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A RESPONSE TO UNION DEL BARRIO

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Recently, Unión del Barrio issued a position paper attacking the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist). This paper from Unión came on the heels of a several months long campaign of harassment against individual San Diego MEChAs and Mechistas.

Union called up the chairperson of the San Diego State University MEChA and tried to tell him who the MEChA could or could not invite as the keynote speaker for the Chicano commencement program. Unión also confronted a Mechista and tried to intimidate her from reading Unity/La Unidad, the League's newspaper. For several months Unión attacked and tried to isolate one Mechista solely on the basis that she was a friend of a supporter of the League and attended some League activities. Despite what even Unión acknowledges as her long and positive history in helping to build and lead MEChA, they tried to turn other Mechistas against her.

Unión insists that their campaign of attack and intimidation against individual MEChAs and Mechistas is motivated by "concern" for the Chicano students. They say that the Chicano students are too young and inexperienced to make an objective political judgement about communism and the League of Revolutionary Struggle. Unión therefore feels that they are justified in violating the democratic process in MEChA and to seek to intimidate Mechistas from learning about the League and its views and practice.

As a Mechista and a member of the League, I believe it is the right of Mechistas to democratically decide who they want to speak at their events, to read whatever they want to read, and to freely associate with anyone they choose. There should be more respect for the ability of Mechistas to think for themselves and make up their own minds without Unión telling them what to think.

The League also believes that it is essential to have an atmosphere in the Chicano Movement in which discussion can take place without slanders and sectarian attacks. We need to address the real issues, such as how we can unite people to stop U.S. intervention in Central America, how to stop the militarization and killing of Chicanos, Latinos and Mexicanos on the U.S. - Mexico border, and how to fight for the right of Chicano students to higher education.

Why is Unión doing this?

Why is Unión launching these attacks at this time? What do they hope to gain? We think it's no accident that this entire campaign intensified after Mechistas raised criticisms to Unión regarding their behavior at different MEChA events, and the attacks stepped up after Unión's program for youthwork was tabled at a recent MEChA statewide meeting. On one level Unión simply doesn't like to have its shortcomings pointed out or have its views questioned in any way - especially not by students. On a deeper level, Unión believes they are the only legitimate "leaders" of the Chicano Movement in San Diego. When Mechistas don't accept that, Unión, instead of looking at their own practice and line, tries to blame "League influence" for their own lack of influence!

The fact is that not everyone agrees with Unión on every issue, and they should accept and respect that fact. For example, in the Chicano Movement, there has been an upsurge of activity in the electoral arena. The nationalists, including Unión, have sat on the sidelines and criticized others for participating in the struggle for democracy. The majority of Mechistas and other organizations in the Chicano community have a different view, and Unión should respect that.

According to Unión, "Nationalists" as defined by Unión, are the only legitimate force which can be "allowed" to participate in the Chicano Movement. Anyone who does not agree with them should be "exposed" or driven out of the movement. Communists and the League are not the first people they have attacked and certainly will not be the last, especially if they think they can get away with it. For example, Unión has attacked Chicano students who dress or comb their hair differently as Gavachados (white-washed). They accuse them of not being "Chicano enough," and of being "Hispanicized," regardless of their contributions to the organizing work around issues important to Chicanos.

With these views and practice, Unión has not and cannot gain widespread support among the Mechistas. Rather than assess the weaknesses in their own history and work, they are looking for scapegoats. The League is their main target today because they see the League as having the most "influence" in the MEChAs.

If Unión wants the respect and leadership of the Chicano students, they will have to earn it. They cannot use intimidation and divisive attacks on individual MEChAs or Mechistas and other organizations as a substitute for addressing the critical questions of strategy and program for Chicano liberation. Nor can they substitute attacks on the League for an inability to win people over on the merits of their own practice and line.

Ironically, the accusations thrown at the League in Unión's position paper are more fitting of the practice of Unión - their desire to "control" the MEChAs, and "abuses" of "democratic processes," and bypassing "its own

need to carry out legitimate base building..." We will, however, respond to Unión's charges for the record.

Unión's attack on the League can essentially be reduced to two points: (1) the League is a multinational organization and therefore it has no right to participate in the Chicano Movement; and (2) the League has secret members which it "plants" in organizations it wishes to control or influence. Unión then fabricates a "history" of the League, in which Unión makes up certain parts, while repeating every lie, rumor and slander ever said about the League.

Unión makes no effort at a substantive analysis of our line or our practice, which they know from their own experience. They just fling slanderous charges and then arrogantly proclaim that the League should be driven out of the movement, or as they state it, "not be permitted to further entrench itself in the Chicano Movement."

Nationalism or Internationalism

Unión claims that as a multinational organization, the League has no right to participate in the Chicano Movement, that this violates Chicano self-determination. They say, "the LRS is a multi-national formation and therefore has no right to assume leadership or to determine the direction of the Chicano Nationalist Movement."

First of all, no organization can simply "assume the leadership" of the Chicano Movement - leadership must be earned through good ideas and practice which moves the struggle forward.

Secondly, Unión makes it sound as if League members are intruders with no roots or legitimate history in the Chicano Movement. However, the League is largely a product of the Chicano struggle of the 60's and 70's. Our Chicano members were raised right here in the barrios, the fields and around the factories where our parents still live, work, and struggle in Aztlán. We are immigrants from Mexico forced to work the hardest, dirtiest jobs for a "Mexican wage." Activists who joined the League helped draft El Plan de Santa Barbara, which has been a guiding perspective for the Chicano student movement. We helped to establish the California statewide MEChA organization, and have been active in the development of many other major Chicano organizations. The August Twenty-ninth Movement (ATM), which co-founded the League in 1978, was the first communist organization in the U.S. to fight for the right of the Chicano Nation to self-determination.

We feel we are continuing a long history of communist activism in the Chicano Movement - going back to the organizing of Chicano miners and farm workers in the 1920's and 30's, to the Sleepy Lagoon case in the 1940's, to the "Salt of the Earth" struggle in the 1950's. Emma Tenayucca, who led the 1938 San Antonio pecan shellers strike, was a communist. Communism is not foreign to the Chicano Movement, but a very real part of some of its most

important struggles for liberation - struggles which are a major part of the revolutionary movement which will one day destroy imperialism.

But Unión claims that because the League also has non-Chicano members (African American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Central American, Asian, American Indian and white members), the League cannot really be for Chicano self-determination. The point here is not the "Chicano-only" composition of an organization, but its actual position and practice in winning political power and upholding Chicano self-determination.

We believe the source of Chicano oppression is the capitalist system which profits from the superexploitation of Chicano workers and from the theft and domination of Chicano lands and resources. We are working for the complete elimination of monopoly capitalism and for the establishment of socialism - a system run by the working people of this country, including the Chicano people, 90% of whom are workers. Under socialism, exploitation will be eliminated and all nations and peoples will be equal. The Chicano Nation's right to self-determination would be guaranteed - the Chicano people would have the right to democratically choose the future of that nation, no matter what that choice might be - an independent state, amalgamation, an autonomous region or a republic federated with the U.S. or with Mexico.

We believe that to overthrow U.S. monopoly capitalism and achieve socialism and genuine liberation for Aztlán, we must build an alliance between all working and oppressed people of this country. We can see no other way to realistically defeat the most powerful oppressors on earth. We think there can be no socialist revolution without the Chicano liberation struggle, and that Aztlán cannot win real self-determination without a socialist revolution.

This is why we are trying to build a strong and disciplined organization of revolutionaries from all the oppressed peoples' movements. We are trying to build a communist party which can help build the conscious unity of all working and oppressed people in the U.S. As communists, we support and work actively for not only Chicano liberation, but the liberation of all people oppressed by imperialism - we are internationalists.

So what Unión really objects to is not simply our being multinational, but our politics. They are nationalists, and they believe that the Chicano Movement is solely a nationalist movement which they or organizations like them must lead. Unión has the right to differ with our view of the revolution, but they have no right to declare our views illegitimate for the Chicano Movement simply because we are a multinational organization. Chicanos belong to many multinational organizations, including the Catholic church and trade unions. Likewise, nationalism is only one of many different political philosophies in the Chicano Movement, including also communism, hispanismo, trade unionism, liberation theology, and others. Whether any organization, multinational or otherwise, should lead the Chicano Movement will be decided by the Chicano people themselves.

Red-baiting, Anti-communism, and "Secrecy"

Unión claims that it recognizes that the League has "secret members" because of the danger of the state (the government and its repressive forces, such as the army, the police, la migra), but immediately dismisses this point as a "rationalization" which "allows La Liga to ideologically and politically influence the Chicano Movement..." This is really what Unión fears - not that the League has "open" or "closed" members, but that through our commitment and through the distribution of our newspaper and discussion of our views, people may listen to what we have to say and agree with us.

Our view regarding the danger of the state is not a "rationalization", but recognizes the state for what it is. The FBI, CIA, the police and la migra are always looking for "lists" of activists, communists and revolutionaries to get their hands on. What do they do with these lists? We have only to look at the history of our movement - the car bombings of Chicano activists in Colorado, the frame-ups of Los Siete, Carlos Montes and Kiko Martinez, the murder of UFW organizers at the hands of agribusiness goons, and deportations. Thousands of communists, as well as those accused of being communists, lost their jobs, were deported, or killed or jailed in the U.S. within the last 30 or so years. Even today, companies and some union bureaucrats try to apply existing laws and statutes to bar open communists from union positions that the workers have elected them to.

Unión insists that in attacking the League in this way, they are not red-baiting. Perhaps Unión does not mean to red-bait or does not understand exactly what it is, but in attacking the League, they repeat over and over all the classic stereotypes used to red-bait communists: that communists are sneaks who infiltrate organizations and trick people into following them. They are echoing the same arguments used by J. Edgar Hoover (long-time head of the FBI) in his book The Masters of Deceit, when he went on a witchhunt for communists. He said he did not object to communists and communism in itself, if communists would only openly identify themselves as such. He demanded (as does Unión) that all communists openly declare their membership. All the anti-communist laws promoted by Hoover and other reactionaries focus on the issue of secrecy and demand communist registration and declaration of their membership.

Of course we realize that Unión does not want to cause the persecution, jailing and even death of communists, as Hoover did. But they want the League, an organization which advocates and organizes for revolution, to tell who all of its members are. Unión trivializes the danger that the government will use this information to possibly get people fired, deport them if they are not U.S. citizens, or even kill them.

Red-baiting has a long history in the U.S. It always takes the form of opposing communist "secrecy" because they cannot attack what communism actually stands for. To this day, fighters for national liberation, workers rights and for an end to U.S. imperialism are labeled "communists," just as Mechistas are often labeled "radicals" to try to discredit us and isolate us

from other students. These attacks take place because MEChA promotes Chicano pride and Chicano rights, and supports progressive issues on campus and in the community. We expect these tactics to be used by the government and the right-wing, but red-baiting has no place among people who are fighting the same enemy and for common issues and goals. In either case, red-baiting is dangerous and destructive to the movement, and must be strongly opposed.

Those who believe that the state is not going to attack people today the way they did in the 50's and 60's under Hoover and Joe McCarthy should think it over. The state has and will. Especially as the revolution grows internationally and in the U.S., the relative democracy which we have today will be further eroded and the imperialists will again use all their "laws" (which are still on the books) and methods to attack the movement. As for those who say we can tell the movement our organizational affiliation and we all promise not to tell the state, we should remember that the state has planted agents in many mass struggles in order to divide and disrupt our struggle.

At the same time, there is nothing "hidden" about our "politics." Far from it. We are very public about our views and goals. We publish our newspaper biweekly in English and Spanish, with distribution throughout Aztlán and the rest of the country. We have published our views on the struggle for self-determination for the Chicano Nation in our book The Struggle for Chicano Liberation, and have just released ADELANTE!, a slideshow history of the Chicano liberation struggle. We have published our program and strategy for the revolution in this country, and we hold public forums and have spokespersons who are active in various movements. Yet it seems Unión would rather have us expose our membership to the state while hiding our views from the people, since they don't want people to even see our newspaper. In contrast, we have never seen a clear analysis by Unión of their strategy and program for Chicano liberation.

There is another important point to be made about Unión's red-baiting: are people to be judged by their practice or not? Should we judge people based on the usefulness of their ideas and their work, or should we judge them based on their political affiliations? Unión's approach negates a person's practice and tries to cause a situation where people become suspicious of each other and worry more about their possible political affiliation than about the work they do. Instead, the issue should be whether people contribute to the best of their ability to building the unity and strength of the Chicano Movement. To do otherwise is to feed into the anti-communist attacks being whipped up by Reagan and company, and to cause divisions in our movement exactly at a time when Chicanos of different political persuasions need to work together.

We work hard alongside our compañeros y compañeras en la MEChA. Our views are out there, and we have confidence that people will make an intelligent judgement to agree or disagree. If they do agree with some or all of our views, it is not because they are being "manipulated," but because they draw the same conclusions as we do based on their own experiences in this oppressive society.

Examples or fabrications?

Added to their political position, Unión's paper contains a so-called "history" which are either fabrications or slanders repeated from unidentified sources. They give not one criticism of the League from their own direct experience! Unión's paper repeats rumors spread by the Communist Workers Party (CWP) or by certain racist white students, without any regard for the truth. (It should be noted that Unión refuses to work with CWP because of its opportunist practice, yet it repeats CWP's slanders in such an irresponsible way.)

Perhaps Unión thinks if it can discredit the League, its own reputation will be enhanced. But in real life, such attacks tend to backfire, because people generally judge different groups by their practice, by what they do and its impact in real life.

Struggle for Chicano unity!

Clearly, different points of view and backgrounds exist in the Chicano Movement, as they do in every progressive movement. In order to build the broadest and the strongest Chicano Movement, we must treat our differences in a responsible and mature manner. We think that Unión should seriously check out what they are doing and put a stop to their unprincipled and unwarranted attacks on the Chicano students, on the League, and ultimately on the Chicano Movement.

Over the years MEChA has stood unified in the face of many attempts to divide us. The fact that MEChA has always functioned in a democratic manner is what has enabled Mechistas from various backgrounds and political perspectives to continue to work together. It has been the principle of respect for the diversity among us, and the focus on what struggles lie in front of us, that has helped us move forward. We are fighting to promote Chicano pride and identity, and struggling for our educational rights. We see ourselves as part of the many battles waging in our communities against migra attacks, police brutality and working with our carnales to stop barrio warfare. This is what we are for: the unity of our movement in our fight for our rights including the right to self-determination. There is no place for red-baiting, intimidation tactics, and declaring all views but your own as "illegitimate" in the Chicano Movement. These are the kind of activities that the Chicano Movement should take a firm stand against, as they hurt the whole movement.

On behalf of the League, I respectfully present these views in hopes of contributing to the Chicano Movement at a time when we so urgently need greater unity.

Self-determination for the Chicano Nation!

¡Viva el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán!