

RESPONSE TO WESTERN REGIONAL CENTER PROPOSAL AND A
BEGINNING PROPOSAL FOR A CONFERENCE ON LOCAL CENTERS

Our specific assignment was to come up with a proposal for a conference on local centers. We found that we couldn't get very far on the proposal without grappling with D.F.'s recent call for building a Western Regional Center (see "Proposal for Building a Regional Center in the West; And for a Conference on Building Local Centers" 12/15/79)* We've found it necessary to respond to the proposal because we understand the need to place the Local Center Conference (LCC) in the context of developing our overall regional work, and because we disagree with the context the LCC has been placed in---as a first step in creating a Western Regional Center. (WRC)

Critique of the WRC Proposal

We want to begin by commending DF's role in developing regional work so far. The political leadership that he provided at the last regional meeting was exemplary. We also want to support his understanding of the importance and potential of regional work. We agree that more centralized regional work can move forward the work of the OCIC significantly. We understand that it can serve in 1) consolidating OC forces and the tendency at large on ideological issues 2) mobilizing OC forces around a national plan of work 3) combating localism 4) aiding the development of local centers 5) taking up tasks which a specific impact for the west coast eg: the struggle with the rectification forces, 6) improving communications and feedback between national leadership and the base 6) identifying and developing leadership.

~~While we support strengthening our regional work, we object to creating a Western Regional Center as an immediate priority. We think it's an error to push for the development of a WRC without first taking into consideration the importance of developing a general national perspective on regional centers, and investigating the needs and resources for such a project in the western region. Further, we think implementing the proposal in this period will cut against the development of local centers. We believe that local centers should be the top organizational priority of the western region.~~

*We've only just received M.G.'s proposal, so we won't be able to respond to it specifically now. Rather we'll address the question of building a Western Regional Center in this period generally. M.G., we commend you for getting your draft out in such good time

The proposal calls for the Local Center Conference as the first step in forging a regional center. We think that this is a spontaneous and pragmatic approach. The proposal does not state how this conference will serve as the first step, but what ever the rationalization we think this is an incorrect first step. We think the first step in building the WRC must be the development of a national perspective on the strategic role that regional centers will play in our overall party building approach. We need a general conception of regional centers which outlines their political character, their organizational functions and their relationship to other key organizational forms (esp. to local centers). The NSC and the SCALC SC have summed up for the OC as a whole their error in not having understood the strategic role of local centers in the beginning of their work (see P.F.'S and I.M.'s presentations at the national conference and P.F.'S and D.F.'s report on SCALC). Let's not make the same mistake with regional centers. Let's employ the principle "from the center out" and call on the local center task force of the NSC to develop a strategic perspective on regional centers. This will necessitate an analysis of existing regional centers. How are they distinct from local centers? Do they tend to substitute for local centers? It will necessitate addressing what priority the NSC places on the development of regional centers in its national plan of work. The NSC will need to assess the role that regional centers should play in developing secondary political leadership in the OCIC. We can surely aid the NSC in this work. But our efforts towards building a regional center must avoid empiricism and localism, respecting the importance of general national guidance.

We think that another important step in developing a regional center must be an ongoing investigation of the needs and resources of the region. This investigation is of course not a passive effort and will in large part be accomplished by taking up regional work itself. The proposal does not address why a Western Regional Center best meets the needs of the western region now. We think many of the functions proposed for the regional center can best be taken up in this period by less ambitious and energy consuming forms. For example regional meetings with consistent representation can effectively take up strategic and tactical questions of the region, conduct some interchange between locales, organize conferences, and provide an arena for communication between the NSC and the base. Other functions proposed for the WRC such as establishing a regional Steering Committee and creating another OC wide membership body seem premature in this period.

We believe that in this period building local centers should be out top organizational priority in the region. We think that putting a priority on building a WRC will cut against our ability ~~and weaken our efforts~~ to build and consolidate local centers. The NSC has put on its national plan of work the goal of building five local centers nationally. We have the potential to build and

strengthen five local centers in the west alone. There are currently two local centers with some leading experience in Seattle and So. California, another in the process of being organized in the Bay Area and the possibility of building centers in the longer run in Portland and Eugene. But the next nine to twelve month period will be crucial. We think that the idea that we can build both local centers and a regional center simultaneously, with the same emphasis on each is idealistic. We have to prioritize one way or another. Are developing local centers primary or is building a WRC primary? Once we decide, the secondary form will have to be built in a way and at a pace that best contributes to the primary form.

The main political priorities of the OCIC for the next year are clear and on the agenda for each locale. OC forces must consolidate themselves around the draft plan for an IC, the 18 points, the struggle against racism and the struggle against federationism. OC forces must struggle to deepen and in many cases develop their leading role in the tendency. Local centers are the strongest forms for taking up these strategic tasks and the only form through which members can participate in the OCIC on a day to day basis. Organizationally they insure democracy in taking up ideological education ~~and~~, struggle, and line development. It is for these reasons that local centers and the efforts to build them are strategic in character.

We think that the idea that building both forms at the same time is the best way to build each is also idealistic. There is no question that regional work will be necessary to develop local centers in the five locales. But we think that they can best be built at this point through regional meetings, a conference, and sharing advanced experience through written sumups and "trouble shooting"**. On the other hand the development of local centers will help lay the basis for the development of a WRC. It is through the ideological consolidation of present forces and the efforts to draw in other forces now outside the OC that we will build the basis for developing and selecting true regional leadership.

It is for these reasons that we think we should not over-extend ourselves organizationally and that we should make local centers our top organizational priority in the region. While developing a WRC is premature in this period, we strongly consider the possibility of one in the future. Meanwhile we see the importance of developing regional work on a more limited basis. We recommend regional meetings for the functions listed on page 2.4, written exchanges which share and sumup experiences of different locales, "Trouble shooting", and conferences that take up general ideological issues for all OC members in the region. We think

**"Trouble shooting--where comrades from more advanced locales are sent to other locales for short period to help develop the work.

that the regional meetings will be adequate for the immediate period in helping D.F. guide regional development. We would like to recommend that an assistant from our region be provided to assist him with his national responsibilities as educational director.

The Local Center Conference (LCC) and the Region

We think that it is possible to have only two conferences in the region a year. ~~We think that it's idealistic to think that we have the political resources, time, or money to have four conferences a year.~~ To demonstrate the point, the Seattle Local Center plans to meet only four times a year in their locale. How could they also meet four times a year in the region? Because we see the possibility of only developing two conferences a year, the question of why the LCC should come first becomes more important. If it comes first, it means that we will have to take up other issues like the draft plan for an IC, racism, and ultra-leftism later or in other forms.

We do not think that the purpose of the LCC should be ~~as~~ as the first step in the formation of the WRC, or as a direct link for developing future leadership.

We think that the LCC should be our first regional conference for the following reasons:

1. The strategic importance of building local centers in order to consolidate our forces around the draft plan for the IC, racism, the 18 points, and ultra-leftism. Their importance in drawing the tendency into effort to build IC. Their potential for contributing to national theoretical work.
2. The concrete potential in our region for developing local centers and subsequently the immediate need for consolidation of all OC members in the region on their strategic importance
3. The close connection between the OC's line of forging a single ideological center and the conception of local centers: i.e. the primacy of ideological work, their importance in building the party spirit and in combatting federationism
4. Their role in fighting racism in the party building movement both by their ability to consolidate forces theoretically on the struggle against racism and by their potential for drawing in national minority comrades.
5. We're prepared to take it up. Important lead work has been done by the NSC through their presentation at the national conference,

their paper "Forging the Party Spirit" and their recent packet on local centers including the report on the SCALC. The OC has not yet had a broad discussion of local centers because we were unable to have it at last national conference. We have advanced experience in the region. We have a good opportunity for ideological struggle with the presence of minority views on local centers in several locales.

6. This would be an effective conference for observers from the tendency to attend because of its close connection to the draft plan and its specific task of summing up the battle against federationism.

Some of us felt that it was important to look at the whole year regarding conferences in the region in order to place this conference in the context of our other goals. As we stated earlier we think it will be possible to organize and prepare for only two regional conferences this year. Two of us feel strongly that we should look to the second conference to be on racism. We think that this is the single most important issue on our agenda to take up as a region. Through a regional conference we would be able to benefit from the breadth of knowledge and experience available in the region. The conference could be a forum for both addressing the theoretical underpinnings of racism and its history in the party building movement, as well as a summation of our own racist errors and our efforts to combat racism. By putting this conference second on the agenda for conferences this year, we will allow ourselves time to sufficiently prepare for it. By then the NSC task force should have given us both theoretical guidance on the question and summation of practical application in the OC. Different locales will have had time to study and discuss racism through the 18 points study and specific materials and should be able to sum up their own experience.

We think that interim work on the draft plan for IC can best take place in the locales through local centers and local center processes. We think both the work of critiquing the plan and consolidating our forces around it; and drawing the tendency into discussion and struggle around it can ~~best take place~~ ^{take place} ~~effectively~~ ^{effectively} in ongoing smaller forums ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ in the locales. The general ideological underpinnings of the draft plan will be discussed at the LCC. Note: Others among us felt that we could not extend our perspective on conferences beyond the LCC because we did not yet know the NSC's plans for taking up the draft plan.

Beginning Proposal for a Local Center Conference

Purpose: The purpose of the LCC would be to consolidate the region's rank and file on the OC's line and the strategic importance of local centers in implementing it. We have found through our

experience in the SCALC that political consolidation of the base is crucial in building a local center. Therefore the LCC should not focus on "nuts and bolts" organizational guidelines but primarily on ideological consolidation which will then allow the organizational consolidation of local centers to proceed. We think that the "how to" work can best be done through regional meetings, summations and "trouble shooting" and that generally regional conferences should focus on ideological education and struggle. The title of the conference should probably be something like "The OCIC perspective and the Conception of Local Centers".

The Planning Committee:

At the next regional meeting the core of the planning committee should be selected. The core ~~of~~ the planning committee should then be expanded to include others in the locales who are not present. At the regional meeting a general sense of the purpose, goals, and guidelines for the conference should be ~~xxxxxxxx~~ adopted. There should then be some time that weekend for the core of the planning committee to meet and set up a preliminary division of labor. We think that the conference can probably be prepared for through this meeting, work in the locales, correspondence, and one general planning committee meeting before the conference. This will of course have to be worked out by the planning committee. We offer the following suggestions for the conference but we want to be clear that the planning committee should take the political leadership for the conference. ~~xxx~~ The following are only suggestions for their consideration.

Time and preparation:

We suggest ~~xxx~~ some time between mid-may and mid-june for the conference. This will allow for proper preparation in the locales. We will need to have the national summation of responses on the local center packet and the new draft plan for an IC in order to prepare for the conference. (If the national summation is not received in time, we should then have an oral presentation at the conference). The planning committee should outline the documents that the locales should read before the conference. We think Memorial Day weekend may be the best time, as ~~xxxxxxx~~ the three day weekend will allow for transportation and perhaps a regional meeting.

Open to all OC forces and selected observers.

Rough Agenda: 1½-2day format

I. Opening major presentation on the OC line and the Local Center. This presentation would cover three areas, moving from the general to the particular. A) the basic principles of the developing OC party building line, with an emphasis on those most relevant to

local centers. i.e. primacy of theory, centralized planned ideological struggle on tendency wide basis, separation of centers, centrality of anti-racism. B) the general conception of local centers: the way in which local centers are both a crystallization of the OCIC line and a form for the implementation and development of that line; i.e. their role currently as a basic organ of the OC as a whole, their projected role after formation of an IC, the battle against federationism and its relationship to the struggle against racism. C) organizational rules for local centers: their relationship to cadre organizations and individuals, no binding instructions, every member ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ participating as an individual...

Note: The critique of federationism and the importance of the party spirit should be a key theme throughout the presentation. We should use the conference to deepen our grasp of federationism. The national summation of the local center packet responses should be drawn from in this presentation.

II. Discussion workshops on OC line and local centers. These workshops should be well planned for and well led. They should encourage, questions, discussion and debate. They should be organized to reflect a mix of locales in each workshop. Seattle and SCALC members should prepare themselves to play a leading role in workshops.

III. ~~Lunch~~

IV. Presentation of a Minority View (5)

V. Response by Majority View

VI. General Plenary Open discussion from the floor

May be dinner or party for informal contact

Next Morning

VII. Short presentations of major ^(info) lessons from existing local centers and local center processes. (Probably Seattle, SCALC and Bay Area). This would be updated information. For example SCALC would discuss work since NSC visit.

VIII. Questions from the floor

IX. Short Presentation---a mobilizing call for comrades to take up work of building local centers. It should include a perspective on the potential in our region, their priority regionally and some general guidance on implementation.

X. Possibly short small group sumups of conference/ c-sc-s/

Follow Up: Sum up by planning committee
Discussion at next regional meeting about next step in building and strengthening local centers.

2/4/80 by KC, KD, IM, AS from SCALC