CLP SUMMARY -- PART I by NLC DRAFT #3

I. PURPOSE OF THE SUMMARY

The purpose of this summary is to analyze CL's plan for building a multi-national communist party, how the plan was implemented in practice, how the old League for Proletarian Revolution (LPR) related to it, and to draw lessons for the party building movement today. This summary will also help us to deepen our understanding of current problems in the MLC, since a number of them have their roots in the old LPR and CLP experiences.

II. THEORETICAL READINGS

Lenin's writings on the formation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, Collected Works, volumes 2-7, selected articles (refer to CWG's bibliography on party building).

III. EVALUATION OF CL'S PLAN AND LPR'S ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF THE CLP

A) History of the Call for a Conference of North American Marxist-Leninists

The California Communist League was formed in Los Angeles in 1969 by former members of the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute the Communist Party USA (POC), a split-off from the CPUSA. In November 1972 the CCL, American Communist Workers Movement (M-L), Association of Communist Workers, Red Collective, Red Star Cadre (M-L)(later exposed as an FBI front), and Communist Party of Canada (M-L) issued a call for a conference of North American Marxist-Leninists, and formed a preparatory committee to organize for it sometime in 1973. (See attached reprint of the call.) The aim of the conference was to unite M-Ls in order to create conditions for forming a genuine communist party. After several months of joint work in planning for the conference, CL and the other organizations split, and CL went on to hold its own conference in May, 1973; the others held a conference in August, at which time the Central Organization of US Marxist-Leninists (COUSML) was founded. Each side blames the other for the split; ACWM (M-L), the forerunner of COUSML, claimed that CL split after carrying out wrecking activities and refusing to organize for the conference, except behind the backs of the other organizations; CL claims ACWM (M-L) was male supremacist and national chauvinist, and wanted to focus on the campuses to recruit every student to the conference. (See COUSML, "Dialectics of the Development of Nelson Peery's Head", and CL, People's Tribune V5, #4.)

The May, 1973 conference is summed up in People's Tribune V5 #5 as a conference of workers, representing communists from throughout the US. Eight unnamed M-L organizations participated, according to CL. Workshops were held on various questions (later summarized in the resolutions in "Marxist-Leninists Unite!"), and the National Continuations Committee (NCC) was established to organize a party congress sometime in 1974.

B) History of the NCC

A brief history of the NCC is summarized in the Black Workers Congress (BWC) pamphlet published just before the CLP congress, "The Struggle Against Revisionism and Opportunism: Against the Communist League and the Revolutionary Union", pp. 93-115. (BWC also published a history of their own organization, "Black Liberation Struggle, the Black Workers Congress, and Proletarian Revolution", possibly available from MLOC or WC (M-L).) BWC quotes the first NCC newsletter (January, 1974):

> "Politically the Committee (NCC) was united around the following points: (1) That the primary task of Marxist-Leninist organizations and advanced workers is to build an honest Multi-National M-L Communist Party in the US -- 'A Party of a New Type' -- to unite and lead the struggle of the US working class in the seizure of state power and establishment of the Dictatorship

of the Proletariat. The Committee realized that this could be done only by strict adherence to and defense of the science of M-L, and by an all out assault against the CPUSA and all forms of revisionism and opportunism.
(2) That a Party Congress should be called in about a year to organize such a party within the US.
(3) That the draft resolutions adopted at the Conference should be the minimum political line holding the Committee together and enabling it to carry out the necessary organizational work for the Party Congress. Finally, that any organization or individual which agreed with these points and the draft resolutions should be encouraged to join both local and the NCC.

"The main work of the NCC was to be organizational: getting the resolutions from the conference finalized and printed up; putting out a newsletter for political discussion and news in preparation for the Congress; coordinating work between the various organizations on the National Committee and on the local Continuations Committee; doing the other tasks necessary in organizing the Congress."

This was the NCC's view of its tasks and basis of unity in January, 1974. NCC Newsletter #2 (February-March) formulated the principles of unity once again, and reiterated the point that members on the NCC were united democratically on the basis of unity and struggle:

"After publication of the first Newsletter, comrades in at least one area raised questions about the basis of political unity around the Congress. So, to insure that there is clarity on this question, we reprint the basic points of unity agreed upon by the Conference of North American Marxist-Leninists and by the National Continuations Committee. We are united around four main points: 1) adherence to the science of Marxism-Leninism; 2) a struggle against revisionism which is headed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the CPUSA; 3) the struggle to build a Multi-National, Marxist-Leninist Communist Party to lead the US working class to overthrow Capitalism and establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Scientific Socialism in the USNA; 4) the resolutions which were approved by the May Conference and printed in MARXIST-LENINISTS UNITE! (this includes the minority position on the National Question, dealing with the issue of 'racism', which was accepted as a minority position by the body as a whole). These four points are the basis for minimum political unity for all organizations on the National Continuations Committee, for local committees, and for individual Marxist-Leninists who are interested in participating in the Congress. These points of unity also act as the organizational guide for the democratic relations between organizations on the Committee and other Marxist-Leninists."

The newsletter went on to stress that the resolutions should also serve as the basis for polemics. In both of the first two newsletters, the emphasis was on the need to deepen ideological and political unity among M-Ls through polemics; this appeared to be a recognition that sufficient struggle had not gone on, either ideologically or in practice, to establish clear lines of demarcation with revisionism. However, by Newsletter #5 (June), "support of the resolutions is not a question for debate", and democratic relations had been replaced by democratic centralism as the organizational principle of the NCC. The NCC even claimed that this had always been the case: "From the time of the conference on, the Continuations Committee has adhered to the Marxist-Leninist organizational principle of democratic-centralism, whether it was stated in so many words or not." (Newsletter #6, July, our emphasis.)

Did this shift, from emphasizing democratic discussion and polemics to demanding centralism, represent a change on the part of CL's leadership, or was it the logical outcome of an opportunist line on party building? In retrospect, we think

it was the latter. Our view is that, contrary to the first newsletters' emphasis, CL was not serious about allowing open ideological struggle to take place; they were determined to form their own party by whatever means necessary, and if stressing the need for polemics could attract some forces initially, they were willing to give it a try, as long as they remained in control. The proof of this is that when growing criticisms of CL's line and practice began to threaten their hegemony of the National Continuations Committee (NCC), CL quickly moved to clamp down on further debate within the NCC, and expelled those forces who wouldn't accept their line, the "line of Marxism-Leninism". In true opportunist fashion, they used the "imminent threat of war and fascism", and the attacks on CL by revisionists of all hues, to justify tightening their ranks, and serve as a cover for their intention to stifle all opposition to them.

CL's motion as the Congress drew nearer is a direct outgrowth of their failure to prepare the subjective conditions for the founding of a genuine communist party. We can see parallels with MLOC's current motion, as they call on all forces to join with them regardless of "secondary differences" (secondary only to MLOC) in the face of the "growing threat of war" and attacks on MLOC by the opportunists. Objective conditions for the founding of a party have long been ripe; the US working class has been without a communist party for years. But without sufficient ideological and political groundwork, in the course of deepening Marxist-Leninist influence within the spontaneous working class movement, no party that truly represents the most advanced sections of the class can be built. What was the situation when the NCC was formed, setting itself the task of organizing a founding Congress for a new party? The NCC united a handful of circles, led by CL, around the "need to defend Marxism-Leninism against all forms of revisionism" and around a series of shallow and undeveloped resolutions which didn't even address some of the main questions facing the US proletariat (for example, imperialist war, fascism, nature of the USSR and its role internationally, etc.). This was in contrast to the Organizing Committee (OC) for the Second Congress of the RSDLP (after which the NCC was modeled), which was formed after the achievement of a relatively high level of ideological and practical unity among various circles, under Iskra's leadership. CL, as the "leading circle", had nothing in common with the Iskra trend. CL had not established real ties in the working class, although it did succeed in recruiting a number of influential advanced workers around Detroit and Chicago; it had not set forth stable, consistent Marxist-Leninist principles, aims and tactics. It had gained a reputation as a sectarian organization with a poor style of work (for example, raiding other groups, focusing on study alone and forcing cadres to memorize long passages from the classics, little or no work with other groups or within the industrial proletariat). However, a number of small circles who honestly wanted to see a party built saw them as an alternative to the blatant economism of RU and OL. We know little about the groups who attended the Conference and were on the NCC, but most appear to have taken a real back seat to CL (with the possible exception of the New Voice). Most put forward no polemics with the line of the resolutions. One group, referred to as the "Detroit Majority" in the newsletters, joined the Detroit Continuations Committee without knowing that the resolutions were the fourth principle of unity; they focused their polemics on CL's hegemonist style, rather than the actual political line of the resolutions, and were finally expelled.

From the beginning, the NCC was characterized by amateurishness and political unclarity. It didn't even begin functioning regularly until January, 1974, after several local committees had been established. At least one of these (Detroit) was not informed that the conference resolutions were the fourth principle of unity; in fact, throughout the life of the NCC there was unclarity on what this fourth principle really meant in practice. Given the relative ideological and political backwardness of most of the cadres of the various organizations (and probably much of the leadership as well), and the fact that debate over what constituted the basis of

unity for the NCC was "cutting into the deadline" for the Congress, the opportunist leadership of CL simply declared the political and organizational line of the May Conference to be sacred and inviolable. A number of the groups that subsequently left the NCC were expelled for "breaking democratic centralism" (BWC, ATM), or raising differences with the "line of Marxism-Leninism" (New Voice).

In the case of BWC, they were allegedly expelled for refusing to publicly present their position on the Black National Question at a Continuations Committee forum, but before their expulsion, relations between BWC and CL had degenerated considerably in the course of fierce disagreement over the nature of the USSR (BWC held that capitalism had been restored). The specific reason for ATM's expulsion was never revealed to cadres in the old LPR. The New Voice was the only group that left after political differences had been debated openly and sharply. The New Voice held (and still holds) the view that no sections of the US working class are bribed by superprofits from oppressed nations, and that the "bribe theory" denies that the US working class is revolutionary. (See their pamphlet, "Imperialism Today") When this position was debated in the Local Continuations Committee forum on imperialism, the line of TNV was soundly defeated, and they walked out.

C) LPR's Role in the Bay Area Local Continuations Committee (LCC)*

The "old" LPR was formed in the summer of 1972 out of the merger of two groups, the Red Detachment and the Revolutionary Workers' Caucus. (See Michael Miller, Against Revisionism, "Preface", for a brief history of the development of the LPR.) In the period preceding our joining the LCC, we were heavily involved in work at the Associated Charter Bus Company, where we published a regular communist shop paper, the Accelerator; we were conducting study circles, and struggling with local circles and independents over the correct road to party building. The LPR didn't join the LCC until the end of March, 1974, around the time of the publication of the second NCC Newsletter. Our only contact with the NCC was through the Newsletters, which were openly controlled by CL. Those of us now in the MLC who were in the LPR weren't regularly involved in LCC meetings, and thus our direct experience is very limited. Furthermore, sufficient discussion didn't go on within the Central Committee or among cadres on the work within the LCC, so our information will be lacking in some respects.

LPR was approached by CL in March, 1974 to participate in a Women's Day forum with CL and the San Francisco Marxist-Leninist Organization (SFMLO). Soon after, LPR and SFMLO merged; the reconstituted LPR was asked by CL to join the LCC (which, according to BWC, had been set up several months earlier). (See MM, Against Revisionism, "Preface", for more on the merger process.) The first event of the LCC was a May 1st forum on May 4, 1974.

LPR's previous experience with CL was limited: some members had studied with them, others worked in an unemployed group with them, some ex-LPR members had joined them, and CL representatives had spoken at an LPR study group. There had been no prior joint work in any workplaces, and no bilateral meetings between the organizations. Comrades will wonder: how was it possible that LPR joined in CL's party building effort on such a weak foundation? The question of when to unite and on what level is one that faces all of us, and it is crucial that we get clear on past mistakes. How did LPR approach this question?

At the time, there appeared to be sufficient grounds for unity around a series of political questions:

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*The "old" LPR, formed from the merger of the Red Detachment and the Revolutionary Workers Caucus, and the "reconstituted" LPR, which arose from the merger of the LPR and the San Francisco M-L Organization, should not be confused with the present LPR, which used to be known as Resistencia Puertoriquena, and chose its present name independently.

1) Party building as the central task for Marxist-Leninists: LPR saw CL as the only organization trying to implement that line on a nation-wide basis. In the Bay Area at that time, RU and OL were the strongest forces in the anti-revisionist movement. LPR and its predecessors had struggled with their right opportunism on a limited scale for several years, countering their focus on "build the mass movement" with the call to build the party. When LPR joined with the LCC, it was struggling within a group of Marxist-Leninists that gathered to discuss writing a national M-L newspaper, and LPR was opposing the line of "build mass organizations as central" with "party building as central". (A pamphlet was written summing up this group and containing a study outline on party building, called "Burning Questions of Our Movement".)
2) Existence of a Black Nation: CL was one of the few organizations that had taken up this question in some depth.
3) Split in the working class: CL was the only organization LPR knew of that recognized a split in the working class, and saw the need to wage open struggle against the labor aristocracy.
4) Anti-revisionism: CL had focused attention on opposing the CPUSA at a time when most other M-L groups were fighting each other exclusively (we didn't recognize then how shallow the opposition was on CL's part).

In addition to what was essentially paper unity, and perhaps more important for drawing lessons today, LPR was increasingly frustrated with being a small circle, unable to fulfill the many tasks required of communists. We had all been tremendously impressed by Nelson Peery's visit to the Bay Area in early 1974, when he spoke about the urgent need for a party in the face of growing war danger. We were quite frankly prepared to "let bygones be bygones", pay little attention to potential differences, and let the burning desire for a party be our guide. The danger inherent in such a position can't be stressed enough today, when MLOC has become the latest group to declare itself the future party, and is trying to gather forces around itself in many of the same ways used by CL. The frustration of being a small circle isn't resolved by jumping behind another group, in the absence of a genuine protracted struggle for principled unity.

The main work of the LCC consisted of organizing and preparing for forums to take up "burning issues" where there appeared to be most disunity, or potential disunity, to try and resolve these questions before the Congress. The forums covered imperialism and the split in the working class (polemic with New Voice), national-colonial question, fascism and the united front, restoration of capitalism in the USSR. Meetings were held before the forums, in which views were discussed and assignments made for speeches. This was the form joint theoretical work took. The only form of joint practice, aside from organizing the forums, consisted of joint distributions to sell CL's paper and pass out leaflets written by LCC members.

In order to carry out discussions in the LCC, LPR carried out intensive internal study and organized four party building study groups to do the same. We developed positions on all of the forum questions in a matter of weeks. It wasn't until the question of the restoration of capitalism came up that we found we had major differences with CL, but by then we were "too close to the Congress" to pull out. We did not develop polemics on any of the draft resolutions, or take up a study of the draft party program (written by CL). We did not make public criticisms of CL's line, or question their leadership in the NCC, even when groups began to leave without much explanation in the newsletters. So intent were we on liquidating our small circle and building the party that we abandoned most of our practical work,

didn't carry on struggle with many wavering contacts, and accepted the line of the Credentials Committee* on homosexuality and welding with hardly a murmur. (The line on gays was that they were banned from the party; welding was seen as a bribed job, and those contacts who were welders had to pledge to give it up if told.)

In retrospect, this raises an important question: to what extent should we have pushed struggle over secondary and tactical questions? Should people have split over the line handed down on gays and welding (some did)? And what does this mean for us today, when MLOC, for example, is calling for unity around their Draft Party Program, and belittling the importance of differences?

There will always be secondary contradictions reflected in relations between groups with even a high degree of unity. Especially in a situation where there are many small circles, with various degrees of experience and varying tendencies to see things one-sidedly, from a subjective viewpoint, it will be necessary to learn to distinguish between principled and tactical compromises. Regarding the questions of gays and welding, in our view these were secondary questions, but they arose on an already shaky political basis and threw into deeper question the openness of the LCC, and CL in particular, to struggle. The decision was handled bureaucratically, with LPR's leadership taking CL's lead and assigning cadres to lay out the policy in their study groups with no discussion to speak of. Some LPR cadres balked at this, but gave in to the view that since these were secondary questions, and there was much important work to be done before the Congress, we shouldn't waste time. When one studygroup fell apart over the questions, we brushed it aside as an inevitable petty bourgeois casualty. Looking back, it seems clear that although in theory it was correct for LPR to discourage spending too much time on secondary questions, the fact that some of the most intensive struggle emerged over these issues should have made LPR look more critically at the method used to "achieve unity" where differences prevailed, i.e., outright intimidation. As we saw later at the Congress, this was the same method used with LPR when the question of the Soviet Union threatened to come up.

D) The Founding Congress

The Congress to Form a Multi-national Marxist-Leninist Communist Party was held in Chicago over Labor Day weekend, 1974. Over 600 people attended from throughout the US, including several foreign student delegations. For most of us, it was the first Congress we'd attended, and we had high expectations. Many of us expected the kind of intense struggle and in-depth debate that Lenin described in One Step Forward, Two Steps Back. We were not at all prepared for what did take place, and some of the blame must lie with us for having left actual preparations for the Congress largely to CL.

What characterized the Congress politically and organizationally? In the contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and opportunism, the primary aspect was clearly the factionalism and opportunism of CL's leadership, reflected mainly in their outright refusal to allow political struggle to take place. Differences over the purpose of the Congress immediately emerged. Many expected it to be a forum for struggling over the program, rules, and resolutions in order to reach higher unity. Others saw it as a "Unity Congress", or culmination celebration for CL. This contradiction in turn reflected the political inexperience of many of the former, given that adequate preparation of cadres had not gone on around the draft program prior to the Congress; this, coupled with the fact that the CL forces were

*The Credentials Committee was set up within the LCC to screen all those who applied to attend the Congress.

in the majority on the presiding body (Presidium), meant that conditions for principled struggle didn't even exist. In short, what characterized the Congress was outright aversion to ideological struggle. This was evident in the following:

1) Debate over the program: the procedure was to submit individual criticisms, differences in formulation, etc. to the Presidium (we weren't allowed to submit changes that had been formulated collectively prior to the Congress, since the first act of the Congress was to disband all organizations). It was later revealed by a member of the Presidium that the method of handling most of the criticisms was to either toss them aside as "BS" or demand to know who was submitting such "garbage". Almost no time was allowed for discussion on the floor; what time there was was taken up in superficial, secondary arguments over wording.

2) Discussion on resolutions: committees for each resolution were set up before the Congress, composed of members of the various organizations. Meetings were then held between Congress sessions; most were kept at a low theoretical level of discussion, and forces unwilling or unable to struggle prevailed. Almost no time was provided for discussion of the resolutions in general sessions; many of the resolutions were left to be taken up by the Central Committee later. This included any reference to the USSR; Nelson P. made it crystal clear to several former leading LPR members that if it came up for discussion on the floor he'd split the Congress, and that the ex-LPR members should "let their people know this". (Note: "ex-LPR" because all organizations had been formally dissolved.) On the question of the USSR, a "tactical" compromise was reached, i.e. that a commission would be set up to further study the question, and that until then, the party would have no position on it.* In retrospect, were the ex-LPR members correct in accepting this compromise? At the time, we think it was correct, since there was no compromise in principle (i.e., it was not agreed to drop the question, or to accept CL's line on it). Furthermore, the strong working class composition of the Congress led us to believe that we should remain in the party and struggle for the correct line from within. At every critical juncture, it was Nelson P. and the top CL leadership who threatened to split the Congress.

3) Elections to the Central Committee: these were openly staged by Nelson P., who wanted to insure that the former LPR leadership and that of other collectives making up CLP were included as tokens. The procedure was to have nominations from the floor; naturally, many of these were from CL. After nominations were closed, Nelson P. went around to most of the former CL cadres nominated and told them to get up and decline; he then made several speeches in favor of members of other collectives, stressing their "ability to compromise".

4) Factionalism permeated every aspect of the Congress, even though in words all organizations had been dissolved as one of the first acts of the Congress. What appeared at first to be extrememly poor planning to those forces expecting a tightly-run, well-scheduled forum for ideological struggle and clarity was in fact consistent with the festive "unity" atmosphere and with the aim of Nelson Peery and others to cover over political differences. A prime example was the security collectives formed after organizations were dissolved: they were all primarily made up of ex-CL cadres, no political discussion was allowed in them for fear of factionalism (ruling by the Presidium), and all debate was to take place on the floor of the Congress. But since we spent more time filing in and out than struggling in Congress sessions, objectively there was no time to engage in political debate and struggle; under the guise of fighting factionalism, the worst factionalists (CL leadership) prevailed.

It was in response to the utter frustration over how events were unfolding that some ex-LPR members met informally several times during the Congress ("ex-LPR" as groups had already been dissolved), to talk over whether or not it was worth staying and struggling from within. We were appalled enough by what was happening

5) Organizationally, the Congress was a disaster. As mentioned, almost no time was scheduled for theoretical struggle in the general sessions. Sessions started several hours late daily, then we spent more hours filing in and out of the church by security collective; there was much partying, and booze was passed around openly at Presidium meetings. In addition, valuable time was spent in cultural presentations while burning questions were ignored.
6) Security was terrible; the place for the Congress was announced publicly before we even knew; at the opening session, a tape-recording was made as the chairperson announced comrades' names, nationalities and home cities over a loudspeaker (this was stopped by protests from the floor); undercover cops stood outside the church openly taking down license numbers of our cars, and we almost always had police escorts when we broke for lunch; the final night of the Congress, a party was held at the office of the NCC with no precautions taken for security. This laxness reflected utter confusion over the nature of the state: on the one hand, CLP held the view that fascism was just around the corner, and we had to build a united front against fascism; but in practice, many among the leadership took a thoroughly opportunist stand toward questions of security and conspiratorial work.

E) Main strengths and weaknesses of LPR's role around the LCC and at the Congress.
The main strengths of LPR's work were:
1) Genuine desire to participate in building a genuine communist party and dissolve our small circle.
2) Intensive study with cadres and contacts around some of the major programmatic questions, in the effort to prepare everyone to find their own independent bearings at the Congress. (Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful, as comrades found themselves thoroughly disoriented in Chicago, faced with CL's factionalizing and hegemonism.)

The main weaknesses in LPR's work were:
1) Enthusiasm over building the party led to glossing over differences, and belittling political line. What little political struggle took place was limited to the LCC; it was not taken up in LPR's CC, or among the cadres, to any significant degree. When differences and criticisms arose in the party building study groups sponsored by LPR, they were belittled, and comrades were advised not to "nitpick", since we all wanted "unity", and there wasn't much time.
2) Internally, intensive study was carried out on various programmatic questions, but almost none on how a party should be built, i.e. questions of strategy and tactics, party program, party rules, what an OC's function should be, what constitutes principled unity, etc.
3) Our relative isolation and amateurishness in applying M-L led us to be somewhat slavish to CL; this was reflected in not questioning the expulsions of various groups (and when the study groups did, they were told not to waste time on minor questions), not polemicizing with CL around the draft party program, resolutions, or rules.
4) Our history of focusing on theoretical work without trying to apply it in practice led us to belittle the importance of conducting joint practical work with CL before going on to the Congress.
5) We failed to see that a party or leading center won't come into existence on the basis of a deadline, and allowed our fear of missing the boat to excuse our lack of waging thorough ideological and practical struggle.
6) We were responsible for misleading close to 75 people (including cadres and the contacts around us in study groups) through our fervent, uncritical support of CL's party building motion.

internal draft

CLP SUM-UP PART II

As of this writing, many of us have been in the communist movement for years, some of us for ten years and more, yet we still don't have a genuine party of the proletariat. For those of us who participated in the efforts to build the CLP and then remained in it for varying lengths of time, the question gnaws at us continually: where did we go wrong? More important than subjective feelings are questions of political line, approach to organizations and to party building, and our approach to inner party life and ideological struggle. In addition there is the nagging question: how could otherwise intelligent, fairly developed MLs allow themselves to be manipulated and used as we were in the CLP?

I. Political Line

It has become increasingly clear in the course of discussions that most, if not all, of us who were involved in the CLP were constantly on the verge of quitting (or, in some cases, of being expelled), mostly around questions of political line. Given this situation, what were we doing in this organization at all?

A. Positive motion of CL and National Continuations Committee

1. CL waged polemics against the main opportunist groups: the CPUSA and their "bastard children the RU and OL".
2. CL put forward the need for a party when most other groups were either totally unclear or else put forward the need to build the mass movement first.
3. CL was the only group to come close to a principled position on the BNQ. Without them, it is doubtful whether the question would have been debated at all at that time. They certainly deserve the credit for re-opening the debate.
4. CL insisted that a primary source of the CPUSA's revisionism in practice was their failure to educate their cadre in ML. Before the congress they often put forward the importance of theory, of ML, and of education in general. Favorite quotes: "Marxism has become a science and demands to be studied as such" and "Facts, gentlemen, are stubborn things".
5. In addition, CL appeared to have won large numbers of working class and national minority cadre to communism.

B. Negative Motion and Negative Features

1. We were all supposed to unite around the resolutions contained in Marxist-Leninists Unite!
   a. These were, without exception, shallow, superficial, and dogmatic. In addition, some were written with what we later came to recognize as characteristic CLP ambiguity. Many did not make sense logically or grammatically. (see attached copies of resolutions)
   b. Still, it was never clear in the S.F. Local Continuations Committee that these were to be points of unity.
      (1) Various stories circulated inside the old LPR about how seriously to take the resolutions, what to tell contacts, etc.
      (2) Consequently, inconsistent stories were given out in LPR-led (and also, we understand, in CL-led) study groups leading up to the congress, about whether acceptance of the MLU resolutions constituted a point

of unity for the National or Local Continuations Committee or not.

c. In any case, the content of the resolutions was not studied seriously by most people, certainly not collectively, and certainly not in the old LPR. The closest we have heard in this regard is collective discussion in one of the LPR-led study groups that drafted alternate resolutions but never presented them at the congress because the deadline for publication had been missed and the presidium forbade presentation of any views that were not strictly an individual product, on the grounds that anything else would constitute factionalism.

d. The general case seems to have been either blind ~~faith~~ acceptance or naive faith that either
   (1) these could not be the principles of a real party
   (2) these were only the topics, not the final positions
   (3) the resolutions would be debated at the congress
   (4) the LCC forums were the real basis of unity.
   Of course, none of these was in fact the case.

e. In retrospect, it was a very serious mistake for us to unite around anything we hadn't studied seriously, didn't understand, or had serious objections to.

2. Although some lines of demarcation had been drawn, e.g., with the CPUSA around revisionism in general and the split in the working class, with OL and RU around the importance of building a party in order to lead the mass movement, still, CL's and later CLP's political positions did not seem to be based on concrete investigation of concrete facts and did not seem to have been tested in practice. There is a kernal of truth in the title of COUSML's old polemic, "The Dialectics of the Development of Nelson Peery's Head" -- namely, that's where it all came from.

3. Since many aspects of political line were not clear, we hardly engaged in collective (or even individual) study of the MLU resolutions, and since all of the individuals involved in preparing this sum-up had strong disagreement with the CLP program when it was adopted in August 1974, we cannot say that we were consolidated on the basis of political line. We were only consolidated on the basis of subjective desire to form and be a part of the genuine party of the proletariat and, to some extent, on the basis of personal opportunism and cowardice...two excuses for slavishness.

4. Our behavior indicates the low level of ideological struggle in the old LPR, and poses the question for us: how much of this low level -- or outright lack -- of struggle have we carried over into the MLC?

II. Approach to Party Building

The importance of this question today is probably clear to anyone who will read this sum-up. We are confronted with a situation where a number of organizations exists, each one claiming to be the sole ML party (or just about to make its declaration). Other forces are highly dispersed, limited and amateurish. In the midst of this, MLOC drafts

a program and calls on everyone to unite with them. How is this similar to CL8s approach, how is it different, and what can we laarn?

A. Openness to debate
   1. At the Conference of North American Marxist-Leninists, which put out MLU, a weekend of workshops was held, draft positions were put forward on programmatic questions, the NCC was established, and it was decided to conduct ideological struggle aimed toward holding a founding congress in about a year.
      a. What was wrong with this plan?
         (1) One year was much too short a time
         (2) Very little ideological struggle actually took place
            (a) With the exception of the expulsion of The New Voice from the S.F. LCC, virtually no struggle took place over the content of the resolutions.
            (b) There was a large struggle in Detroit over whether acceptance of the resolutions in MLU was to be a fourth principle of unity for the NCC, with the Detroit majority splitting from the NCC. But this struggle was not about the content of the resolutions.
            (c) The San Francisco forums were at a "high" level and were well attended, but they weren't related to the resolutions. This made things very confusing. More?
         (3) There was little or no joint practical work between various organizations and individuals going into the congress. There was no systematic plan for joint practical work; and, as a matter of fact, CL at that time engaged in very little mass work at all. We don't know about other organizations, but LPR had no bi-lateral relations with CL whatsoever.
         (4) As mantioned above, there were serious problems with the resolutions themselves.
      b. How was the plan implemented?
         (1) First of all, the NCC didn't begin to function until several months after LCCs were functioning, as far as we know, more or less independently and anarchically, in several cities.
         (2) The NCC, under CL leadership, pulled some major shifts in orientation, namely
            (a) changes in the internal rules, reflected in the change in NCC Bulletins #2 to #3. #2 encouraged open debate, unity/struggle/unity, etc. #3 put forward that certain questions are not up for debate, that the MLU resolutions were a point of unity, and that only the line of ML would be tolerated. [other voice: who is to judge?]
            (b) various groups were expelled from the NCC and LCCs without any adequate explanation, struggle or exposure of opportunist lines, etc. For instance, Black Workers' Congress, parent group of WC and MLOC, ~~and~~ was expelled along with ATM, supposedly for violating democratic centralism. But the committee never functioned on the basis of democratic centralism; this is a principle

that could apply inside the various groups, but not between them, at least not until they dissolved into a higher unity, i.e., at the party congress.

(c) individuals who raised questions or objections were chastised and, if they persisted, expelled. Some controversial questions at that time: are all gay people hopelessly reactionary? are all welders bribed?

(d) shortly before the congress, in NCC Bulletin #5, the slogan "Democracy is relative, centralism is absolute" was put forward. This was an unprincipled call for unity in order to quash any wavering, dissenting, or democratic forces in the NCC.

(i) CL leadership put forward the pretext that we were under attack from the CPUSA, other revisionists like OL and RU, and the state; that fascism was just around the corner and we had better heighten our vigilance and close our ranks rather than debating sterile trivia.

(ii) In some respects this resembled a policy of war communism, where external attack demanded an emphasis on centralism at the expense of democracy. But in this case there were no real attacks, and no real war -- and no real communism.

(iii) Still, xenophobia is a powerful force, and the CL leadership was clever and skilled at manipulation. Just after the coup in Chile, Pinochet made a speech ranting and raving about the destructive influence of foreigners -- from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Pointing an accusing finger at foreigners, outside agitators, other orgs or other scapegoats, is the oldest trick in the book to prop up an unstable regime. It's bad enough we let ourselves be fooled once like that. Let's not let it happen again.

(iv) /the other voice notes: beware of MLOC and others who create a false sense of urgency/

III. This must lead anyone reading this document to the question, Why did we stand for all that? (and what can we do about it now?)

A. First of all, to a large degree, we didn't stand for it. One of our friends was expelled shortly after the congress for raising correct criticisms of the People's Tribune at a cadre school. Two were expelled shortly thereafter. Others were put through the mill in Chicago. One stayed until the second congress, but wrote long and detailed criticisms and tried to initiate struggle at various points.

B. /But second, we were not free from slavishness. The fact that much of the organization (and leadership) was minority and proletarian, while we were mostly anglo and petty bourgeois, had some-

thing to do with it. This phenomenon has a long history in our movement, in recent years, from the Black Panther Party to the RLEC. It is a reflection of national chauvinism and racism in our ranks and must be struggled against.

C. Third, we weren't free from opportunism or cowardice, either.
   1. Why did none of us who had strong objections stand up at the congress and denounce the CLP program publicly?
   2. This is mitigated by other instances where individuals did raise objections, did risk whatever there was to risk, and did struggle, even in regional meetings preparing for the second congress;
   3. but none of us was really free of the fear that someone would later write, "As late as 1975, Comrade X still upheld the laughable petty bourgeois deviation that ..."
   4. Thorough-going materialists must be fearless, and we often were not.

D. Fourth, some (not all) of us were taken in by Nelson Peery's charismatic leadership. As anyone can tell by reading a few issues of the People's Tribune, CLP cannot be followed because of its clear explanation of political realities. The central leadership, as well as lower level cadre in most cases we know of, is blindly loyal to Nelson on a personal basis. In many respects, the organization is run along autocratic, almost feudal, lines, with Nelson parcelling out favors and fiefdoms (for instance, he gave one of our ex-comrades -- also an ex-MLC comrade -- the West Coast).
   1. What can we learn from this? Since our movement does not have tested leadership, everyone in leadership must be considered expendible. Current leadership of organizations and circles must be held accountable for the way they represent and lead their groups. Those unresponsive to criticism or otherwise unaccountable or unable to lead effectively, should be removed from positions of authority and given other, perhaps less conspicuous, work to do, until they have improved their attitude or ability, or contact with production or with the masses, or until their "unique" talents are needed where no one else's will do.
   2. We should also strive to remember that there is no raging river between the leadership of small circles and the membership, and it is absolutely incorredt for members of these circles to sit back and wait for the central committee or the unit leader to decide things for them.. This kind of slavishness (the RU used to call it "employee mentality" -- "don't ask me, I just work here") provides fertile soil for opportunism of every kind, as well as demoralization throughout the organization.
   3. To overcome slavishness, we must set our sights on the long haul and train mature, capable communists who can find their bearings independently, who make a habit of using their brains, and who arentt afraid to go against the tide. The comrades must be developed both ideologically and practically to distinguish ML from opportunism in practice as well as in theory, and to struggle both for correct line and correct tactical planning and implementation.

E. Fifth, there are certain problems with our class background that we haven't dealt with in depth. Those of us who are from petty-bourgeois backgrounds usually acknowledge the fact, do a little guilt tripping, and let it go without any serious analysis. But the fact is, few, if any, of us were really small producers, with petty capitalist mentalities. We were mostly students or drop outs, and radical students at that. That means we usually have the student method of eclecticism: sample a little of everything, like choosing courses from a college catalog, and argue with verbal skill rather than with facts. This makes us somewhat unstable. We are also mostly rebels against traditional authority, whether parents, police, professors, or whoever. But our high ideals and early training keep us looking for someone who can really tell us the answers, a real professor who is not a pompous phony, a real political leader. Some people, like Nelson, seem to know this, and when they hold out the promise of being such a person, they find all sorts of people willing to follow them. This only names the topic. We should pay more attention to this in the future if we want to really overcome the weaknesses of our class bakkground and avoid getting fooled again.

F. Finally, why do people stay in an organization once it has degenerated? There are many reasons and rationalizations, such as

1. we must stay in and struggle for the correct line in the future (say at the next congress)
2. this organization may not be perfect, but the others are worse
3. at least this one has a strong proletarian and national minority composition, and who am I as a petty bourgeois intellectual to demand that everyone think like I do?
4. leaving any group means severing personal ties; even if many of them are not satisfactory, the process and prospect of isolation is always difficult.

These are real reasons, but they are also rationalizations, and don't really explain why people stay in. This is an important question, not just for understanding CLP and other organizations that have gone bad, but for understanding ourselves and preventing these mistakes in the future.

5. Bourgeois psychology has a concept that sheds some light on this problem. It's called cognitive dissonance. They did a lot of studies 15 to 20 years ago on how people make choices, especially choosing mates and buying commodities. When shopping for a car, you might read all the ads, think about what you can afford, and decide to buy a Ford. But after you've made that decision, you stop reading Chevvy and Plymouth ads the same way you used to, just as you avaid thinking about who you might have married who would be more satisfactory than your present mate. Hearing that you might have made the wrong choice creates discomfort, or cognitive dissonance, so you avoid it. PC tries to speak to this point: cadre in most organizations don't look seriously at eachother's lines because it makes them too uncomfortable to have to consider whether they have made the wrong choice, be in the wrong organization, or have been duped by opportunist leaders.
6. In CLP we put not only time, work and money into the organi-

zation, many people picked up stakes and moved to different cities, severing personal ties and abandoning work that had been going on for some time. (Bourgeois psychology has ways of explaining how individuals are transformed from recruits into soldiers, for instance, too, and this is something else we should pay attention to as we struggle against slavishness.) The point is, quitting may have been constantly on our personal agendas, but it was not easy to do, and we didn't want anyone telling us what a mistake we had made.

IV. How does this whole situation resemble or differ from MLOC's plan?
A. For all its shallowness and incompleteness, MLOC's Draft Party Program is more sensible and coherent than Marxist-Leninists Unite!, but
1. the DPP does not appear to have extensive investigation or analysis behind it; we're faced with Barry's head instead of Nelson's! ✓
2. to many of us, the lines of demarcation in the movement are less clear today than they were four years ago. At any rate, they don't stand clearly drawn as far as we know. MLOC has not conducted extensive ideological struggle around their program (or around anything else but the 3WT, and not completely there, either), and doesn't seem to be willing to do so in the future. This is reflected in their (almost) exclusive reliance on bi-lateral, as opposed to multi-lateral, meetings, calls for unprincipled unity, and leveling of charges against MLC and others who have raised principled objections, either to their party building plan or to ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ aspects of their line. MB!
B. We have a long history with MLOC (see our MLOC Summary), which continues to this day, and on which there is still much unclarity in our organization.
C. Both CL and MLOC said, in effect, Unite with us or be left out of the real party of the proletariat for ever. When people raised objections or criticisms, they were given one song and dance or another, the essence of which was, What you're objecting to
1. isn't really our basis of unity
2. isn't really important
31. shows your petty bourgeois outlook and/or unwillingness to struggle
4. shows that your are really a left anti-party bloc.
✓ D. Yet, without dealing with the criticisms, or setting up ways to struggle over differences, we were still called on to unite.
E. But finally, if criticisms were raised again, we were told
1. the time for criticism is over
2. there's no time to take up these criticisms
3. you petty bourgeois intellectuals want the party to be moulded in your own image
4. raiding criticisms is a Trotskyite tactic
5. if you don't like it, you should have objected before.
→F. What should we conclude from all this?
1. Since political unity and fusion are both at a low level, it cannot be said that questions of program, stategy and tactics, or other aspects of political line are for the most part decided.

2. Without a higher level of unity, developed out of widespread ideological struggle and summaries of practical work in the light of scientifically testing various political lines and strategic and tactical plans, we cannot consider lines of demarcation between ML and revisionism and opportunism to be drawn (again, with the exception of those being drawn internationally, like 3WT).
3. Therefore, any binary process (You're either with us or against us) like MLOC's plan is premature and shallow at best.

V. How to set up wide-spread ideological struggle

We are talking with other organizations in our area and corresponding with others further away about just this question, and we should be able to deepen the multi-lateral discussions ~~that have begun fairly soon~~. We have put forward in local talks recently that principles of unity would be premature at this time, but that we should be guided by our "Principles Guiding Relations Between Organizations"* or something similar. These discussions should lead, eventually, to setting up a nation-wide forum for debate of the main ideological questions and the exchange of practical summaries.

A. Publications (suggested for some time in the future)
   1. Theoretical journal containing polemics, study guides and summaries, and other points of ideological struggle. Space and rights of rebuttal should be extended to all participants, a la Iskra. Widest possible distribution.
   2. Internal newsletter, something like the CLP Organizer, containing mainly sum-ups and reports on practical work. Limited distribution (i.e., only individuals and groups participating in multi-lateral discussions ~~and exchanges~~; not for sale in bookstores, etc. idea: to familiarize cadre with other organizations and their work).
   c. The NCC Bulletin was not a bad form for a certain period. There were two sets of mistakes connected with it:
      (1) Opportunist, bureaucratic centralist leadership; closing down of debate and struggle instead of opening it up; unprincipled expulsions, etc.
      (2) Failure of many groups and individuals (including us) to correspond, to try to struggle for correct line in the columns of the Bulletin.

B. Joint Practical Work

Political unity, statements of principles, a party program, are all necessary but not sufficient if we are to avoid endless repetitions of our past errors.

   1. We should set up joint practical work wherever possible, and sum it up while it's still fresh. Bway provides us with one negative example; hopefully GM will provide us with a positive one. We should also draw whatever lessons we can from the shipyards and from our friends at Cat. Cadre involved in joint work will be able to familiarize themselves not only with different lines, but also styles of work and ability to carry out line in various situations.
   2. In addition to talks, forums, publications, etc., what should develop out of the talks and developing unity between several organizations is a "clearinghouse for reports," which the groups

should strive to develop for each other on a regular, say monthly, basis. These reports need not be long and detailed; the machinery of getting the reports written and distributed is almost as important as the content. But wouldn't it be fantastic to have reports in your hand right now on the progress and set backs in Chicago (or whereever) for the month of August?

3. As unity develops, it might be desirable to transfer a few cadre between different areas.
   a. This would deepen political unity and make it possible to share practical lessons in a more realistic and living way than just the proposed reports.
   b. A number of cadre want to leave this area. This doesn't mean we should all leave, especially not all at once. Also, fairly developed work should not be liquidated without compelling reasons. Moves out of the area should be determined based on investigation of the old and new situations and on political understanding on the part of the cadre involved.
   c. Refer to part I of this draft for CLP's policy on transferring cadre.
   d. This all points to our need to develop a correct and decent cadre policy in terms of assignments, overload, placement (industry and geographical area), developing proletarian leadership, and using to the fullest our people's talents and desire to make revolution.
   e. /the other voice notes: our current problems with overload should suggest to comrades how easy it is to say what the problem is and how hard it is to correct it/

Comrades, learn from our mistakes!

Be bold in criticism and self-criticism!

Dare to struggle!

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* Principles Guiding Relations Between Organizations

Mutual desire to advance the struggle to build a genuine communist party in the US

Mutual respect and principled struggle: unity-struggle-unity should characterize discussions; criticism and self-criticism is the method for resolving ~~difficulties~~ contradictions

MB → Equality between organizations: neither to set its own interests above that of the other; no political privileges

Open discussion, exchange of political line, summation of joint work

Confidentiality should be respected: neither to present views of the other unless they are public positions or it is agree to beforehand.