

WHY WE WERE EXCLUDED FROM THE BAY AREA REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON RACISM AND NATIONAL OPPRESSION

We are a grouping of ten people, individuals from the Bay Area Socialist Organizing Committee (BASOC), the Independent Study Project on the History of the International Communist Movement, Inkworks Printing Collective, and independents, who were excluded from the November Bay Area Regional Conference on Racism and National Oppression. The organizers of the regional conference, who were Line of March/rectification forces, also refused to distribute before the conference our entire written critique ("Critique of the Conference on Racism and National Oppression") of the "working papers" of the conference.

We are issuing this statement because LOM's exclusionary tactics, even if they occur at a local conference, hold back the political struggle over the critical question of how to build a revolutionary anti-racist movement in this country. Their exclusionary tactics also objectively retard the development of the communist movement's struggle over political line on this question.

To give others an accurate understanding of what happened here in the Bay Area, we will briefly review the history of our relationship to the national and regional conferences. Then we will draw out the political significance of LOM's exclusionary tactics at the conference.

All of us who were excluded from the regional conference had attended the May national conference as either representatives of our respective organizations or as individuals. At that time we had criticisms of how the conference was being organized and the political lines exhibited in the "working papers." (Those criticisms have been further expanded upon in our written critique.) We met prior to the national conference as a group, but we did not enter the conference as a "faction" as LOM has suggested. Suffice it to say here that several people in our grouping came under sharp attack during the conference. When we raised our criticisms in a principled manner in the final summation session of the conference, members of our group suffered personal attacks for their "body language" and not too thinly veiled accusations of racism.

After the national conference, our grouping met regularly to collectively produce our written critique. We informed the National Steering Committee (NSC) of the conference that we would consider meeting with them to discuss our mutual criticisms after we had completed our written critique since that would provide a more solid basis for discussing our political differences.

Before our paper was completed, we received a letter, dated October 7, 1981, from the Regional Steering Committee (RSC), which was organizing the Bay Area regional conference, that comrades in our grouping would not be invited to the regional conference because we (1) had refused to meet with the NSC and (2) had walked out of the national conference. Both of these allegations are not true. But we were told we could go to the conference if we met with the RSC. At our meeting with the RSC, they informed us that we would then have to meet with the NSC two days before the conference.

We met with the NSC two days before the conference. The NSC informed us that we were "principally responsible" for bringing the conference "to the brink of disaster" and that we would have to be "accountable" to them in the future. We informed them that we would not accept principal responsibility for what happened at the last conference, and that we would not unconditionally subordinate ourselves to their center. We repeatedly encouraged them to raise their political criticisms of us since we obviously would not agree with their summation of the conference. Under what they consider "political criticisms," they attacked one member of our group for her "body language" in a workshop at the national conference where LOM had consciously targeted her. We informed the NSC that we would not tolerate such unprincipled personal attacks and that the meeting was over because of their sectarian antics. They have since used this, our alleged refusal to "take responsibility" and listen to their "political criticisms", as a justification for excluding us and our political line from the conference. We actually think this meeting was just a set up to provide them with the bureaucratic rationale to exclude us.

We believe they intended to exclude us because they had already refused to distribute our entire paper before the conference. We had offered to make a sufficient number of our paper available to them for distribution before the conference which would raise the level of political struggle at the conference itself. They rejected our offer because they refused to distribute or pay for the first two parts of our paper. (Our paper was divided into three sections. The first part was an introduction to ourselves and to the paper itself. The second part raised "process" criticisms of how the national conference had been organized, and the third presented our political critique of their line on racism and the national question.) We informed them that we would not allow them to suppress any parts of our paper since the three sections formed an interrelated whole even though they dealt with different questions. They ended up not distributing any part of the paper before the conference.

We had been willing to participate in the regional conference, not to raise our "process" criticisms of how either conference had been organized, but because we had hoped there could be an open and principled struggle over our political differences. In fact, our paper had been written closely following the "working papers" so a political debate could easily be organized. We were willing to participate because we recognized that these conferences, even with all their problems, were an advance over previous "trend" conferences and because of the critical importance of this question to the communist movement.

But the LOM forces consciously excluded us from the regional conference and suppressed our paper prior to the conference. Instead of having an open and principled political struggle over our differences, they utilized bureaucratic maneuvering to exclude our political critique of their line. We think there are much deeper reasons for their excluding us, which makes this such a serious political question. We believe they are trying to isolate us because of our party building differences and because they wanted to suppress our political critique of their line on racism and national oppression.

We believe that this issue, how political struggle should be organized within the communist movement, is itself a political question which must be properly dealt with if our movement is going to continue to advance. Although we would agree that struggle over political line differences may be more important than "process" criticisms, it is impossible to have a full political struggle if at supposedly "trend-wide" conferences other political tendencies within the "trend" are excluded from participating and their papers suppressed. We believe that LOM's bureaucratic maneuvering actually held back the political struggle within the communist movement because of their adoption of bourgeois, rather than communist, methods of struggle.

We hope that at future conferences there will be an opportunity for much fuller and productive political struggle and that our critique of the conference "working papers" will be seriously discussed and debated. Copies of our critique are available from: Boxholder, P.O. Box 3112, Oakland, CA 94609; for \$2.00 per copy and 75¢ postage.

--Comrades in the Bay Area
November 24, 1981