

June 15, 1981

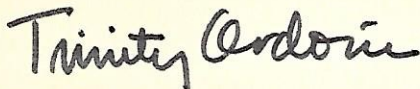
Theoretical Review
P.O. Box 3692
Tucson, AR 85722

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is our response to your letters on the conference held recently in Berkeley on Racism and National Oppression. I am sorry that we did not send you our response last May 22 when it was more appropriate. A copy of your letter (May 11) plus our written response was distributed at the conference, but your copy of our response was not sent, due to an organizational oversight on our part. We did not catch this error until our summation process recently.

Further correspondence to the Steering Committee of the Conference on Racism and National Oppression should be addressed to me at my home address (3368 26th St., San Francisco, CA 94110). Since the national conference is over, our function as a steering committee will be dissolved with the summation which we expect to finish by the early part of July. The working papers will be available through the Line of March Publications which reprinted the papers as they appeared for the May 22nd conference. A foreward from the Steering Committee accompanies the reprint and is self-explanatory. Further line struggle on this question has moved to the regional/city-wide level where conferences like the one held in Berkeley will be duplicated and all forces in the Trend are encouraged to participate.

Sincerely,



Trinity Ordone
for the Steering Committee
Conference on Racism and National Oppression
(May 22-25, 1981)
Berkeley, California

RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT OF THEORETICAL REVIEW CONCERNING THE
CONFERENCE ON RACISM AND NATIONAL OPPRESSION

May 22, 1981

We find the May 11th statement of the Theoretical Review (TR) concerning the intent and content of the Conference on Racism & National Oppression to be ill informed and reckless. The TR has collapsed together its differences with the Line of March (LOM) Board and the work of this Conference Committee. This unfortunately has led them into a sectarian and frontal attack upon this conference, an attack which can only be interpreted as a last-minute attempt to sabotage this conference and throw it into confusion. An attack which we predict will fail miserably to gain either a large or reputable following within this Trend.

There is an objective criteria to determine whether or not this conference represents a further sectarian and opportunist degeneration of our Trend, that is, does it coincide with advancing the overall political interests and development of our trend regardless of the fact that it was initiated by comrades associated with the LOM Board or that rectification forces were numerically superior within the Conference Committee? Against this political criteria, we maintain that our efforts have already vindicated us. The trend wide efforts and process associated with this Conference have constituted a conspicuous step forward for our trend's capacity to take up the struggle against racism and national oppression. In contrast, the TR has placed its own partial interest (in this case, its contention with the LOM/rectification forces) above the interest of the forward motion of our whole Trend crystalized in this Conference.

In order to gain an all-sided appreciation of the significance of this Conference, it must be placed in its concrete historical context. Specifically, the efforts surrounding this Conference have been in response to the confusion and demoralization caused by the OCIC's Campaign Against White Chauvinism. The OC's campaign was principally characterized by its weak political and ideological foundations; its tendency to separate ideological struggle from politics, and its opportunist manipulation of the struggle against racism among communists. In contrast, our committee attempted to develop a comprehensive and advanced line as a starting point to systematize and raise the level of this crucial line struggle within our trend; to take up the struggle against racism among communists in a serious manner devoid of demagogy and manipulation; to regroup and reunite this trend in the process of the Conference preparations, the Conference itself and the report back conferences planned in various cities throughout the country.

Whether or not this in fact was the pressing task before our trend at this juncture; whether or not the initiative and work of our conference committee took up the challenge and began to accomplish it - this is the principal political criteria by which to judge the TR allegations-that this Conference represents merely a sectarian maneuver on the part of the LOM and a further degeneration and splintering of our trend. We remain confident as to the outcome of this judgment.

Concerning the specific charges of the TR:

-We find the TR's equation of this Conference with the earlier OC sponsored Minority Conference to be patently ridiculous. Such an allegation raises serious doubts as to how firm TR's grasp is of the actual developments within our trend associated with this Conference, compared to our previous legacy in terms of the theoretical and political quality of the working papers, the degree and organization of the delegate's preparatory work, the political scope of the mobilization efforts, etc. Consequently, we reject outright this charge of the TR and leave the burden of concrete substantiation to them.

-TR charges that it was sectarian on our part not to have drawn them into drawing up the original call or drawn them into the Conference Committee. We do not deny the fact that TR was not invited into the Conference Committee and we are prepared to explain and defend this decision politically:

On one level it was clear from the beginning that the Conference Committee was based principally in the Bay Area with counterpart groups in LA, NY and Washington D.C. In each area, efforts were made to broaden the committee and make it as representative as possible of trend forces who had substantial experience in the struggle against racism, in terms of theoretical work, mass intervention, controversies within the trend, etc.. in short, the criteria was not simply trend forces who were critical of the OC's Campaign Against White Chauvinism.

In the case of the TR, other than the fact that they are based in Tucson, the geographic contradiction could have been overcome if we had determined that the TR had in some fashion distinguished itself within this trend in the struggle against racism - either through sustained theoretical work or practical work, either prior to its joining the OCIC, while within the OCIC, or subsequent to its leaving the OCIC.

In our opinion, the criteria we used to constitute the Conference Committee was politically justifiable and the fact that the TR did not emerge as an obvious candidate is also understandable. Certainly, the comrades in the TR are free to question the policy we utilized as well as our assessment of their track record in this area, however, they can not simplistically use the fact that we did not draw them into the Conference Committee as sufficient proof of our supposed sectarianism.

In terms of participation in the Conference more generally, in no way has the TR been discriminated against; their invitation and representation was assured from the beginning and never once even questioned or challenged in the Conference Committee. Problems with the late issuing of invitations was a general phenomena, not unique to the TR. In addition forces sympathetic to the political line and party building perspective of the TR in other parts of the country were in no way discriminated against in extending invitations or restricting participation. Any restrictions were part and parcel of the broader contradiction facing the Conference Committee in our attempts to keep the conference below 200 while striving for the broadest range of participation nationwide.

-Implicitly, the TR criticism also equates with sectarianism our decision to organize the work of the conference around the collective scrutiny and struggle over one coherent line presented by the Conference Committee, as opposed to organizing a "presentation of various points of view" on racism which exists within the trend. We consider this to be an appeal on the part of the TR to some of the most ultra-democratic prejudices within our trend.

We recognize that there are times when it may be appropriate to organize such a conference around the presentation and juxtaposition of various points of view. However, we also challenge the TR implication that failure to organize a conference upon this basis provides sufficient proof in itself of sectarianism, inherently equated to suppression of differing opinions, etc. Given the scattered and low theoretical level of our Trend, on the question of racism and national oppression, the Conference Committee set out from its inception to develop the most comprehensive and advanced line we were collectively capable of at this time and to organize the Conference in discussion and struggle over this point of view. Our intentions were made clear in a straight forward fashion months ago when the call was issued. We defend this method of organizing the conference as a legitimate one and in hindsight we still defend the decision to have proceeded this way as politically the most effective.

Again, TR is free to raise doubts about the wisdom of our decision to organize the conference around one set of working papers. But this fact alone can not constitute sufficient proof for its charges of sectarianism and manipulation. In our opinion, the TR must substantiate further that differing opinions were actually suppressed in the course of preparation work or that the conference agenda was manipulated to discourage line struggle and merely rubber stamp the working papers. The burden of proof also still rests heavily upon the TR.

-We reject TR's ill informed charge that the center of gravity for the Conference working papers and proceedings resided in the LOM Editorial Board and not within the Conference Committee. The individual members of our committee have been identified from the inception of this project; the overlap with the LOM Board has been obvious to the whole trend and was neither evaded nor denied for a moment. However, in addition, our committee has conspicuously overlapped with the Racism and National Question Study Project as well as forces associated with leading opposition to the OCIC sponsored Minority Conference and Campaign Against White Chauvinism - a point the TR fails to note. We maintain that all of these intersections had a bearing on the work and synthesis of the conference working papers and proceedings. It is noteworthy that the TR is unable to substantiate concretely its allegations about LOM domination and manipulation and will be forced to rely on the worst sort of anti-communist prejudices to sustain an audience.

-On another level, the TR charges that the failure of our committee to get the working papers to delegates earlier constitutes proof of a sectarian attempt to prevent broader participation at the Conference. While we are self-critical that the working papers were late and did present an obstacle in the fuller preparation of delegates, we contend that the shortcoming was not in the main qualitative, and more importantly, it was certainly not a petty maneuver to shortcircuit political discussion and struggle at the Conference.

In conclusion, blinded by its sharpening contradictions with the LOM, the TR has objectively taken an obstructionist posture towards the Conference. From the time that the Conference call was issued to the release of their public broadside attack on the Conference, there were no attempts on the part of the TR to directly communicate their concerns or criticisms or in any fashion open up direct struggle with our committee. Instead, the TR chose to issue sweeping and unsubstantiated charges concerning the Conference, refused to participate and in essence, called for a boycott.

Where does the sectarianism lie? It is our opinion that the efforts surrounding this Conference, despite its shortcomings and the mistakes of our committee, represent a significant step forward for our whole trend. It has begun to reverse the disintegrating and degenerating impact which the OCIC's Campaign Against White Chauvinism has wrought upon our trend, and it has taken a major step forward in focusing and systematizing the struggle for an advanced line on racism and national oppression as well as a correct perspective on the struggle against racism within our ranks. We maintain that whatever political differences and struggles remain within our trend on these matters, they should be placed in the context of the overall advance marked by the Conference - to fail to do so constitutes, in our opinion, a sectarian error.

Our criticism of TR's sectarian practice is in this specific historical context when the primary task facing our Trend is to make more strenuous efforts to reorient and regroup ourselves and take up once again the struggle against racism. The fact that the TR has failed to display therefore, either the deter-

mination or capacity to take up the challenge at this critical juncture in the development of our trend, is noteworthy in itself. However, for the TR to issue such an unsubstantiated frontal attack upon this Conference and attempt to obstruct and disorient it, constitutes a serious sectarian error which runs counter to the long term interests of our whole trend.

Steering Committee

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Bob Wing

Conference on Racism and National Oppression