

# THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LOCAL CENTER EXPERIENCE

## A BEGINNING ANALYSIS

### FROM THE "MINORITY" PERSPECTIVE

This is a beginning analysis and initial statement of a substantial minority within the Southern California Local Center (SCLC) on the theory and implementation of the Local Center concept in our region.

We uphold the essence of the present Draft Proposal and the concept of local centers as a form to build a non-sectarian leading ideological center. However, we see certain dangers arising from the experience of the SCLC locally, and we are gravely concerned that they may arise nationally as the Local Center conception is implemented elsewhere.

It is critical, therefore, that we view the Local Center experience in an all sided manner and draw from it the fullest lessons possible. From a full understanding of the nature of the errors, as well as the strengths of the SCLC, will emerge a clearer and deeper understanding of the implications of the Local Center process. The aspects of the local center experience which we feel have been most poorly summed up deal with the relationship of individuals to the LC, of local organizations to the LC, "center out" concept, the relationship of national to local, and questions on the nature of leadership.

We do not think that the steering committee of the SCLC has fully understood the experience with which it has been so intensely involved, nor many of the errors which were made along the way. We feel that it is our responsibility to express our concerns and to raise some of the questions that must be addressed in order to make a full summation.

#### CONCRETE CONDITIONS

In order to discuss the LC in general, it is necessary to describe the LC and the context within which it functioned.

Los Angeles is a city of over 2.5 million in a metropolitan area of about 10 million people. Orange County is within the metropolitan area, but about 35 miles from L.A. L.A. has large concentrations of heavy industry, Orange County is

a large and growing center for light industry.

We have in Orange County a small cadre organization that has in the past 16 months begun to establish itself in a democratic-centralist form. This organization is called Socialist Organizing Committee (SOC) and has existed in Orange County in an extremely hostile political environment for the past 3 years; in a place where no national communist organization has been able to establish a presence. Why has SOC been able to survive and develop? From its inception SOC has been guided by two fundamental bases of unity:

1. It has always recognized the need to build a base in the working class in Orange County. It is in fundamental unity with the line that fusion of the Communist movement and the workers movement is the essence of party building.
2. It has always struggled against a localist small circle spirit. Since its break out of NAM, SOC has continuously reached outside itself for other Marxist Leninist contacts in Orange County, California, the West Coast, and throughout the country. It always recognized that a small organization isolated from national ties could not survive.

These two basic conceptions led SOC to link up with and then join the OCIC at the earliest stage as was possible.

However, SOC still has no concentrations at point of production work, about half of the membership relates primarily to campus or professional work, and there has been ongoing but limited community work. There is a concentration in a service sector workplace.

In L.A. itself, there is no cadre organization that is an OCIC adherent. A few individuals are carrying on point of production and service sector work in scattered workplaces. But the overwhelming majority of L.A. individuals in the OCIC are engaged primarily in the local center as the only Marxist Leninist group they belong to. From the beginning of SOC's relationship with the L.A. individuals, it was clear both to them and SOC that they should unite with SOC or create their own organization in L.A. Neither has yet occurred although some discussions have occurred and continue.

This points out the curious anomaly that has developed in our locale: less than a handful of people in the whole L.A.--Orange County region are engaged in TU work, while at the same time we have the most "advanced" practice in building a Local Center!

THE LOCAL CENTER STEERING COMMITTEE

The majority of the Local Center Steering committee remain as individuals and represent no-one but themselves on the steering committee. They were essentially an untested, inexperienced and self selected leadership without a base.

As the LC process developed, it became clear that the LC would not only outreach to the tendency but would also take on the responsibility for leading the internal consolidation of local OCIC forces (including SOC) around the 18 points of unity. Questions of the role of individuals and organizations in the OCIC process, and the question of the national leading the local, came into focus--not as points of disagreement in principle, but in the implementation and practical effect of that principle.

We think that there has been an overemphasis on the role of individuals in the building of the Local Center. We think that there was a mechanical attitude towards implementing the plan for Local Centers which emanated from the NSC. And we think there was a lack of understanding of our local conditions (on the part of the NSC and the Local Center Steering Committee) in relation to building the Local Center.

THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE OCIC

We uphold the principle that individuals should participate in the OCIC and local center processes. And we believe that leadership within a LC, like leadership on a national level, should be responsible to its base as well as to the national leadership. We also believe that local leadership should be elected by its local base.

In the SCLC, the steering committee has existed for a full year and yet not one



vote has been cast by the whole membership of the Local Center to elect this leading body. We object to this method of leadership.

We also believe that local organizations, because of their ability to fuse theory with practice, are the backbone of the OCIC at this time. On the basis of the ability of local cadre organizations to win both Marxist Leninist individuals and advanced workers to our party building efforts, rests the success or failure of our present efforts. We do not believe that these ideas represent federationism. We feel that this term has been misapplied in Southern California--a ~~times it has~~ ~~been applied erroneously, and at other times it has, and continues to be overlooked.~~ Political characterizations such as Federationism and Organizational Hegemony, have been used in a careless and indiscriminate manner which has not helped to clarify these matters. In Southern California, with its weak ties to the working class, anyone pushing the idea that we must build our cadre organizations, has been labeled as having federationist ideas and advocating a federationist approach.

We see the Local Centers as the arms of the OCIC. They should be responsible for outreach to the broad tendency and they should contribute to the growth and consolidation of OCIC forces around our developing OCIC line as ratified at our national conferences.

We see these tasks as complementary to each other. Local organizations should contribute to the growth and support of the LC and its work. Cadre should participate in all LC arenas, should attempt to win independent Tendency forces to the LC, and should take up the task of internal consolidation on existing political line and further the development of new line. The LC, on the other hand, should educate its participants on the value of local cadre organizations in this period of our development. The Center should actively encourage LC participants who share political unity with a local cadre organization to explore the possibility of organizational unity with that organization. We think that the value and necessity for cadre organizations in this period of our development should be pointed out as part of the Local Center's work.

We do not hold that Local Centers should be direct recruitment mechanisms for local cadre organizations. We also recognize the historical and continuing reality that many national minority Marxist Leninists find it impossible to join present day majority-white ML cadre organizations at this time. We hope these problems will be overcome in the future. However, these problems are in sharp relief in the Southern California area. A critical analysis of the experience with the SMG must be developed. The SMG was a local organization of national minority Marxist Leninists which initially had a strong affinity for the views of the OCIC, eventually split, with some of the key leaders joining the rectification movement and the other forces remaining in a state of dissolution at the present time. Why was it that not one person from this formation was consolidated within the OCIC? We think that this entire experience demands a most thorough investigation by the OCIC. We suggest that one of the important contributing factors was the artificial separation of theory and practice within this entire political process. We will be evaluated by national minority cadre not only on our theoretical principles but also by our practice in the class especially in relation to the anti-racist struggle.

For these reasons, and others, we think that it is necessary to maintain that cadre organizations have an important role in the party building movement. What we fear if we do not explicitly uphold the value and necessity for local cadre organizations is that we will fall into the trap of "unite Marxist Leninists now, fuse with the class later", by default. When in the name of "national leading the local" we have organizations that do not build deeper bases within the class and develop concentrations and mass practice, but instead devote large amounts of energy to national questions and extended struggle with forces outside the OCIC, we end up with unbalanced rather than all-sided organizations.

Furthermore, we believe that a line that one-sidedly promotes individuals, will lead to a weakening of a basic premise of the OCIC--that it is necessary to have disciplined and systematic ideological struggle. We think that this will occur if there is an encouragement on local or national levels of failure to struggle for organizational unity when political unity is apparent. We therefore think that the national must answer certain questions on the role of the individual and the role of organizations in order to better implement its Local Center policy:



- When is it correct for individuals to remain individuals within the OCIC?
- When should individuals be urged to become members of cadre organizations?
- Is there a danger of promoting individualism and careerism in present conceptions of the role of individuals in the OCIC?
- When members of cadre organizations and individual OCIC members are involved in common practice, what should be their relationship?

We feel that clear distinctions have to be made that define the differences of the OCIC in practice from the NNMLC. If left unchecked, the emphasis of individuals and national work at the expense of any developed line on the importance of organizations could lead to the sectarianism, individualism, and elitism that is implicit in the Network line. If the role of local organizations in the OCIC is not defined and elucidated in terms of its absolute importance in relating practice and theory, its ability to test line and carry on programmatic work, then we will end up with a "unite now, fuse later" perspective.

We uphold the line of the OCIC--we see the IC as the future center for ideological not practical struggle, we uphold the national leading the local, we uphold a "center out" perspective, and support individual participation in the OCIC.

In Southern California, however, we have twice as many people engaged in Local Center work as we have in workplace practice. We believe that we must promote a dialectical relationship between national and local, individuals and organizations, center and base, theory and practice. Without an all-sided understanding and line on these questions, we face a real danger of straying from our goals.

We feel that by necessity there are contradictory aspects to the need to develop stronger cadre organizations and still place building the IC as primary now. We understand that primacy, but we also see the need to address the present contradictions that have emerged between theory and practice. The OCIC is faced with a struggle with contending forces; revisionism, trotskyism, ultra-left dogmatism are represented in competing organizations for the recruitment and winning of cadre, advanced workers, oppressed national minorities, and women. Class contradictions are growing more acute. New forces are looking for leadership and there is a growing consciousness underway. The OCIC must find the correct links in the present changing situation to forge ahead. To make an incorrect decision will cost our new movement serious losses. Let us hope that we can objectively evaluate our practice so that errors become identified and rectified. We feel that the story of the Southern California Local Center experience must be told in an objective and all-sided manner.

We plan to contribute to an effort to create a more all sided sum up of the Southern California Local Center experience and the lessons to be drawn from it.

8/31/79

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