

March 31, 1981

Dear Comrade,

We are pleased to invite you to the Conference on Racism and National Oppression being held Memorial Day weekend (May 22-25) in the Bay Area.

We have had a very favorable response to the Call and are excited about the potential of the conference to bring together many experienced comrades from our trend nationally to take up important questions related to the struggle against racism and national oppression.

It is clearly an important step forward to bring together the broad forces of our trend to begin to forge more common understanding of the theoretical, political, and ideological issues we face in advancing the anti-racist struggle in society as well as among communists.

The general importance of the conference is further highlighted by its particular significance in light of the recent experiences and controversy within our trend - specifically those surrounding the OCIC campaign against white chauvinism.

As communists we share a commitment to the centrality of the struggle against racism; yet we clearly have far to go in gaining clarity and unity over the precise nature of this struggle. We hope this conference will contribute to advancing our progress in this regard.

The content of the conference will focus on: (1) the character of racism in US society and the significance of the anti-racist struggle to the US revolution, (2) the struggle against racism in the communist movement, historically and currently, and (3) particular political and theoretical questions bound up with understanding racism and national oppression. These topics will be addressed in three working papers, written by the Conference Committee. The papers will be circulated to all invitees for preparation prior to the conference and then discussed in plenary and workshop sessions at the conference.

We are also planning several panel discussions on some of the various analyses current within our trend of particular questions such as Black, Mexican/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, and Asian peoples within US society.

To achieve the theoretical and political goals of the conference, we are striving for the maximum breadth of participation, both in terms of the various forces in our trend as well as assuring the nationwide character of the conference.

At the same time, there are serious logistical and geographical constraints we face in achieving this. Due to political and logistical complexity, we are necessarily limiting the number of invitations to 150. In addition to our general goal of achieving delegations from different local areas which represent the breadth of our trend, we have used the following considerations in determining invitations:

- involving leading activists from the anti-racist struggle and the party building movement.
- involving the minority activists in our trend.
- having representatives from major groups in the trend.

As the conference will be held in the Bay Area there will be an imbalance in the number of participants from the Bay Area and other Western cities in relation to the remainder of the country. Recognizing this, we are making special attempts to encourage participation of the conference by comrades from the East, Midwest, and South. Unfortunately, it is beyond our capacity to defray transportation costs, and we are aware that this places an additional burden on comrades from far distances. However this burden should not fall solely on individuals, but should be seen as a collective responsibility of the trend in the respective areas to assist in raising the necessary funds.

We plan that through various forms of report-back following the conference, comrades who are unable to attend can share in the content, lessons, and discussions of the conference.

In order to proceed with the conference preparation, it is important that you RSVP by April 15 whether or not you plan to attend (see enclosed form). We are asking a registration fee \$15 to cover expenses.

We hope to actively work with you in preparing for the conference and making it a political success.

Conference Committee



# Call for a Conference on Racism and National Oppression

In calling for a trend-wide Conference on Racism and National Oppression it is appropriate for us to begin by placing before the movement our purpose and general political orientation.

Racism and national oppression profoundly pervade and shape the political life of the U.S. Undeniably there is a racist economics and politics of color in this country. It can be witnessed, on the one hand, by the lily white character of the ruling class, and on the other by the conspicuous color of the country's unemployment lines and ghettos. Class and race in the U.S. are profoundly and inextricably intertwined. This phenomenon is thrown into sharper relief especially at this time when U.S. imperialism is in the throes of one of its endemic and periodic crises.

These material conditions of inequality and oppression are reflected and justified in racist ideology and national chauvinism. In turn, racism becomes a material force in itself, working back upon and shaping the economic, political and ideological aspects of social life in the U.S. While it basically serves the immediate and long range interests of the capitalist ruling class, it nonetheless thoroughly penetrates the working class. In this sense, racism cannot be simplistically reduced to a plot by the ruling class to divide workers. Surely it is no exaggeration to assert that racism and national chauvinism within the working class are the major obstacles toward achieving revolutionary class consciousness. Consequently, winning the working class to the determined struggle against racism and national oppression is central to forging a revolutionary formation within the U.S.

The communists have recognized the centrality of this particular problem, more or less, for the last 50 years, and have seen the need to take up the numerous practical and theoretical questions bound up with racism and the struggle against it. Unfortunately, taking the period as a whole, the communist movement has failed to seize the commanding heights of the struggle, either practically or theoretically. Although at different periods and in particular mass struggles communists have been in the lead, the dominant line of the anti-racist struggle remains reformist and the leadership petty bourgeois. Theoretically, communists have often inadvertently conciliated the bourgeois and metaphysical obscurantism which envelops this question, contributing to the muddle imprecise, shifting, and contradictory formulations such as nations "of a new type," internal colonies, etc. Rather than bringing forth a unified and penetrating Marxist analysis of racism and national oppression, confusion reigns within communist ranks characterized by widely divergent, contradictory, and oftentimes outlandish lines. Certainly, one of the major signals of the development and maturation of the U.S. communist movement will be the extent to which this legacy is reversed and a leading Marxist-Leninist analysis and practice gains influence.

Unfortunately, although the demands upon us are great, the communists are poorly equipped to take the lead. At present, the movement is conspicuously fragmented and disoriented, saddled with a tradition of reformism and tailism bequeathed by the revisionists, as well as the isolating, voluntarist antics and sterile dogmatism associated with the ultra-left sects. The Marxist-Leninist trend in the U.S. today must fight hard to



survive, grow and consolidate itself. Our trend is still fragile, young and relatively inexperienced. Yet, it can grow and mature only in the process of confronting the communist tasks before us as well as those tasks presented by the class struggle itself.

In this light, the struggle against racism and national oppression, both society-wide and internal to the communist movement, takes on particular significance. Concerning the mass struggle, our trend traces many of its roots to the revolutionary impulse of the mass civil rights and anti-racist struggles of the 60s and early 70s. Collectively and individually there has been a substantial amount of experience accumulated both in the practical and theoretical aspects of the struggle. In recent years, as a self-conscious trend distinct from the ultra-leftists, we have attempted to impact and lead various anti-racist struggles involved with the issues of affirmative action, police brutality, the KKK, etc., on a nation-wide as well as a local level. However, in spite of these gains, the practice remains by and large scattered, unsynthesized and unsynthesized.

Concerning the struggle against racism within the communist ranks, our trend has lagged behind more conspicuously in taking it up in a systematic and timely fashion. Unfortunately, the most highlighted efforts in taking up these questions associated with racism have been the ill-conceived and ill-fated initiatives associated with the OCIC over the past two years. This has proven to be a big disappointment and the source of some disillusionment to many. The planning and mobilization of the OCIC-sponsored Minority Conference was marred by sectarianism from beginning to end, and the content of the theoretical work produced was sloppy and confusing. This was to be surpassed by the current, on-going OCIC internal "Campaign Against White Chauvinism" intended to cleanse its ranks of racism. Again, we witness that the theoretical and political foundations of this campaign are incorrect, reducing racism to an attitudinal malady among white activists. This in turn sets the basis for the unrestricted use of demagoguery and intimidation passing itself off as anti-racist militance. Rather than uniting the trend and clarifying the nature and importance of the struggle against racism, the net result of these OCIC campaigns has been to further spread confusion and disunity within our ranks.

Surely we agree that there is no invisible shield which protects the left from the noxious influence of racist ideology and practices. In fact, racism among communists is more subtle and in many ways more insidious, negatively affecting the recruitment, development and participation of minority cadre within the communist ranks. The perpetuation of such racism only serves to reproduce a form of segregation within the revolutionary movement which in turn weakens the whole movement and cripples its capacity to take the lead in the broader struggle against racism in society and in the class struggle generally. Attempts to blur the possibility of the emergence of racism within the revolutionary movement are seen in the logic that "communists can't be racists because they are communists." This fails to recognize the fact that racism is reproduced spontaneously with dynamics of its own within the movement. On the other hand, there are important differences. Racism within the communist sector of society does not take the same form as in the broader society. As distinct from broader society, revolutionaries have the political basis to understand more fully the material roots and ideological function of racism and national oppression in propping up U.S. capitalism. And therefore, more than any other sector of the population, communists have the



ideological basis to make the firm commitment to the struggle to overcome any manifestation of racism within their own ranks. In handling the contradictions of racism among communists, this distinction from racism in broader society must be firmly grasped. Failure to do so has always resulted in creating havoc within the ranks, while accomplishing little in the actual elimination of racist attitudes and practices. The present OCIC campaign against white chauvinism is a vivid negative example of this point. In our opinion, the communist movement—our trend in particular—can ill afford a serious mishandling of this crucial question and struggle.

The need for us to all-sidedly address the problem of racism is quite pressing. As the world-wide crisis of imperialism deepens, the ruling class attacks upon the working class are mounting conspicuously. In the U.S., these attacks are inextricably bound up with the rise of racism and national chauvinism—from the open violent attacks of the KKK, to the more sophisticated controversies over reverse discrimination and busing, to the INS raids and harassment of immigrants from Latin America and Asia—the 1980s promises to be a decade of sharp anti-racist struggle.

For all these reasons, we have taken it upon ourselves to call for a trend-wide Conference on Racism and National Oppression. In taking this initiative we are hopeful that the Conference will serve to advance our trend's understanding, practice and unity around the issues of racism and national oppression, both as applied to the whole society, as well as within the ranks of communists.

The preliminary plans thus far are as follows:

1) The planning and organizing of the Conference will be taken up by the Conference Committee. The Committee is drawn from activists within the anti-revisionist, anti-left opportunist trend who have been involved in the anti-racist struggle, both practical and theoretical aspects, both within the mass movement and the communist movement. In addition, the Conference Committee is collectively critical of the orientation, approach and line which has characterized the OCIC initiatives in this area.

2) The general content of the Conference will concentrate on: (a) an analysis of the roots and functioning of racism within U.S. society and the significance of the anti-racist struggle for the U.S. revolution; (b) an analysis of the phenomena of racism within the communist movement, the history of how it has been handled and mishandled, and the lessons and questions before us presently; (c) in addition, a number of more particular political and theoretical questions bound up with racism and national oppression will be taken up. This will include discussion of some of the various analyses within Marxist circles concerning the situation facing the Black, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Native American peoples within U.S. society.

3) The Conference format will attempt to utilize a combination of working papers (circulated among the participants prior to the Conference), presentations, and panel discussions (delivered at the Conference itself). Collective discussion will be organized both within workshops as well as in plenary sessions.

4) The Conference will be open to activists who fall within the broad contours of the anti-revisionist, anti-left opportunist trend. Due to financial and logistical limitations, participation will be by invitation. However, the Conference Committee will attempt the broadest and most representative expression of our trend (including



OCIC forces) with a particular stress on the participation of minority activists.

5) The Conference will be held in early Summer 1981, either in the Bay Area or New York.

6) Within the next few months we expect to particularize the agenda, format and logistics of the Conference. More details will be available by the early part of 1981.

### San Francisco Bay Area

Linda Burnham  
Attieno Davis  
Eileen Eya  
Phil Hutchings  
Belvin Louie  
Nobuo Nishi  
Bruce Occena  
Margo Sercarz  
Kathi Tactacquin

### Los Angeles

Michael Downing  
Danny Estrada  
Florante Ibanez  
Cyrus Keller  
Dan Lund  
Laurie Mayeno  
Jeff Schatz  
Karen Bass  
Jaime Geaga

### Midwest

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Sharon Rose

### New York

Frances Beale  
Phil Gardiner  
April Hopkins  
Ray Otake  
Bob Wing

### Seattle

Mike Kozu  
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### Washington D.C.

James Early  
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