discussion of his motion.

Why? Whether intended or not, Phil made a common error of racism in our movement. His motion assumed that the color of one's skin is a more fundamental basis of unity than political line. The comrades from the NNMLC and El-Comite were observers because they have stated opposition to the OCIC's basis of unity - a

single center for the tendency. Phil's motion was to allow national minority comrades who have fundamental disagreements with the OCIC on this key question before our movement to speak as a delegate at the OCIC national conference, but only on the issue of the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference. Let's explore this error a little further.

he was scared you say

While the root error is the same, the racism in the example of Phil's motion expressed itself in two common ways:

1. White comrades often make the error of relating to national minority comrades only on questions of racism, national oppression, or on practical questions before the movement - always to the exclusion of party building questions in general. Implicit in this is the DOWNPLAYING OF THE ALL-SIDED THEORETICAL TASKS OF NATIONAL MINORITY COMRADES IN THE MOVEMENT. By only raising the NNMLC and EI-Comite observers' participation on the issue of the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference and not on the issue of their party building approach which had been discussed at length earlier in the day at the conference, Phil bowed to this error.
2. Phil's position was racist also because it suggests that since the two observers from the NNMLC and EI-Comite are national minority comrades, political line should not be used as criteria for participation at the conference. At the Point 18 conferences, at the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference, and at the OCIC National Conference, comrades who held opposition to a single national center for the tendency were invited only as observers. Why would it be correct to reverse this procedure for a discussion of the National Minority M-L Conference at the OCIC National Conference? Why would it be correct to put the question of political line secondary in any situation? When white comrades chose to relate to national minority comrades on a different basis - this is racism. It is again the error of DOWNPLAYING THE ALL-SIDED THEORETICAL TASKS ~~and~~ and obligations of NATIONAL MINORITY COMRADES IN OUR MOVEMENT. In this particular situation, Phil was using one set of criteria for white comrades and another set of criteria (not political line) for national minority comrades.

In his defense, Phil raises two objections to the above criticisms. First, he says that if he is guilty of this error, then so is the National Steering Committee. How? Before the presentation of the National Minority M-L Conference was made the NSC put forward a motion that two members of the Planning Committee of the National Minority M-L Conference be asked to participate in the discussion and presentation of the resolution. In Phil's view, this was racism on the part of the NSC. But how could it be racist to ask two leading members of the Planning Committee who have political unity with the OCIC to speak on the question of the importance of the National Minority M-L in relation to the OCIC? Phil asks: What is the difference between the observers from the Planning Committee and the observers from the NNMLC and EI-Comite? The answer is that political line is the difference. This is the only basis upon which unity in our movement rests and it is the only basis upon which some observers are asked to participate and others are not at OCIC conferences. Phil's racism blinds him from understanding this.

*So what
than the
OC has
no unity*

Using Phil's argument, the NSC should have called for the participation of the two observers from the Planning Committee on all agenda items, not just on the issue of the National Minority M-L Conference. But that is a liberal racist argument

as well. More to the point is why were the Planning Committee observers only observers at the conference? In both cases (the Bay Area and Cincinnati), it was because of errors made locally in not insuring national minority leadership in the OCIC. White comrades from these locales were correctly criticized for racist errors made in delegate selection. Phil's argument, however, would have glossed over these racist errors made locally by raising the question of their participation as delegates on all agenda items even though they were observers.

The arguments Phil makes above only compound the original error made and are put forward to deflect criticism.

Another aspect of Phil's motion which was racist was the assumption that the conference participants were not going to get a full picture or were not going to hear all of the facts if the comrades from the NNMLC and EI-Comite were unable to speak on the resolution. If Phil was unclear about the facts, he certainly had every right to ask for answers to his questions or to ask for clarity about his uncertainties. But Phil was saying something else. He was saying that unless the observers from the NNMLC and the EI-Comite were able to speak, he would not get all of the facts. This aspect of Phil's argument is particularly racist as well for these reasons:

1. Because Phil is unable to see the primacy of the political line questions involved in the discussion of the National Minority M-L Conference, he reduces the arguments over the NMM-L Conference to a "who did what" type of argument. The assumption here is that Phil believes that the debate was merely a sectarian squabble among national minority people and that the OCIC conference needed to hear both sides of the debate in person in order to figure out who was right and who was wrong. This might be ok for high school debating classes, but not for arenas of ideological struggle. Phil's error of racism is revealed here again by failing to understand that the differences around the National Minority M-L Conference were around political line questions of our movement; they were not secondary differences for national minority people. Failure to put politics in command leads Phil to want to pick and chose on some other criteria which national minority person he will believe! *P16!*
2. To put forward that he had doubts about the accuracy of the facts if only presented by the Planning Committee of the National Minority M-L Conference displayed an anti-leadership and racist attitude as well. Phil never questioned the accuracy of OCIC comrades' experiences with NNMLC folks during the debate of their party building approach earlier in the day. But Phil does question the accuracy of the facts as presented by the Planning Committee of the National Minority M-L Conference.

To compound matters, Phil did not raise one question of fact or clarity, did not raise any concerns he may have had about the National Minority M-L Conference throughout the entire discussion of the resolution. He, in fact, voted for the SC resolution in support of the Conference. He, in fact, tried to "clarify" for a black comrade on the Planning Committee who voted against the resolution why he was mistaken, after the vote had been taken, and urged the comrade to change his vote. This episode went on until the chair called Phil out of order repeatedly.

But in Phil's paper, "Response to CN's Criticism", the following appears (written shortly after the Labor Day Conference, paper not dated):

"...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 Midwest Point 18 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."

scared
boldshit
(pol line on OC or PB)

How do we explain why Phil did not raise any of these concerns and questions he had at the conference? Why did he vote for a resolution which he did not unite with? Why did he vigorously try to convince someone who voted against the resolution to unite with it? Phil was unwilling to openly challenge the political basis of unity of the National Minority M-L Conference himself out of a racist liberalism. It was liberalism because he was not willing to struggle directly and forthrightly with national minority leadership in the OCIC on the basis of political line. By not raising his questions and concerns on the floor of the conference, Phil downplayed the question of political line with national minority comrades. By raising his questions and concerns in a paper after the conference, he serves to undermine national minority leadership in the OCIC. It becomes clear from the reading of Phil's written response that the reason why he moved that the NNMLC and EI-Comite observers speak at the conference was in order that his own questions would be raised by national minority comrades and he would not have to struggle himself openly with other national minority comrades. The underlying racist assumption is that only national minority people can struggle with other national minority people, and that white comrades don't have to struggle with national minority people, only with white comrades. All of these aspects of Phil's racism point to common errors in our movement: a non-struggle approach over political line questions with national minority comrades. Phil's open exposure of this racist liberalism had the effect of playing on the racist liberalism of many other white comrades at the OCIC conference as well. In conference summations being submitted at the present, we find that there were other white delegates at the conference who had similar questions about the National Minority M-L Conference and did not raise them. *(intimidation you culture)*

There are other questions raised in Phil's paper which also relate to the question of racism. How is it that Phil has all these questions of unclarity regarding the National Minority M-L Conference when a leading comrade on the Planning Committee lives in Detroit (LR)? Phil has never attempted to contact LR to raise these concerns and questions, nor did he formally write to the Planning Committee or the SC of the OCIC.

Why did Phil not seek out and get his questions clarified with about 10 other comrades in Detroit who attended the National Minority M-L Conference? If he is unclear about whether it was a success or not why did he not ask those who attended and those who were in leadership of the conference? The answer is that Phil wants to pick and chose which national minority people to get the answers from, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it seems clear that Phil has held back all these months because he has been unwilling to struggle politically with national minority comrades. In addition, it seems clear that he has, in effect, downplayed the leadership role of a leading national minority comrade. To this day, Phil as yet to contact LR to discuss his questions of unclarity.

Phil made additional racist errors at the conference which are important to raise. After the vote on the new OCIC Steering Committee, Phil explained privately to LR, who had just been elected, that he wasn't sure of voting for her up until the conference that weekend, but that by the end of the conference he had been convinced. Phil had known for quite some time that LR was being put forward for the SC of the OCIC. Never once did he raise any concerns about her nomination either to LR herself or to a member of the SC who is in his own organization. Phil's racism is again reflected in his non-struggle relationship with national minority Marxist-Leninists. If Phil felt that LR had weaknesses which made him uncertain about her nomination, why did he not raise them? Secondly, what was it during the conference that changed Phil's mind about LR's nomination? LR was self-critical for her lack of participation during the conference. Her own self-criticism was in the context of recognizing that holding back in discussion at the conference would help to contribute to the already racist tendency on the part of white comrades to vote for her out of racist liberalism. What was it that made Phil change his mind through the course of the conference, given LR's lack of participation? The only explanation can be his own racist liberalism - refusing to struggle with national minority comrades.

Nevertheless, Phil spoke in "support" of LR on the floor of the conference during nominations. He said that he supported national minority leadership and felt that his organization (DMLO) had made errors in the past in regards to national minority comrades and LR in particular. This "support" could only have been paternalistic and liberal in the face of the fact that Phil has never attempted to build a struggle relationship with LR. "Support" is not in word, but in deed. Support is in how we struggle with one another and, therefore, in how we try to develop each other because we understand that to fail to do so is to fail the party building movement as a whole.

Basis of Unity of the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference

Let's examine what the real issue concerning the resolution on the National Minority Marxist-Leninist Conference was all about. The real issue which has been obscured by unprincipled methods of struggle is the following question: Was it sectarian to demand unity with the OCIC process (a single, national center) as the basis of unity of the National Minority M-L Conference? Was it sectarian to demand unity with a line on the key party building question before Marxist-Leninists today?

The NNMLC charges that the Conference Planning Committee was sectarian because they refused to drop from the basis of unity of the Conference any reference to a single,

national center for the tendency. The NNMLC proposed that unity on party building questions be dropped from the content of the Conference and, instead, comrades only discuss joint practice in the anti-racist movement and how to combat racism in the communist movement. The Planning Committee's position was that to drop the key party building question before our movement today from the basis of unity of the Conference would be racist. It would be saying that national minority Marxist-Leninists have a different, more important basis of unity than political line (for a fuller account of the differences see the exchange of letters between F. Beal, B. Occena, 5/2/79, and the Planning Committee, 6/20/79).

This was the real issue that was being challenged by Phil, yet he would not directly confront it either at the conference or in his paper later. Instead, the challenge to the resolution came from the back door. That is, discussion on the floor of the OCIC Conference centered on the question of whether the National Minority M-L Conference did, in fact, bring concrete developments in the party building movement to national minority Marxist-Leninists. This was a point of fact. It would be like saying that the OCIC Conference did, in fact, bring concrete developments in the party building movement to approximately 150 people. To argue and challenge a point of fact was in itself a direct challenge to the integrity of national minority leadership. If Phil wanted to challenge the political basis of unity of the conference he should have come out and done so. By failing to forthrightly unite with a racist line on the National Minority M-L Conference, he further compounds his error by failing to put political line questions primary in relationships with national minority comrades (by not raising his challenge on the floor of the OCIC conference), and by refusing to struggle with national minority comrades either at the Conference or at home.

This was the chief reason why Phil did not challenge the resolution on the floor of the OCIC Conference. To have challenged the political basis of unity of the National Minority M-L Conference would have been to unite with the racist position of the NNMLC - joint practice, but not political unity on party building for people of color!

There are a couple of other errors of racism which Phil makes in his paper, "Response to CN's Criticism". First, Phil addressed himself only to Clay Newlin. Although Clay was the first person to raise the criticism, at least three other comrades who are national minority comrades spoke to the criticism on the floor of the Conference as well. They were S, K, and T - all of the Planning Committee of the National Minority M-L Conference. Phil's failure to address his reply or even send his reply to S, K and T further compounds his error of failing to struggle over differences with national minority comrades, only white comrades.

Lastly, Phil did send his paper to the observers from NNMLC and EI-Comite. Phil is confident that these comrades will give him support and he will use this support - support from national minority comrades - to justify his position. Here again Phil is relying on skin color, rather than political line, as the basis of unity.

In summation, then, we see that the original error of racism made by Phil by putting forward his motion was compounded a number of times over. At the root of all these errors is the failure to put political line primary in relationships with National Minority comrades in the party building movement.

This paper has been sharp in its criticism of comrade Phil. It has been written in

the spirit of learning from mistakes in order to move us all forward. Hopefully the lessons in this paper will help us all in our understanding of how racism works in the party building movement. The sooner we grasp these lessons, the further along we will be in building our future party.

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